

WINDOWS AND MIRRORS: Working toward Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Media-Providence Friends School

While the U.S. has grappled anew with issues of racism and social justice over the past several years, Media-Providence Friends School (MPFS) has been working to help its students, families, and community engage in conversation and action.



As a Friends school serving children in PreK through 8th grades, the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship lie at the heart of the school's mission, and have guided it through some of the most turbulent points in our nation's history. In 1937, enrollment at MPFS dropped by nearly half when it enrolled its first student of color and leaders chose to stand by the decision to promote equality despite the protests of some parents. In 1943, the school welcomed the first of several children who had been refugees following the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. And in 1956, MPFS again faced controversy when it hired its first teacher of color.

Today, in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and the nation's changing demographics, the Quaker values of equality, community, and integrity are finding resonance with a new generation of families, and the school has found new ways to help its diverse body of students and parents navigate the conversations and issues they experience in the world around them.

In 2019, MPFS launched a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Task Force composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and trustees, all working together to help the school live up to its ideals. Says MPFS parent Erin Harris,



"For me, the work that we are committed to doing with JEDI is a declaration of boldness in the face of adversity. Understanding how this country was formed, we show how love, peace, and compassion are not forgotten."

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LETTER FROM The Head of School

Dear Friends,

On the last Monday before the holiday break, I was watching the tent company remove the tents ahead of the anticipated snowstorm (one of the many lessons learned over the past ten months is that even the good tents cannot handle a substantial snowfall). For me it was a true moment of reflection. Wasn't it only a week ago that we had these installed? It may have been 3 months but it sure felt like a week ago... And then I began to reflect on how far we have come during this time. It really is surreal, impressive, almost incomprehensible in some ways.

This past summer, as we looked to figure out how to open campus, the whole situation was emblematic of Winston Churchill's famous phrase, "A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." We really did not know what was right or what to do. While the guidance we have been getting the last 4-8 weeks has really amped up, this was not the case this summer. In many ways we were flying blind.

In addition, while everyone obviously wanted what is best for the students, it was obvious that there were three sets of interests at play while we planned. First, that of the parents, most of whom want their kids in school or at least want the option. Then, that of the



Jon Hall, Head of School

teachers, who really do risk their health and safety every day when coming to work and also have to deal with the anxiety that comes with that fact. And of course, that of the students, for whom all of the following is true: virtual may or may not be ideal, there is increased anxiety and isolation caused by the pandemic, and they have endured the loss of a year (and more) of their childhood (at least in the traditional sense).

All of this framed the landscape we faced as we moved into the 2020-2021 school year. We could not be more fortunate because all three groups, parents, faculty/staff, and students, have been incredibly open to ambiguity, trusting of the process, and supportive of each other. And as Robert Frost said, "That has made all the difference." It could not have worked otherwise.

It also could not have worked without the hard work of the scenario building team (comprising T. Kristen, T. Clare, T. Lisa, and the Admin Team). We have been meeting since early April 2020 to brainstorm what this year could look like, how we might respond, and what we might need in every situation. A special shout out to our Director of Business Operations T. Syreeta whose task it was to actually make sure that every-

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thing we needed was here and set up, in addition to overseeing the number of projects undertaken to ensure the campus was as safe as possible. Of course, this was all also in addition to the usual ordering and work that is done every summer.

At no point during this school year will we be out of the woods; in fact, you could make the argument that we have only just stepped into them. However, I am writing this in a much better place than I ever thought possible in August. All of the various mitigation protocols we have in place are working. The students on campus have been absolute champs with the various changes to their regular school life. The students who take part in MPFS @home have also been rock stars; they're attending on time, participating, and making the most of the situation. Our faculty has been here, day in and day out, knowing the risks, juggling the responsibilities that are involved with teaching students in their class and at home, and delivering an awesome Friends education. Their courage, thoughtfulness and dedication cannot be understated. And finally, our families. It would be easy to be frustrated with the ambiguity that has hung over the last several months, and I am sure some of you were from time to time. Having said that, the support we have received from the parent community has been incredibly uplifting.

