

STUDY ON THE NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF ELDER QUAKERS IN
NEW YORK CITY

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New York Quarterly Meeting

Concern for Quaker Life

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Abstract

As we age, the concern is raised about life in New York City, and for aging Quakers, the question is retention and affordability. This study commissioned from the Concern for Quaker Life (CQL) was performed asking Friends in NYC to complete a survey and attend focus groups. The survey had 63 respondents and 20 Friends participated in the various focus groups. This study explored the opinions of the Friends in the New York Quarterly Meeting (New York City) around the topics of affordable housing, transportation, health care, social activities, spiritual formation, and social services. This study confirmed our thinking around these topics, with a clearer vision through voices.

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge that this study was conducted on occupied territory of the Lenape people, who have stewarded this land for generations, and continue to thrive to this day.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Concern for Quaker Living workgroup for all their time, effort and thoughtfulness while developing this study, and for allowing me the opportunity to meet some very wonderful, caring, and fun Friends along the way.

Special thanks to Callie Janoff, site supervisor for my internship with the CQL. We met weekly and discussed many topics around Quaker life, and life in general. Also, to Justin Cabrera, advisor at Columbia University School of Social Work, who has been an amazing source of support through this study, and school life in general while we continue to live our lives through this pandemic.

Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Concern for Quaker Living (CQL) working group of the New York Quaker Meeting (NYQM). The CQL wished to explore how Friends¹ across the NYQM region (Figure 1) can explore new opportunities for continual relationships with older Friends. CQL is invested in seeking ways to enable older Friends, who want to remain in New York City (NYC), to do so, rather than having to relocate elsewhere.

