2017 College Park Friends Educational Annual Report to College Park Quarterly Meeting

Good morning Friends! My name is Sandra Schwartz and I am currently serving as the Clerk of the College Park Friends Educational Association aka Sierra Friends Center or Woolman. I welcome you to the campus and hope you are noticing some of the many changes and improvements that have been made since last year.

Last year you may remember Doug Milhous quaking as he told you of our decision to suspend the Woolman Semester Program. His voice cracked with emotion as he described the degree of uncertainty and the weight of decisions that lay before us.

The Board was meeting monthly investigating what our legal and ethical responsibilities required if dissolution of Sierra Friends Center became our only option. We wanted to insure that if that were the case we would honor our lenders by repaying our debts, finding the best options for the future of the land, and implementing whatever was necessary with integrity and care. At the same time, we were also exploring what other program options were possible, what would be needed to achieve economic sustainability, and how to address our infrastructure, staffing and community needs. We felt overwhelmed.

We asked you for a year to discern a way forward and we began that discernment process by setting very strict benchmarks for ourselves.

One benchmark was to raise half of our operating budget by the end of December 2016. This benchmark was slightly more complicated, but in the interest of getting through the chronology of the year I am going to keep things simple.

Fortunately, I can stand here today and tell you that we were not forced to close Sierra Friends Center. Instead it feels like we have a new lease on life.

We were able to meet our initial benchmarks. Amy raised $40,000 in three weeks, which was the first bar in the first benchmark. We met with Irene McHenry, former ED of the Friends Council on Education, in December and set benchmarks for every aspect of the center including; fundraising, the site, Board recruitment and development, staff policies, and financial management. We have found and entered an agreement with a law firm for legal advice when needed and we are using modern technology to be able to include board members from a distance who want to serve. Business plans are being developed for every program at Sierra Friends Center.

As part of our focused attention on fiscal responsibility and viability, the Finance Committee has been working towards a guideline of getting no more than 30% of our income from direct contributions. For the 2016-17 fiscal year, we were at 37%. The proposed 2018 budget, planned to be approved later this month, has us at 28%.

We set goals for addressing the major problem of deferred maintenance of our physical plant.

We successfully secured more funding through grants. Including a grant from AmeriCorps to host 10 AmeriCorps volunteers on campus for 8 weeks. This was an exciting success because they provided hours of labor that included rebuilding the deck outside the dining hall, work on the A-frames and cabins, removal of blackberry bushes, habitat restoration, etc. Plus, we were able to give them a taste of the Woolman experience; shared work, Meeting for Worship, consensus decision making and a sense of community. We were their last work site after a year of service and they reported that it was a positive experience.

Amy secured a FEMA grant to provide labor to repair the water ways on the land. Many of the ditches and waterways were overgrown and silted in; causing flooding and other problems.

More grants are being developed as we speak, including another grant to have more AmeriCorps volunteers.

We also held three work camps – the venerable Family Work Camp, and two JWS alumni work camps, which were both very successful. I hope you will take particular notice of the east side bathhouse, though there is still work to do it has seen a lot of progress.

As I said, we suspended the Woolman Semester School but we have recommitted to our mission which is, to steward diverse learning communities and educational programs that weave together spirituality, peace, sustainability and social action.

Sierra Friends Center has three current program areas:

Camp Woolman and Teen Leadership Camp
Events, Retreats and Rentals
The Resident Community/Long Term Rentals

Camp Woolman is our biggest and most robust program serving 156 campers this past summer. I personally heard from one young man that it was, "even better than last year." I would suggest talking to some young friends to hear first hand about their experiences including any camp staff who are here.

Events, Retreats and Rentals are continuing to grow. We met all of our income goals for this program element in last year's budget. We have done a lot of upgrades to make the site safer and more appealing over the past year. Clearly deferred maintenance from the past is still a huge hurdle but we have made progress. There

is a list of all the projects completed and Amy will be leading a tour of campus for those who are interested. Please take a look.

The Resident Community/Long Term Rentals
We currently rent to nine different households. Community is created through shared work, community meetings, and Meeting for Worship. Community agreements are worked out in meetings and each household contributes 10 hours of labor toward Sierra Friends Center each month.

We are also working on two new programs:
The Woolman Outdoor School
And a school for nonviolence

We successfully piloted our first outdoor educational program of the Woolman Outdoor School this past spring with North Oakland Community Charter School. (Please take a look at the video.) We will be expanding that pilot program this year by adding two additional schools, at a minimum. (Please note that we are building this slowly, testing every step to see if this seems like the right direction.) This program is being developed in partnership with Sierra Streams Institute, a watershed science organization based in Nevada City. Sierra Streams offers California State accredited STEAM educational programs. STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. Their curriculum has recently been updated to include the new NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) standards, as well.

Sierra Streams will be renting the soon to be renovated Madrone Hall starting in March 2018. We are excited about this relationship. There are many aspects that are very beneficial to Sierra Friends Center, including having scientists help manage our watershed, forests, and meadows, including removal of invasive species. They have already conducted flora and fauna surveys of our land and have identified one endangered species, which will help us in certain grant applications. Sierra Streams is also partnering with us and the local Nisenan tribe to implement indigenous practices for restoring the land.

The relationship with the Nisenan tribe is developing. We are planning a restorative justice ceremony to honor the people who lived on this land before the white man came.

A leading that is still being tested is the idea of developing a School for Nonviolence, based on the Highlander Institute model. We strongly believe that there is a growing need for the study and practice of nonviolence. We know that the world needs radical change and that young people are essential for creating that change. We think we may have a role to play by providing space and leadership to further these conversations, develop strategies for the future and train new leaders. We are approaching this with care, collaboration, and deep listening.

As Amy began to discuss this idea with supporters, the suggestion arose to name this new program the Jorgensen School of Nonviolence. This name seemed like a fitting tribute to these beloved founders whose vision for social change inspired so many.

Another prospect that is under consideration is putting the undeveloped parts of our land into a conservation easement with the Bear Yuba Land Trust. This would protect the land into perpetuity from development. There is a lot to discern about this proposal and an area where help from the greater community serving on an advisory committee could be helpful.

All of this is very exciting; but there is still a lot to do. The rain last winter was very hard on the property exposing a lot of issues with deferred maintenance. We are in constant discernment about sustainability. The land and programs are one issue, but staffing and compensation are also key components of both sustainability and integrity.

I want to include with the most important aspect of this past year's journey and this is gratitude. Board Service has truly felt like a spiritual journey partially because way seemed to open so fully and partially because we have been held so well by so many people. If you would like to join us in this journey as a Board member, please let us know.

I cannot say thank you enough to all the people who continued to support us financially when we were really in trouble. Also I want to thank those who stepped up with their time and their skills when the going was really rough; some of those people include the Kewman's, the Runyan family, David Matchett, Doug Hamm and Dorothy Henderson, John Inman, the Eusebio family – opening their home for us to meet, the entire Board, and the staff, especially Amy Cooke and Carl Sigmond whose love, grace, hard work and creativity kept us all going. And I would be totally remiss if I didn't acknowledge all of those who came before us who poured their hearts, their dreams, their money and their work into creating this place whose magic continues to touch the hearts of those who have the privilege to be here.

I realize that I have just told you a lot of new information a lot of which is relatively complicated. We are giving an interest group where more questions can be asked, we can go into more detail about the relationship with Sierra Streams Institute, the Bear Yuba Land Trust, the Jorgensen School of Nonviolence, budget issues, etc. But I wanted to give you all the highlights. Also, please pick up a copy of the annual report as every aspect of the past year is described in detail.