

THE NANCY SHELLEY BEQUEST FUND JOURNEY – A REFLECTION ON OUR FIRST THREE YEARS

Nancy Shelley was a long-time and treasured member of the Blue Mountains meeting. When she died in 2011, and after a long and complex process of court determinations, a legacy bequeathed by her to the Quaker community was deemed to be the responsibility of the Blue Mountains local meeting. I wasn't part of the many threshing meetings which then took place over the next two years, during which time deep consideration was given to how best to employ this gift in a way that Nancy would have wanted. I know from other Friends who were involved in that process that at no stage was it hurried, and that it was a process which reflected deeply and listened for the voice of God to help them discern on how best to make this generous bequest available for Friends.

Finally, in 2013 the Nancy Shelley Bequest Fund was set up, and guidelines were developed for individuals or organisations who intended to apply to the fund for financial assistance for their projects or activities. These guidelines were built around a knowledge of Nancy's concerns and passions, identified as matters relating to peace, indigenous concerns, matters relating to women's education and leadership particularly in relation to music and mathematics, and also concerns of the local Blue Mountains meeting and Yearly Meeting.

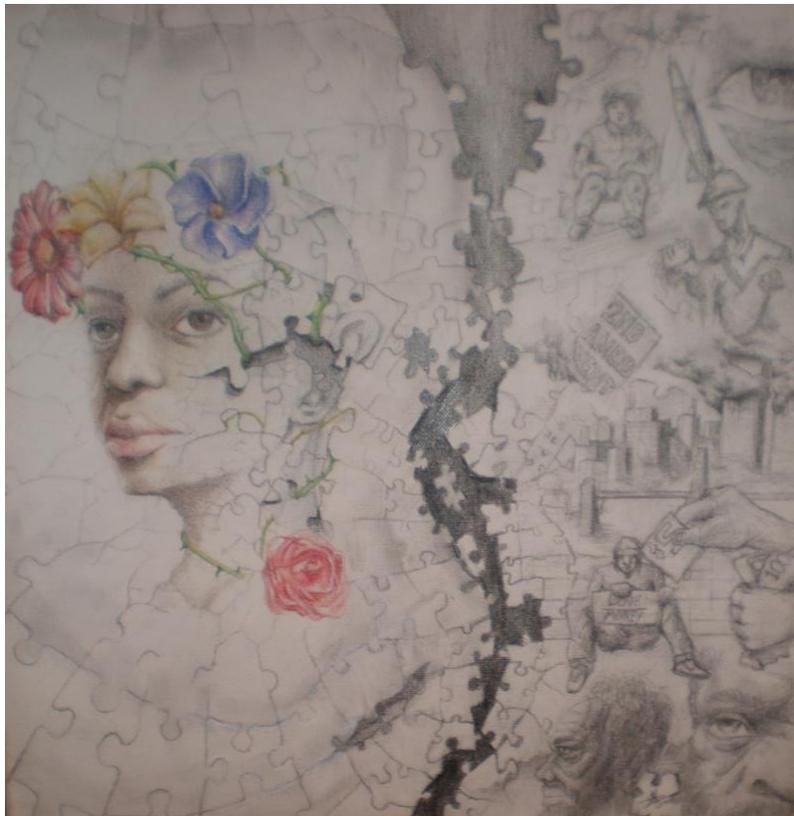
Along with Brett Trenery and Sabine Erica, I was approached to become part of the working group to administer the trust. The Blue Mountains meeting had had to become a legally incorporated body in order to be able to auspice the trust, and the meeting's treasurer at the time, Myra Hutton, was therefore also an *ex officio* member of the working group. An early task for the group was to consider how best to invest the money available. Blue Mountains local meeting had determined that the fund would not need to preserve the capital indefinitely by relying only on interest for grants, as this would have limited how much money could be made available for projects and activities and possibly limited the group's ability to fund any large-scale projects should they be presented for consideration.

The working group informed regional and local meetings that the fund was now open for applications, and developed an application form – something we wanted to keep as simple as possible. An early decision of the working group was to send \$10,000 to each of the regional meetings for them to be able to assist their members with either travel or study funds as they saw fit. I think however that we also expected to be inundated with applications when we announce that the fund was “open for business” but in fact, for a while, nothing happened. Then the first application was received in mid-2014, requesting funding for a music program for young people at a local school, and slowly the applications began to arrive.