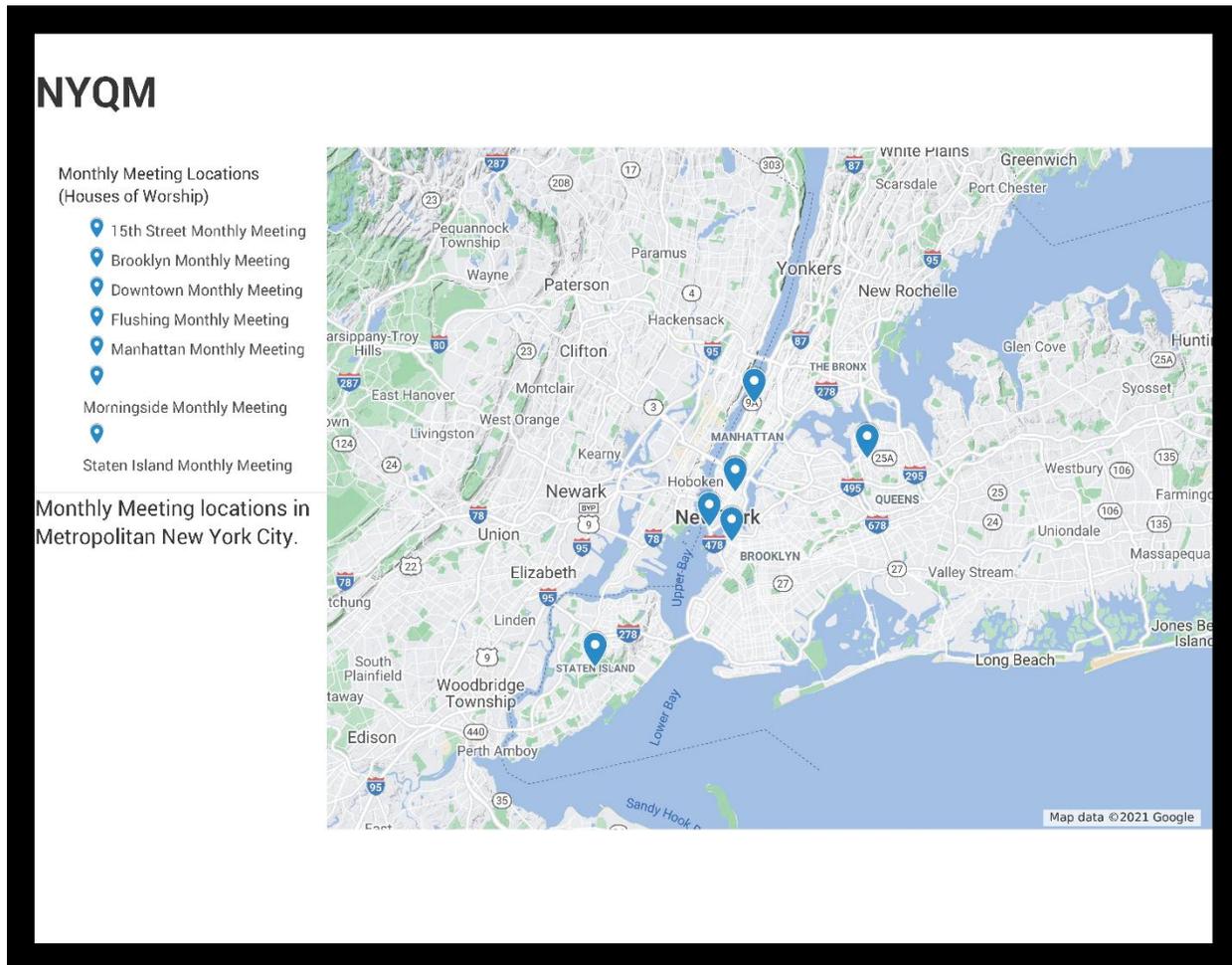


Figure 1 NYQM Monthly Meeting Locations in New York City

The CQL commissioned this nine-month study to explore the following objectives:

- Explore how the CQL might help provide for the care, well-being, and housing concerns of older Friends,
- Identify and provide connection to resources that can meet individual needs,
- Collaborate with existing community resources,
- Provide greater opportunities for intergenerational fellowship through group activities throughout NYQM.

¹ Quakers refer to their community “members” as Friends.

Review of Literature

A literature review was completed through the Boolean search method, using the keywords: “Quaker*”, “Quaker living”, “Quaker housing”, “Quaker New York City or NYC”, “Quaker quality of life”, “senior programs for Quaker*”, and “aging Friends”. I utilized the EBSCO database, Columbia University Libraries and WorldCat database online services, as well as Google Scholar, and Acedemia.com.

This search provided 32,761 materials referencing the keyword “Quaker*”. Using the PRISMA Checklist² to assess and review the materials, the list was narrowed down to zero materials that specifically studied the quality of life within the Quakers, and more specifically Quakers in New York City. However, some other religious studies have been completed that look into religion and spirituality in relation to quality of life³. While Quakers were not specifically mentioned, many of the issues and concerns that were brought up in this study were discussed in others.

² PRISMA is the Transparent Reporting of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses checklist. “PRISMA,” accessed April 12, 2021, <http://prisma-statement.org/PRISMAStatement/Checklist>.

³ Mark Peterson and Dave Webb, “Religion and Spirituality in Quality-of-Life Studies,” n.d., 10.

Method

With the COVID-19 pandemic, this study was conducted using an online survey (Appendix A) that Friends would complete. Focus Groups were held remotely using Zoom technology. Within the survey, Friends were asked to participate in focus groups of their choice⁴. CQL set a goal to reach 175 Friends for their input into this study. It is estimated there are approximately 500 Friends⁵ who are affiliated or identify as a Friend in New York City.

It is worth noting that many Friends' opinions might change after the pandemic. Given the state of the pandemic at the time of this study, and with a fraction of the population qualified to receive a vaccination, many of the conversations were focused on how they felt at that moment. Other studies that have been produced during this pandemic have shown reduced participation, as people are inundated with daily life challenges⁶.

Survey

The survey (Appendix A) was created by the researcher and site supervisor, with the final edits and approval from CQL. The survey was created using Google Docs, and the scheduling for the focus groups was done with SignUpGenius.com. Respondents were asked for their voluntary consent prior to proceeding (100% return).

The survey asks Friends to complete twenty (20) multiple choice, and short answer questions online. The researcher presented a web link to the survey, which was distributed through email by the site supervisor and members of the CQL. The researcher made virtual appearances and promoted the survey through attending meetings in all locations, except Flushing and Staten Island. The clerks of all meetings were notified of the survey and focus groups, which they were asked to forward to their contacts.

The survey became available to Friends on February 1, 2021 and closed April 1, 2021. The survey captured responses from 63 Friends ($N=63$).

