Common threads and insights from NPYM Family Affordability Survey

• The problem is not just “affordability.” Factors include cost, distance, time, and the prospect of a joyful experience for the kids and the parents. All of these are equally weighed when families are deciding whether to attend Annual Session. Addressing only financial measures will not solve the problem.

• There is an emphatic feeling among nearly all the Meetings that there is too much business at Annual Session, and that families are not inclined to attend as long as that’s the case. A very large contingent of Friends want to see more spirituality, more communal experience, more joy—and less business. They want more workshops, small-group activities, spiritual community. Many reflected that the FGC experience—which is more focused on the substance of Quakerism and on joining together in Spirit—is a successful model that they wish Annual Session would mirror. There was a strong desire across Monthly Meetings for more fun activities as well.

• The children’s programs are a strength of Annual Session. Older kids especially look forward to seeing each other at AS and bonding with their peers. It would be helpful for the children’s programs to cover more of the AS events so that parents can attend adult activities.

• It is difficult for newcomers to feel comfortable attending Annual Session. It’s intimidating to join a group where so many already know each other and know how things are run. Many would like more ways to help welcome and integrate those who are new to AS. Perhaps pair new attenders with experienced ones in some sort of buddy system, or otherwise have ways to better welcome and integrate newcomers.

• Many would appreciate alternative lodging: camping, RVs, home-stays offered by local Friends.

• It would be helpful for NPYM to give families more notice ahead of time of Annual Session, and work harder to “sell” it to families. Especially to those who haven’t attended before -- don’t make them do the research. Show them why they might want to attend, and help them do it. Perhaps offer a first-timer discount?

• Many MMs have covered or are considering covering the costs of children’s attendance, or increasing scholarships for their families who need them. Encourage more MMs to take similar steps.

• Remote/multimedia options: Meetings are more likely to use a recording (online from a website, or as a DVD) that they can show in their Meetings when the timing works out—for adult religious education, or other discussion/community opportunities.