



Friends Place
on Capitol Hill
Promoting Civic Engagement

Newsletter

WINTER 2021

NO. 2/2021

Friends Place to Open in January 2022

By Alex Frandsen

After months of extensive repairs, Friends Place on Capitol Hill will open its doors to visitors in January 2022. The building, located a few blocks from the Capitol, will provide meeting space, overnight accommodations, and civic education and engagement opportunities for groups.

In addition to its new look, Friends Place also has a new director, Sarah Johnson, who joined in August 2021. Prior to Friends Place, she directed the Steinbruck Center at Luther Place in Washington, D.C.

"I don't know that I could have found a more perfect fit," Johnson said. "I was looking for something that would build on my experience, so having the chance to join an organization with a network as big [as FCNL's] was a really wonderful opportunity."

Although raised Baptist, Sarah found that she identified strongly with Quaker values, which made the Friends Place job all the more alluring. The support and vision provided by the FCNL Education Fund for Friends Place has also been a major boost. "The resources that have been made available in this role have been immensely encouraging," she said.

When Johnson first came on board, Friends Place was in the middle of major repairs, estimated to cost \$2 million. FCNL Education Fund has raised \$1.2 million towards this cost.

Repairs included new bathrooms, an exterior green wall, two meeting rooms, energy-efficient appliances, updated bunk rooms, installing a wheelchair lift, replacing floor tiles, using permeable paving stones, and building an ADA-compliant bedroom.

"We're hoping that [by mid-December], the major repairs will be done. They have painted nearly everything, they're installing toilets and vanities now, and furniture is beginning to arrive. We're down to the final stretch," Johnson said.

Open houses for the neighborhood, Capitol Hill community leaders, and FCNL's nonprofit partners will be held starting January 2022. The first group of students is slated to check in on Jan. 13.

Already, Friends Place has 35 visiting groups on the calendar for 2022, totaling more than 600 people. Most groups will fall into four categories: junior and senior high school groups, college service-learning trips, nonprofit groups, and activist groups.



In October, FCNL welcomed its first group of Advocacy Corps organizers back to Washington, D.C., since the pandemic began. They had an opportunity to visit the soon-to-open Friends Place on Capitol Hill. Photo by DAG Photo/FCNL.

This also includes hosting participants to the 2022 Spring Lobby Weekend.

Group bookings can be made online, through the new website, www.friendsplacdc.org.

“We are excited to offer yet another opportunity to promote civic engagement for peace and justice with groups of young people,” said Mary Lou Hatcher, clerk of the FCNL Education Fund and Friends Place.

The FCNL Education Fund assumed governance and management of what was then William Penn House in 2019. A few months later, the board changed the building’s name to Friends Place on Capitol Hill, recognizing that William Penn, a highly regarded Quaker, also enslaved people.

Even with a new name and upgraded amenities, however, Johnson stressed that Friends Place is working hard to connect with its past. The building was built in 1917 and was acquired in 1964 by Friends Meeting of Washington with the help of FCNL. In 1966, the building opened as William Penn House, a Quaker seminar and hospitality center on Capitol Hill.

Its history is told in a book, *Friends Place on Capitol Hill: Promoting Civic Engagement*. The book was written by Carl Abbott and published this year.

“There are so many stories of people who have a connection with this place,” Sarah said. “A lot of the storytelling that I’ve heard about William Penn House is related to how it served as a place of hospitality and fellowship. We intend to continue that legacy.”



Sarah Johnson (center), director of Friends Place, tours the renovations with FCNL Assistant Clerk Mary Lou Hatcher (left) and General Secretary Diane Randall (right). Photo by DAG Photo/FCNL.

As a subsidiary of FCNL Education Fund, Friends Place will open in January as a new Quaker learning center and guesthouse that will promote civic engagement of young people. Programs for young people are being planned that will use the Friends Place facility and the advocacy expertise of FCNL.

“There are all sorts of opportunities for the two organizations to send people to one another and to collaborate on program offerings,” Johnson said.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed its opening, precautions are in place to ensure the health and safety of all guests. Friends Place guests must be vaccinated, and visitors will only share a bedroom and bathroom with people in their own group.

Additional precautions may be taken, depending on the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health of the District of Columbia.

Alex Frandsen is FCNL’s communications strategist. ■

For more information, email info@friendsplacdc.org.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), FCNL Education Fund, and Friends Place on Capitol Hill are nonprofit, nonpartisan Quaker organizations working collectively to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

Friends Place Newsletter, a publication of Friends Place on Capitol Hill, is published every six months.

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LOCATION

515 East Capitol Street NE
Washington, DC 20003

MAILING ADDRESS

245 2nd Street NE
Washington, DC 20002



Printed using vegetable inks on FSC-certified paper in a facility that uses renewable energy.