Focus Groups

As a component of this study, focus groups, or conversations, were offered for Friends to expand and have more of an open dialogue with the investigator and Friends. Prior to organizing the focus groups, the investigator sought advice from published materials, and through a conversation with a professor at Columbia School of Social Work. The groups began on February 15th, 2021 and ran through March. There was a total of twenty (20) events scheduled, with seven (7) canceled or rescheduled dates. From these groups, we had twenty-two (22) Friends attend the one-hour

⁴ This study follows all guidelines for participant confidentiality, and all records are secured in a password protected dropbox file with a destruction date of April 30, 2022.

⁵ Typically, there are no "members" who are counted, unlike other religions who count membership. Meetings do not keep these records; therefore, this is an estimated figure.

⁶ Susanne Röhr et al., "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Statistical Design and Analysis Plans for Multidomain Intervention Clinical Trials: Experience from World-Wide FINGERS," *Alzheimer's & Dementia: Translational Research & Clinical Interventions* 7, no. 1 (2021): e12143, <https://doi.org/10.1002/trc2.12143>.

conversations. Each session was recorded by the investigator⁷, and each participant agreed verbally prior to the recording⁸. There were no objections.

The original design was to have each night offer five (5) different topics. The first night worked well, other than it required more staffing and technical training. From that point forward, they became individual topic nights. All Friends in NYQM were invited and encouraged to attend.

Participants were asked in the survey which topics they were interested in (Figure 2). While there was strong interest in Spiritual Formation, and social activities, it was affordable housing that drew a larger attendance in the focus

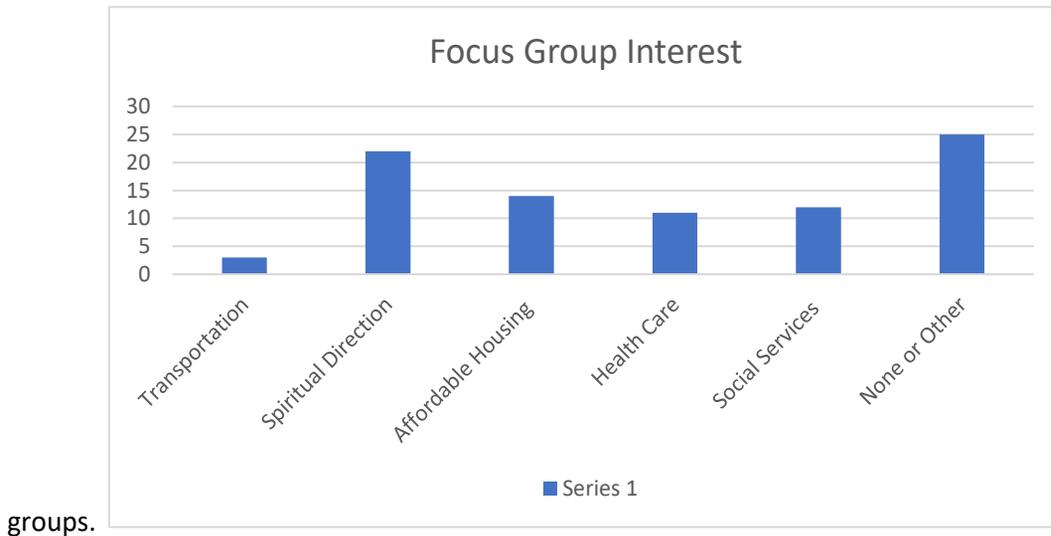


Figure 2 Focus Group/Conversation Interests

Note that from the 63 responses, 19 (30.2%) responded that none of these topics were of interest to them. 6% responded with other topics such as racism and ending zoom meeting.

As previously mentioned, some of the focus groups were cancelled due to low or no enrollment. It was anticipated a larger enrollment would occur, however, without having a master email list of Friends from each Meeting, it was left to individual Friends to pass the word around to attend the focus conversations and complete the survey.

⁷ Recordings were saved to a dropbox account with the only access granted to the investigator. These digital records will be destroyed on April 30, 2022 (1-year).

⁸ Friends who disagreed with consenting to videotaping were kindly asked to leave the session.