The rest of the year will no doubt be a challenge. Cases are not declining and the vaccinations are not progressing as we were told they might initially. Vaccinations for children under 18 are only just beginning clinical trials. It will take very careful and deliberate action on everyone's part to get us through the school year without closing campus. From what I've seen so far, though, I believe we can do it. Partly because we have managed to do it so far, but mostly because we have to. We all know what is best for kids and we all know what it will take to get us there. But for now, I feel that it is important to take a deep breath and relish what we have been able to do as a community, appreciate each other and the parts we all played, and look to the future with light and positivity.

In Friendship,

Jon Hall
Head of School

NEW TRUSTEE PROFILE

SueLynne Ganbari



New trustee SueLynne Ganbari joined the board in 2020 and is well-acquainted with MPFS as a member of Media Monthly Meeting. MPFS is so pleased to have a member of MMM join the board (as a Quaker board, at least half of the members must be Quaker) as both a spokesperson for and liaison between the school and the Meeting. SueLynne

brings a passion for education and communication to the board. As a certified American Sign Language interpreter for the past 29 years, she highly values the importance of accessible communication for all.

For the past 15 years, SueLynne has worked as a Video Relay Interpreter translating phone calls between Deaf and hearing people for Sorenson Communications at their Media call center. Previously, SueLynne lived in Seattle for 15 years where she studied to become a sign language interpreter.

SueLynne grew up in Glen Riddle (now a part of Media) and now lives in Rutledge. When SueLynne was a teenager, her mother joined Middletown Meeting in Delaware County. Though SueLynne did not become a member herself until she joined Media Monthly Meeting eight years ago, she was a long-time attender everywhere she lived including her time at Antioch College.

She truly values the Quaker perspective and what it lends to a child's education, and social-emotional development. "I highly recommend the middle school friends and high school friends community hosted by Philadelphia Friends Council on Education. My kids really benefited from that program while growing up as Quakers."

SueLynne is proud to become a part of the MPFS community this year and hopes to continue supporting the school in its mission by being a member of Advancement & School Meeting-Relations committees. "My sense of MPFS is that the faculty is tuned in to the kids. That gives them the ability to tune in to one another and into learning. This kind of community support allows them to be themselves and offer what they have to offer the world." We couldn't agree more! Join us in welcoming SueLynne.

ALUMNI PROFILE: Victoria Brown, Class of 1997**What years did you attend MPFS?**

I attended from 1991-1997. I started in 3rd grade and went through 8th.

Where did you attend high school?

Archbishop Prendergast High School

How was the adjustment to your new school? Culture?

I went from a small setting to a much larger setting, but it was a private school and it was all girls. I would say that I was able to adjust very well.

How well do you feel that you were prepared?

Oh, yes. Absolutely. I felt I was very prepared. I would say MPFS laid the foundation for how I see the world and how I see people. From a very young age, I learned to be open to people who are different. But also willing to do things that don't necessarily fit into the norm, and to use those opportunities to grow and learn.

When you left, what did you miss most about MPFS?

I would say the personal connection. I always felt like I had a personal connection with my teachers and my peers. In particular, I felt that connection with Coach Doug, Teacher Nancy Allison, Teacher Thom, Teacher Nancy -- the first grade teacher, she wasn't even my teacher but she was always a staple of the community. And also Teacher Gerri. And to this day I still absolutely adore Teacher Grace.

What friends, if any, do you keep in touch with that you knew from MPFS?

I definitely do. My best friend actually, she was only at MPFS for a couple years. Her name is Courtney Patrick. I'm still very close to her. (I see a few others) and of course I keep in touch with a lot of people from MPFS on Facebook.

I've visited the school too since I have a niece who attended MPFS. I was always there for different events (for her.) And a close friend now has a son who goes there, so I've been on campus for different things for him as well.

Tell us about your career as a nurse.

When I graduated high school, I knew I wanted to be a nurse. My grandmother was a nurse and I just always wanted to be a nurse. I went to Union College and actually had an unpleasant experience that made me question my nursing career so I changed my major to psychology. I graduated with a BA in psychology and a year later, I worked in the field as a behavior specialist and realized I was just not living my passion.

So, I attended Drexel University's Accelerated Career Entry, which is an 11-month program to prepare students to be a BSN. I finished that program in 2009. My first position as a nurse, I worked as a transplant nurse on a solid organ transplant unit. I did that until I transitioned into my current role. I have a dual-masters in Nursing Leadership and Healthcare Management from



Wilmington University (Class of 2016), and I am currently a clinical practice leader at Penn Presbyterian Medical Center.