Our job was to consider each application and discern whether or not they fitted the guidelines and reflected Nancy's concerns. We then made a recommendation which was taken back to Blue Mountains local meeting for a final decision.

The applications which have been received over the last three years have fallen into three broad categories – requests from individuals for assistance with study projects relating, usually, to peace or spiritual development; requests for money for larger-scale projects such as the production of the *People Power Manual*; and requests for capital investment. Most of these applications have been approved.

One particularly successful project was a Peace Prize – a venture where students from high schools within the Blue Mountains were invited to submit either an art work or written work which addressed peace in some way. The committee received submissions from a wide range of students from all the schools, mostly of art works, and the quality and imagination of some of the submitted works was outstanding and very inspiring. Judging of the art works was conducted by Jacque Schultz, and in October 2016 a prize night was held at the Wentworth Falls School of Arts. It is hoped that the Peace Prize may be offered again in 2018.



One of the works submitted for the Peace Prize

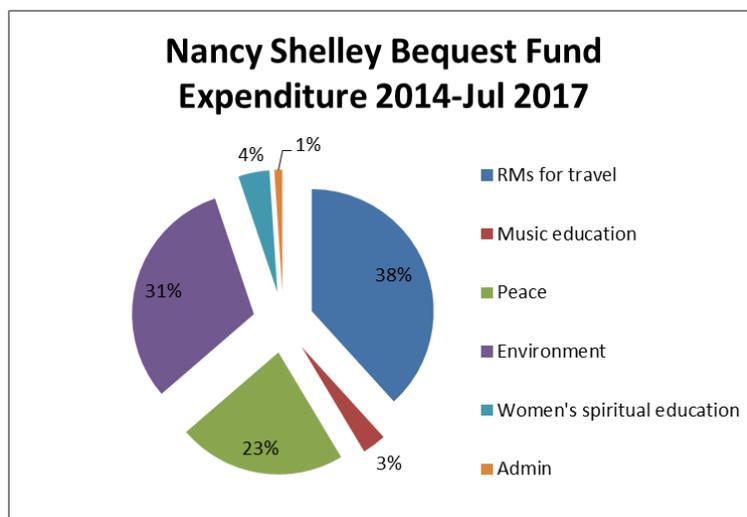
Approvals are easy. Not approving an application is, not surprisingly, less so. Occasionally an application hasn't been seen to fit the guidelines or to adequately explain its purpose. We made a couple of difficult decisions which involved lengthy discussion and careful consideration and, ultimately, a decision to either request more information or decline the application. In the process, we have learned a lot. For example, we developed a checklist of things for applicants to consider; we became clearer that we would utilise the option to request more information and clarify specifically

what we needed to know; we developed a protocol for requesting a report back to the working group and local meeting about how the funds were utilised.

We have also asked ourselves whether the NSBF should make funds available for capital works, and in conjunction with the Blue Mountains local meeting have considered that this is not a viable option, as the original intent of the fund was to focus on projects and activities which had outcomes relating to Nancy’s interests. This in turn, however, has also led us to frequently wonder “would Nancy have wanted us to approve this particular application?” This has been a deeper issue, leading us to recognise that we don’t have to treat Nancy’s interests as a constraint, but rather as a guiding spirit. Following Nancy’s passions does not need to limit our capacity for discernment about what is valuable and relates to Quaker concerns. In relation to this, the guidelines have now also been widened to include matters relating to the environment, one of our Quaker testaments.

Recently, the working group revisited the application form and guidelines, and Jennifer (now our *ex officio* treasurer) and Jackie, the Clerk of Blue Mountains local meeting, recently talked about the fund at every opportunity at this year’s Yearly Meeting. The working group membership is about to change, and new members will bring new insights and discernment. The Nancy Shelley Fund is a living, evolving fund which it is hoped will allow Friends and friends to gain assistance to develop projects which contribute to the society in which we live.

The process of being involved in the Nancy Shelley Bequest Fund has been a valuable one for me. As a newcomer to the Quaker community, I’ve learned a lot about Quaker processes. I’ve appreciated the care and time each person in the working group has taken to consider the applications and tried to contribute to a final recommendation thoughtfully and honestly and listening for guidance. And I have learned something about Nancy Shelley, a woman of vision, passion and generosity.



How the money's been spent to date