Data Analysis

(N=63) Unknown Sample Size (Approximately 500)

The demographics reported that most of the participants are white, while 2% identified as mixed race and 2% identified as other (figure 2). 44% of the respondents are married, with 27% being single, 15% indicated with are widowed with the remaining 14% reporting other or not reporting a status. (figure 3)

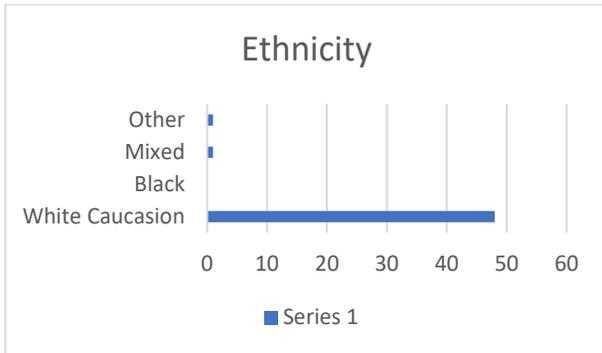


Figure 3 Ethnicity (N=50)

What is your marital status?

63 responses

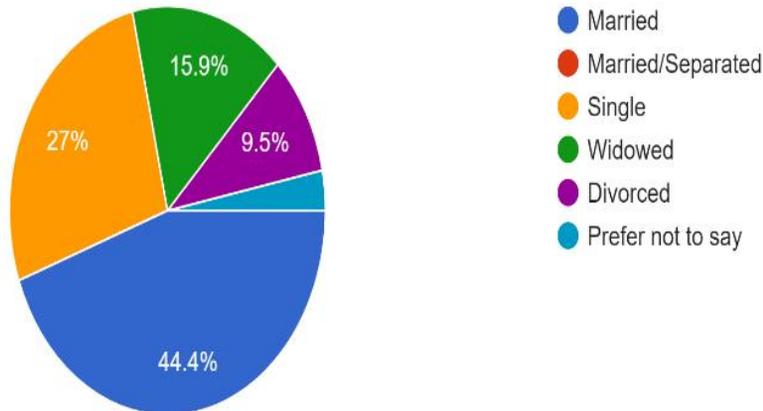


Figure 4 Marital Status

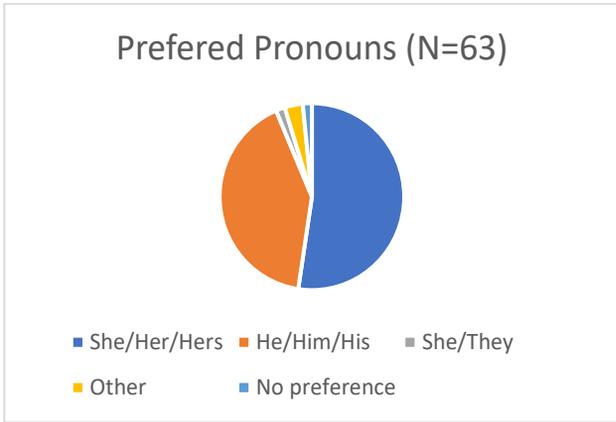


Figure 5 Preferred Pronouns

Figure 5 (above) shows the breakdown of pronoun identity. And figure 6 (below) shows that 43% of the respondents are retired, with 27% working full-time. 2% responded as student status, with 6% doing unpaid work from home.

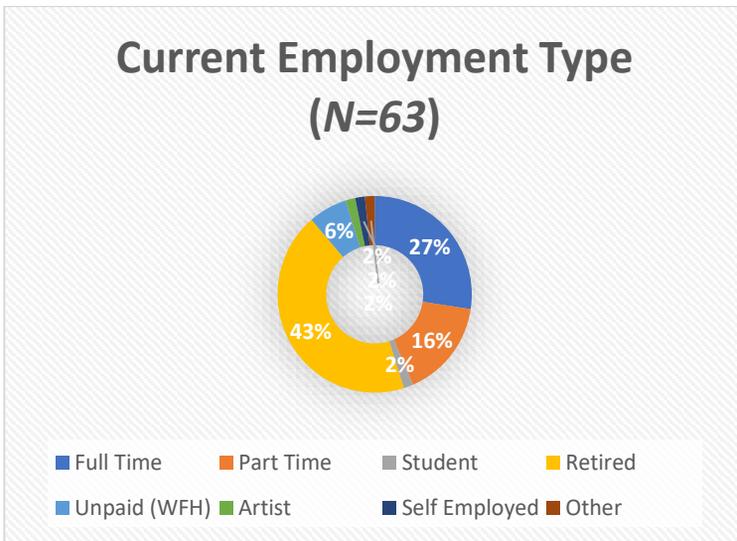


Figure 6 Primary Employment Type

We asked how satisfied Friends are in their current living situation. 55 (87.3%) stated they were happy, with four (6.3%) stating no. There were four (6.3%) who claimed other reactions (Figure 7)