Would you like to share that initial challenging experience and what you learned?

(During undergrad), I asked for help and was basically told that because of where I grew up that maybe nursing was too hard for me. So when I decided to go back and fulfill my dream, I went to Drexel and I chose a program that I knew was really intense. As a student, I started working at Penn. I had clinicals at Penn and I just absolutely loved the commitment to professionalism. So, in my current role I get to develop nurses. I started in the health system as a new to practice nurse and I worked my way up the clinical ladder into a leadership position.

My role is unique in that I am responsible for nursing practice on a surgical unit. In my job, I get to mentor and educate nurses and actually help them acknowledge different

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talents that they have, that they don't always know exist. I am able to help them improve and advance their clinical practice but also take a closer look and help them find where they want to take their nursing career.

Do you have advice for students who want to pursue a career in nursing or healthcare?

Yes! Put your heart first. It is difficult and, especially working through a pandemic right now, I think sometimes you may wonder why you have to do certain things but those "whys" will show up later in life. My advice is to always believe in yourself, even when other people doubt you. Stay committed to your own personal growth and always seek out opportunities that will help you not only elevate yourself but elevate others. No matter what it is you do in life, I would say that we all got to where we are in life because someone else gave back. So my advice is to believe in yourself and to give back and help others.

How has working as a nurse been since the pandemic?

I will say that, like most everyone else in the rest of the world, when the pandemic first hit we were extremely afraid. No one really knew what was going on. We were at an advantage seeing things from around the world, but we still didn't know what it would look like when it hit here. (It was a) challenge to look within and say, what do I have to learn from this situation and what do I have to offer?

As a leader, I was able to stand in front of the nurses on my unit and say, "I am in this fight with you and we will get through this together." Through this I think every nurse working at the bedside, though we are extremely exhausted, the commit-

ment to our profession and a commitment to learning is more prominent now than ever.

What do you want people to know about living through this pandemic?

Everybody has opinions and we should be respectful of those opinions. But the facts are: the virus is here and still, you can't forget humanity. So whatever you believe in, don't forget to be a decent human being throughout this experience. Follow the recommendations and advice of the CDC, of course, but also just be mindful to respect others and take care of yourself. There are a lot of people who are really afraid and that may cause them to not take care of themselves or others that they are responsible for.

Would life have been different if you had not attended MPFS? How so?

Absolutely. It's funny that you ask that question because I can't think of a challenge or a time in my life where I haven't drawn on my experience at MPFS. And even interacting with certain people, I know there is something special about me. I know there is something different. It's not something I can necessarily identify exactly what it is but I think the school definitely shaped me to be who I am today.

What did MPFS teach you?

Never be afraid to be an individual. Always be open to learn about other cultures and other experiences. And always be kind.

What other activities, hobbies, or personal interests would you like the MPFS community to know about you?

Well, I am single and I have a six year old cockapoo named Yoncé!

I belong to a professional nursing

sorority. Our motto is "service for humanity," so we do various acts of community service throughout the Philadelphia area. We do things like administering flu shots as well as education in regards to healthcare in general. For the holidays, we make survival kits for the homeless and pass those out to those in need around City Hall and Dilworth Plaza (in Philadelphia.) We also have different mentorship opportunities within the sorority. I am a mentor to a nursing student at Lincoln University.

I am also in a mentorship program that is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Action Coalition on Diversity and Healthcare. The goal is to basically diversify healthcare. One of the things I have personally committed to is making sure I have a presence in nursing. Representation is very important in nursing. For someone like me, as an African American student -- I attended private schools where you don't always see people who look like you. When I say that my goal is nursing leadership, it is because other nurses who are African American or minorities need to see people who look like them to keep pursuing their career.

For nursing students, and even for elementary and high school students, we are in a time where we are seeing things that we have never seen before. You need to be able to look at whatever role you choose to be and see someone who looks like you. So to me, that's what this work does. I've committed myself to becoming someone others can look up to know that I did it and so can you.

FACULTY Q&A: Teacher Clare South

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in a village called Haddenham, which is in Buckinghamshire, England. It's about 20 minutes outside of Oxford. It's a beautiful village with lots of thatched cottages. It's been used in lots of film sets, such as *Midsummer Murders*, *Jeeves and Wooster*, and *The Great Muppet Caper*.

Tell us a bit about your family.