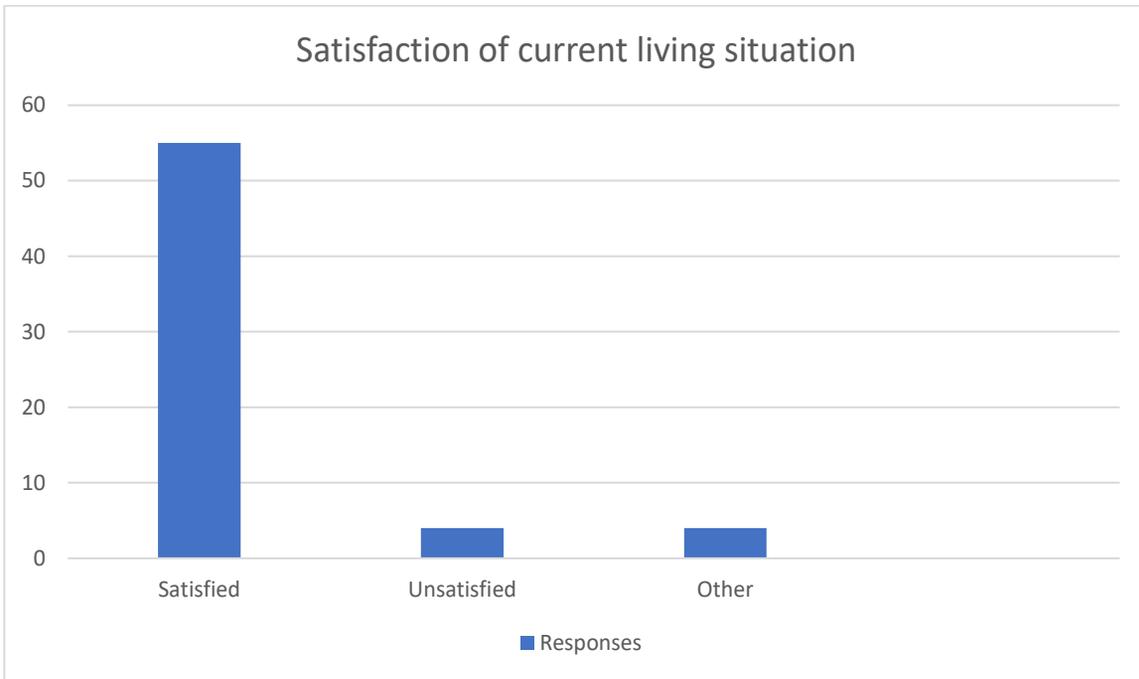


Figure 7 Satisfaction with current living situation

We asked: If given the opportunity to move into supportive housing, operated by the Quakers, possibly in another borough. Would this appeal to you? Friends responded with 17 (27%) yes, 20 (31.7% no, and 26 (41.3) responded “maybe” (Figure 8).

If given the opportunity to move into supportive housing*, operated by the Quakers, possibly in another borough. Would this appeal to you?
63 responses

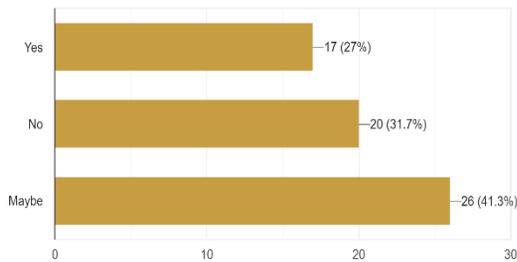


Figure 8 Supportive Housing

Spiritual Formation

During the focus groups, this conversation was not well attended with some being cancelled due to low or no attendance. The one larger attendance conversations seemed a little confusing as to how this question was formed, and what I was looking for. The intention was to discuss how spiritual formation fit with their lives, and, how, if any, could NYQM become involved in this. A vast majority spoke of their meeting being enough of the support for spiritual formation. One small group organically grew from this discussion, and it was with Friends from the area, and not one meeting.

It was discussed that Friends are not always connected to individuals who are homebound, hospitalized, or ill. The question arose around care teams, or some way of providing support to those who are facing challenging times. This aspect of the discussion was brought back to the meeting level, and to work closer with their meetings' leadership.

Social Activities

We held discussions around social activities, looking into how or if NYQM could be more active in supporting social activities. Some great ideas, such as small group events were brought up, however, it appeared that this would benefit more at the meeting level. This conversation topic was not vastly attended, and most were canceled due to low or no registrations.

Affordable Housing

We asked Friends in this focus group, hypothetically, if the Quakers were to develop housing that was owned and operated by the Quakers for the Friends of NYQM, would this benefit them, and what amenities and services would be required to meet their needs, or not be met by developing affordable housing.

Many Friends, who attended, commented on what amenities, in and outside the facility, would be available such as in-unit laundry, entertainment, parks/nature, accessible transportation (Subway station with elevator). The survey asked: How important is your physical proximity to your Meeting location? Out of 63 (N=63) responses, 27% states that it is most important, with 31% reporting middle of the spectrum and 3% stating that it was not that important. Additionally, we asked "is it important for you to have access to parks and green space?". With the same 63 respondents, 96.8% stated that it is most important, with 2% stating that it was not that important, or indifferent.

During the conversations, many Friends raised comments, such as: "What is affordable housing mean from the Quakers viewpoint", "Wouldn't it be wiser to pay for independent apartments rather than invest in one structure", "I like where I live, but I know someday I might not be able to live here, will there be a spot for me in the future". Other comments made: "I support the idea of Quaker housing for senior citizens. I am currently middle aged and like my living situation". One comment that was raised deserves some attention: "...while we moved out of NYC, this was largely due to cost of housing. We are interested in options for disabled/ elder housing with Friends".

Overall impressions from the focus group conversations is that there is interest in learning more about what affordable housing options might look like if the Quakers were to operate such a program. There were some concerns about location, and relocation. One comment was made that relocating is more work than adjusting their own living space, as finding new doctors, pharmacies, stores, etc. takes time and creates added stress. Later in this report I will discuss transportation, and how that incorporates into the affordable housing category.

Other questions that were asked on the survey that fit into the affordable housing category are: Do you have access to healthy food options? From the 63 responses, 98% stated yes, with 1% stating maybe. It was also asked: "Do you feel like you have adequate access to your faith community? Out of 63 responses, 83% stated yes, with 13% stating no, and 5% answered maybe. Some Friends raised concerns about the design of the apartments, would it have accessible

showers, will it be designed for privacy if I have a live-in caretaker”, “Please have accessible laundry facilities”, and there were several comments about having pet friendly apartments for their pets.

Transportation

We were interested in the topics around transportation. Given that New York City has a large mass transit operation, it comes with challenges. Some Friends pointed out that many of the stations have not become accessible for many who are unable to use the stairs. While MTA is addressing this concern⁹, it is not at any great speed for the concerns of today. There was one concern brought up regarding transportation at the Cemetery, as it is difficult to walk a great distance.

Social Services & Health Care

These topics were not well attended, most were cancelled due to no registration. Some comments that were received were around housing and would health care become available if moving into Quaker housing. Concerns were also raised regarding losing health care providers if they moved, and the challenges in re-establishing with another provider, pharmacy, etc.

There were no discussions held on social services.

⁹ “MTA Accessibility,” MTA, accessed April 16, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/accessibility>.

Summary of the Action Plan

The CQL tasked the investigator with three action steps bullet points to address while completing this project.

- Conduct focus groups
 - There were twenty (20) focus groups arranged between February and March 2021. There was a total of twelve (12) that were conducted. The remainder were cancelled due to low attendance.
 - The focus groups were designed as multi-generational, inter-Meeting and held at various times to reach Friends at their best availability.
 - Member contacts were not made available to the investigator. The Quarterly assisted with sending mass emails to each clerk, and CQL was asked to forward the emails with invitations to the focus groups and survey out on multiple occasions.
 - Each focus group was recorded by the investigator and has been securely stored in a password protected drop box account. Each focus group recording was transcribed and these documents are stored in the same drop box account. These records will remain confidential, per the consent that each Friend agreed to prior to participation. On April 20, 2022, following research standards, these documents and recordings will be destroyed.
 - The survey and focus group recordings and transcripts were analyzed, and are being detailed in this report.
 - Through the analyzation of these records, there was no new information gained on outside resources that Friends need at this time.
 - Contact with Friends without email contact information was attempted, with some responses.
- Create tentative programs to address identified needs, (possible issues)
 - There were no significant needs addressed by friends to create specific groups. There was one group that organically formed from one of the focus groups.
 - This investigator understands that Friends, in general, rarely discuss personal finances, health, medical or other issues that would raise concern. While Friends were open to complete the survey, the conversation groups around health care and social services were not well attended.
 - This investigator witnessed that many of the conversation groups were focusing on their own individual Meeting, and not as a wider community, outside of advocacy efforts. When NYQM wide events or groups were discussed, there was extraordinarily little enthusiasm around those ideas, as each Meeting has their own programs that meet the needs of their community.
- Develop database of resources
 - With the density and everchanging community of New York City, this investigator does not recommend having a separate database for social services or other resources to be managed by