My husband's name is Andrew and we have been married for 20 years -- we met at University! We have a son Harvey who is 19 and going to college in the UK and twin daughters, Florence & Grace, graduating from high school this year. We also have two jack russell terriers named Rupert and Stanley.

How did you discover Media, PA & MPFS?

I moved to the USA with my family in 2014 for my husband's job. He is a scientist and runs a cancer research lab at Jefferson. My family are Quaker and it was wonderful to find a community of like minded people when I moved to Pennsylvania. My father in law was head of the Friends School in Ramallah, so I was familiar with the benefits of a Quaker education. I was thrilled to find so many Friends schools in the local area. Once my family had settled in their new home, I started a job search and began an 8-week maternity substitute role at MPFS in 2015. I loved the school immediately and when I left I expressed my desire to come back and work at the school again if a job became available.

What was it about MPFS that drew you to the community?

I was really struck by the time and care that teachers are able to attend to getting to know their students. There is a wonderful, strong community here at MPFS that really gets to know its students.

Where do you reside?

Outside Norristown. We just moved, actually, in a home that was built in the 1940s. It has the original 1940s kitchen with the original tile and pull-down ironing board right there in the kitchen. It's got a lot of great details. It needs a lot of work but my husband and I like doing that sort of thing.

Before we start talking about teaching, do you have any hobbies or interests you'd like to share?

I'm very keen on baking. So, especially during quarantine, I've been making my way through making all the recipes from the Great British Bake-Off.

Favorite thing you've baked during quarantine?

I'm quite keen on meringue so I'd say the bakewell tart.

Can you tell us about your education?

Whilst in the UK, I earned a Bachelor's degree in Classical Civilization, before moving to Scotland where I completed a Postgraduate Certificate of Elementary Education from the University of Dundee, and a Postgraduate Certificate of Physical Education (3-14 years) at the University of Edinburgh.

**You've had some interesting jobs outside of teaching. Can you share a bit about that?**

When I first left college I worked for an industry that doesn't exist anymore - a press cutting service. We sent couriers to Fleet Street to get the daily newspapers straight off the press at midnight. Then a team of readers read the news for any mentions of various industries. These mentions were then cut and couriered to our clients - I worked for Richard Branson and lots of government departments. When our clients woke up in the morning they would see what was written about them in the papers! It was an exciting industry to be in and I fell in love with publishing. Of course, once the internet came along the press cutting industry ceased to exist. From there I went into magazine publishing. I was the Circulation manager for Marvel comics, which meant I would work with the publisher to set the

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print figure for each edition and coordinate distribution of the magazine.

Why did you choose teaching as a profession?

While I was working in the magazine sector in London I started to volunteer for an organization called Roots and Wings. In London, there are many areas that have a huge disparity of wealth and educational opportunities. The organization aimed to mentor kids through their final exams by giving them a real life work experience. The kids would come to work with me every week for a year, and I would mentor them educationally as well. The organization found that if kids left school at 16, as they were allowed to do at that time in the UK, then a majority would never return to full-time education. My experience made me value the importance of education in kids' lives, and when I left publishing to move to Scotland, I decided to retrain as a teacher.

Why did you choose MPFS?

The active learning that takes place here is really unique, plus the autonomy afforded to teachers. It really allows you a depth in your teaching and with your students that is so valuable.

What strikes you most about your students?

What strikes me about my students is their care and kindness for each other. Today, for example, we were reading

Ready Freddy, Thanksgiving Turkey Trouble and there were some children being unkind to each other. They just could not understand why anyone would behave that way. They were asking about the word "snickering" and so, I was telling them that it meant when people are laughing at someone but doing it in an unkind way, and it was very sweet that they could just not comprehend why anyone would be that way! They are very good to each other and just have no concept of any other way to be.

What are some of the ways you prepare the students for the next level in their education?

At MPFS, we aim to give our students breadth and depth of education, so that kids have the opportunity to look at subjects from many perspectives and encourage deep thinking. This means that in math we often talk about the different strategies that we can use rather than looking solely for the right answer. This means that our students understand the why of what they are learning.

What do you think are MPFS' greatest strengths?

Definitely the community. It has been a difficult year for everyone but I think this is a good example of how wonderful this community is. People have really come together and have been there for each other. And that has made this year so much better for me professionally and personally.