NYQM, as this list would need immediate and expedited maintenance. Therefore, it is recommended that NYQM, and Meetings, utilize the 311 free information service offered by New York City. This database is constantly changing and updated as the information changes. It would provide more accurate information, and is easy to access for Friends who are not computer savvy or would rather talk to a person, rather than attempting to find resources from keyword searches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conducting this study, it became obvious to this investigator the difficulty in surveying Quakers. This could be because of COVID-19, or because Quaker's believe in helping others before themselves. Some logistical challenges were promoting and connecting with Friends to complete the survey. Out of a possible 500 Friends in the NYC region, this survey was completed by 63 Friends, and approximately 20 Friends attended the focus groups, with many of the attendees being members of the CQL. NYQM is without a central communication network. Many of the meetings, and the NYQM leadership emailed and posted information regarding the survey. It is speculated that in person worship would have helped with having this survey completed by more Friends.

The CQL, and the investigator anticipated that many of the Friends would be receptive to discussions around affordable housing, transportation, and health care concerns. The conclusion of this study did not produce any new information than we already had anticipated. Outside of Affordable Housing and Transportation, many of the conversations focused more on what the individual meetings were doing, or not doing, in relation to the topic. When it was asked how NYQM would be beneficial for these topics, there was not much input.

Transportation topic was discussed and resulted in many suggesting the social justice groups of NYQM become involved, possibly deeper, into MTA and other transportation issues. The growing concern is accessibility for any person who is experiencing mobility concerns, including those who use the Subway for shopping, etc., where an elevator would benefit their experience.

This study allowed more conversations around the housing project, and how Friends would receive this. This report recommends the following concepts to continue further study and conversations:

Deeper study on the Quaker Housing idea. Especially in the areas of cost, neighborhood conveniences, integrations into the community, transportation, and qualifications for renting.

Deeper study into providing funding for individuals to remain in their current housing situation, rather than move to a new location.

If a study of this nature were to be undertaken again, it would be the recommendation of this investigator to wait until after COVID-19 pandemic, when Friends are able to return to worship in person. This study would most likely have a different outcome, as the community will be changing. Face-to-face focus groups would benefit a study. Depending on the depth of another study, unless during COVID times, a survey would be beneficial, with personal follow-up. During the pandemic many experienced "Zoom fatigue", were challenged to develop or maintain connections, and may not have felt comfortable discussing their concerns in this forum.

Personal Reflection

I appreciate this opportunity to meet so many Friends over the past few months. I came into this internship knowing nothing about Quakerism, other than worship was silent. I dove in by reading the history and design models of how Quaker living was laid out for Friends, and I grew a deeper gratitude for the practice.

As I move along in my ordination as a Presbyterian pastor, I feel very connected to Quakerism, and the niceties Quakers bring in our faith. I have gained so much in a short time with NYQM, and with my own faith journey. I believe in double belonging, which is where I am here. As I prepare for worship in my church, and lead worship, I do not always feel that I received worship as there are too many moving parts to worry about. I began attending worship at a meeting and found led in a direction which nourished my spirit. I became closer with God without someone (like a preacher) guiding my journey.

Again, I appreciate this opportunity to be in community with you all, and to learn so much beyond worship. I look forward to regularly attending and doing the work that the spirit guides me to do.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. DeBrucker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dan DeBrucker (he/him)

Intern, Columbia University School of Social Work

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Appendix

Appendix A – Survey

NYQM Concern for Quaker Living 2021 Survey

The New York Quarterly Meeting (NYQM) Working Group with a Concern for Quaker Living (CQL) is conducting a survey to further our discernment around the needs of our older community members, and how we can work to address these needs as a whole community. This survey is open to all, and feel free to share the link with other Quakers in the NYQM. Our Social Work Intern from Columbia University, Dan DeBrucker, (ddebrucker@gmail.com) will be guiding us through this process. There will be opportunities to have conversations with Dan, and others who share the same interests.

We are attempting to keep this survey brief, and to the point. Therefore, if you have a concern or suggestion that might not be covered in this survey, feel free to add your comments at the end. Dan is also available to meet with you individually Monday, Tuesday and Fridays. If you prefer to speak with a member of CQL group, please contact:

Scott Blumenthal scott.blumenthal@gmail.com

Carol Wilkinson carol10463@gmail.com

Joe Gosler joe.gosler@gmail.com

Joan Malin joanmal53@gmail.com

Charlene Ray rayab20@nyc.rr.com

John Maynard johnpmaynard1944@gmail.com

Pat Donohue patdonohue@hotmail.com

Callie Janoff callieoff@gmail.com

* Required

1. Consent Form: *

I agree to have my responses used in aggregate to inform results of this survey. Names and emails will not be shared.

Mark only one oval.

I agree to the terms and conditions

I disagree

2. Your Name

3. Your Email

4. What are your preferred pronouns? *

Check all that apply.

- She/Her/Hers
 He/Him/His
 They/Them/Theirs
 Prefer not to say

Other: _____

5. What is your marital status? * *Mark only one oval.*

- Married
 Married/Separated
 Single
 Widowed
 Divorced
 Prefer not to say

6. What is your ethnicity? (optional)

7. Please select your current primary employment type *

Check all that apply.

- Full time
 Part time
 Student
 Temporarily unemployed/Seeking Work
 Retired
 Unpaid work in the home

Other: _____

8. If not currently working, what was your previous work identity?

9. Are you satisfied with your current living situation? *

(This is a general question. Please consider your current house/apartment, neighborhood, roommates, etc.)

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Other: _____

10. If given the opportunity to move into supportive housing*, operated by the Quakers, possibly in another borough. Would this appeal to you? *

*For the purpose of this survey, the term supportive housing means: housing that is affordable, and may include support services and responsive programming.

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

11. Please rate your access to transportation? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Poor Excellent

12. If you utilize public transportation (bus or rail), please rate your comfortability using this?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not Comfortable I am very comfortable using public transportation

13. How often do you pursue a hobby? *

Such as exercise, crafting, non-degree educational activities, social outings, cooking for pleasure, etc.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
almost never	<input type="radio"/>	daily									

14. Do you have access to healthy food options? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

15. Do you feel like you have adequate access to your faith community? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

16. How important is your physical proximity to your meeting location? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important to me	<input type="radio"/>	very important to me				

17. Do you feel like the policies (regarding housing, transportation, equity, justice, etc.) by your local administration (city, state) are geared towards you and the location population? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- I am unsure
- I have no opinion either way

18. Is it important for you to have access to parks and green space? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes
- No
- Does not matter to me either way

19. How would you rate your mental health over the last 4 weeks? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
No difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	Major difficulties				

20. How would you rate your physical health over the past 4 weeks? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
No difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	Major difficulties'				

21. How often does the lack of money keep you from doing the things you wish to do? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	Frequently									

22. Are there any concerns that we did not mention that are important for us to know about? *

We are interested in having a longer, over Zoom, discussion with you and others. There is a link at the end to sign up for the upcoming Focus Group Discussions. You will need to **Focus Group** copy/paste or click on the link to register. The focus groups are not intended to engage in **Conversations** the actual activity, but to have open discussions around how Quakers can come together over these topics.

23. Over the next couple of months, we will be hosting online focus groups via Zoom designed around these topics. Please indicate below which groups you would be interested in attending (check all that apply). This is voluntary. *

Check all that apply.

- Transportation
- Spiritual Formation
- Affordable Housing
- Social Activities
- Health Care
- Social Services
- None of the Above

Other: _____

Focus Group Registration Information

If you indicated YES to any of the above questions about focus group participation, please follow this link to register for a focus group time that works best for you. The focus groups will last for 1 hour. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040449AEA72DA1F49-nyqmcql>

24. If you aware of any Friends who might not have access to technology, we are very interested in presenting this survey with them over the telephone, or mail, please leave a contact name and phone number below, or, have them contact Dan DeBrucker at 315-403-2960 (cell/text).

25. Thank you for completing this survey. If you have any additional comments, please leave them in the space below (optional) PLEASE SHARE THIS SURVEY LINK WITH OTHER FRIENDS. Thank you.