PHILANTHROPY SPOTLIGHT: The Sussman Family

The Sussman Family knows what their generosity means to those who benefit from it. They started their journey to philanthropy by building their ability to give through entrepreneurship. The late Sydney Sussman, patriarch of the family, started from the ground up in his Camden family butcher shop. He was a visionary entrepreneur, civic activist, and philanthropist that would mold how his family thought about giving back and taking action. The Sussman family worked hard to get where they are today and believe in paying it forward to help others. They have established foundations that support a variety of local and regional charities. As great grandparents, grandparents, and parents to an MPFS student, we could not be more grateful for their decision to support other MPFS families. The Sussman's gift to MPFS will provide financial aid for students who qualify. Their support enables the enrollment of talented and well-qualified



students who will contribute to and benefit from an MPFS education regardless of their family's financial circumstances. The financial aid allocations will be made without regard to the basis of race, color, religion or national origin.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2020

A Socially-Distanced Celebration!



As part of the JEDI initiative, the school partnered with the Philadelphia Children's Movement in the Fall of 2020 to conduct a listening campaign—a series of conversations with students, faculty, and families to discover where the school is doing well and where it may need improvement. The school plans to build upon what it hears from these listening sessions in the coming years.

The task force also designated 2020-21 as a “Black Lives Year of Purpose” for the school community, with events and programs including:

- Weaving the theme throughout the school's curriculum, introducing age-appropriate antiracism books all divisions of the school: with middle schoolers reading “Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You (A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped from the Beginning)” by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds; elementary schoolers reading “Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness (Ordinary Terrible Things)” by Anastasia Higginbotham; and preschoolers and kindergarteners reading “Each Kindness” by Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis.
- Co-sponsoring an online film screening of Andre Robert Lee's “Virtually Free” in 2021, a documentary about “unlikely allies who partner to transform the juvenile justice system and stop mass incarceration.” The screening will be followed by a Q&A, and the committee hopes middle school students from local Friends schools will also have an opportunity to meet with the filmmaker.
- Identifying resources to support parents and teachers both in their own learning and in the conversations they're having with their students.
- Unveiling a Social Justice Leadership elective for middle schoolers, in which the students develop their own ideas for learning about and responding to these issues. According to School Counsellor and elective co-teacher Laura Taylor, “A very important issue for students was to understand more about issues with justice so they can begin to address unequal treatment.” To date, students in this elective have designed posters and bulletin boards to educate the school community; engaged with local leaders like Simmee Myers, the DEI Coordinator at Delaware County Community College; led a Thanksgiving food drive for the Media community; and planned new ways for the school to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday, focusing the school's annual MLK Day of Service on diversity and antiracism. The students have also proposed planting trees in nearby Glen Providence Park to honor the lives of Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, George Floyd, Stephon Clark, and others.

All of this is in addition to the regular, ongoing work of faculty members like T. Kristen Thomas-Clark, the school's library and technology teacher, who has long used an approach called “windows and mirrors” when curating the school's library collection. Originally introduced in 1988 by educator Emily Style, the approach suggests that children benefit from books that serve as “windows”—views into other people's cultures and lives—and “mirrors,” which reflect their own life experience. It's an apt metaphor for a school whose logo features a window, and one that can be readily applied to other parts of the school's approach to JEDI.

With the work of the task force and a renewed focus on social justice, MPFS looks forward to many more years of helping students and families understand the world around them, while also seeing themselves reflected and honored within the life of the school. “Collectively,” says Harris, “our vision holds proof that we all can be seen, be heard, and be present when given the opportunity.”

Come explore with us!



@mediaprovidencefriendsschool



@media.providence.friends



@mpfs





Media Fair Trade Honors MPFS with Fair Trade Scholastic Award

On Thursday, October 15, Media Fair Trade honored MPFS with the Fair Trade Scholastic Award at the Media Borough Council Meeting. As you may know, Media is America's First Fair Trade Town and MPFS became one of four schools in the nation first certified as a Fair Trade School in 2014.

Media Fair Trade is a local non-profit organization that helps to support and educate the community about the importance of fair trade. Elizabeth Killough, Media Fair Trade member, says that they wanted to honor MPFS with the scholastic award because "(the school) incorporates fair trade within the curriculum... without our having to ask. It's really taken hold through (teachers) Holly & Shirley to be in the DNA of the school. We're really happy about that!"