



# 7th Annual STUDENT VOICES PROJECT

## PROMPT

Write about creating change in your local community. Two approaches: (1) What change do you want to see happen, why, and how you would do it? (2) What change have you already been a part of creating and how has it made a difference?

Our seventh annual Student Voices Project brought in writing from 130 middle and high school students representing ten different Friends schools. We selected 20 honorees whose submissions are featured here as short excerpts, instead of full pieces as we've done in past years. We made the difficult decision to shorten the SVP feature in our print edition in order to make room for the preceding articles about how Quakers have been responding to the coronavirus pandemic and all its challenges. The rest of each student piece can be viewed in our online edition available at [Friendsjournal.org/studentvoices2020](https://Friendsjournal.org/studentvoices2020), where we've also posted a full list of all 130 participants.

This year's theme of "Creating Change" has taken on new meaning since the submission deadline passed in mid-February. On March 23, *Education Week* reported that 46 states had closed all their schools, canceling classes for at least 123,000 U.S. public and private schools and affecting at least 54.8 million students. At press, at least two dozen states had ordered their schools closed through April or May, and another 15 to 20 states had decided to extend the closure for the remainder of the academic year or "until further notice." We're in an unprecedented period of societal upheaval with particularly heartbreaking and lasting consequences for the education of our young people, who will nevertheless take this experience and go on to shape our future world.

Quakers have a long history of organizing for positive change in response to various social, economic, racial, and environmental injustices; perhaps we'll soon enough add to that list: worldwide pandemics. For now *Friends Journal* is pleased to share and celebrate the writing of younger voices in our Quaker meeting and school communities despite the world events that have so drastically changed their lives. In the following essays you'll find inspiring stories of what it takes to move from one person declaring, "Something's gotta change"; to others joining in agreement and action, "Let's work together"; to finally landing in a new and improved reality: "Look at what we can accomplish when we treat all beings as equal before God." Buoyed by Quaker values and supportive communities, this year's honorees tackle a range of issues, including gender equality, food insecurity, healthcare access, gun violence, prejudice, and environmental responsibility. They present convincing evidence that a whole new world is possible if we want it to be.

—Gail Whiffen, associate editor



“Before I was in kindergarten, I started rescuing cats with my mom and my babysitter. We found a group of cats near some stores and a busy road, and we left notes to see if anyone else was feeding them. The other people stopped helping, and we ended up feeding and caring for them every day. Eventually we started feeding cats at other locations too.”

—*“Cat Rescuer” by Jade Louis Clarke McKay (he/him), Grade 7, Friends Meeting School in Ijamsville, Md.*



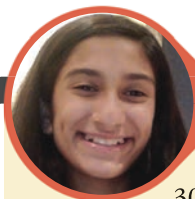
“If one accident doesn’t prove that there is a problem with the system, we can see that two separate accidents in the same spot are no fluke. It is clear that change is necessary. I have decided to begin by talking to the head of school about this problem, as she will likely have more weight in a conversation with the local government than I do. If I can get the school engaged and active with this issue, then I will have more support when I continue to my next step.”

—*“The Dangerous Turn” by Austin Setzler (he/him), Grade 8, New Garden Friends School in Greensboro, N.C.*



“After class, I asked my teacher whether it was still possible to start a new affinity group, one for girls. He said it was a possibility, but it wouldn’t be easy. My mind jumped straight to a quote from Bayard Rustin: ‘Let us be enraged about injustice, but let us not be destroyed by it.’ I thought about that quote for a long time. I realized that I can be mad at the world for not understanding what is wrong and what is right, but that just wastes time that I could be spending making change. So I went home and started to do my homework.”

—*“Stronger Together” by Coco Campbell (she/her), Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“The petition was signed by 30 girls. It was very simple, or at least we thought so. All we wanted was for them to agree to our plan. We weren’t asking for much, just an opportunity for girls to get exposure to football through PE. We marched right up to the athletic officials and handed them the crumpled piece of lined paper that had touched so many eager hands. On that paper were the signatures of the girls who wanted change.”

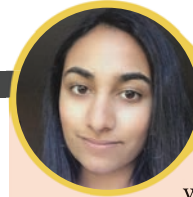
—*“Our Turn” by Maina Vaidya (she/her), Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.*

Photos courtesy of the students



“Did you know that in one 12-ounce (Tall) Starbucks Vanilla Bean Frappuccino there are 41 grams of carbohydrates? And that all of them are sugars? This is not good for anyone, but for me and others like me, it’s dangerous. . . . The American Heart Association (AHA) was very interested in my story as I am not the only kid struggling with high cholesterol. . . . Ever since the first article was published, I have been helping AHA empower kids of all ages to make healthy food choices and avoid sugary drinks and junk food.”

—*“From Juicy Burger to Leafy Greens” by Lara Asch (she/her), Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“In seventh and eighth grade, while attending Newtown Friends School (NFS), I clerked the Tech Team, a student-run committee charged to educate the NFS community on the use of technology for learning. NFS also has an intergenerational program with Pennswood Village, an adjacent continuing care retirement community. The Tech Team makes annual visits to Pennswood to help residents get familiar with using technology in their daily lives. On those trips, I taught the residents how to use their electronic devices for communication and entertainment.”

—*“Teaching Tech to Seniors” by Ankita Achanta (she/her), Grade 9, George School in Newtown, Pa.*



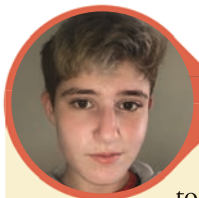
“After wrestling for months with the idea of making a speech to the middle school, the emotions and motivations were bubbling up so strongly that I knew it would be wrong to ignore them. As such, I helped organize the Day of Silence in our school: a day when students take a vow of silence to symbolically represent the silencing of the LGBTQ+ community as a result of bullying and harassment. This experience initiated a conversation that would stick with people both in the moment and in the long-term.”

—*“The Spectrum of Equality” by Aria Gratson (she/her), Grade 9, Abington Friends School in Jenkintown, Pa.*



“Anxiety and depression haven’t been covered much in my school experience—at least not as much as race or gender. I started to think that people must not really be that affected by their mental health. I ignored the casual comments of ‘kill yourself’ and ‘I’m so depressed’ from people that I thought I knew, and I ignored when I started saying them too. . . . One afternoon I was sitting in meeting for worship when I found myself thinking about the situation again. I had never spoken in meeting before, but I rose on shaky legs and spoke my mind.”

—*“False Face Must Hide What the False Heart Doth Know” by Kiera Larrieu (she/her), Grade 9, Abington Friends School in Jenkintown, Pa.*



“Every Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., I make 50

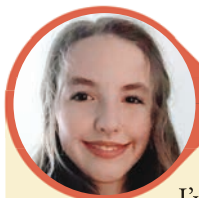
bagged lunches for homeless people in Kensington, a neighborhood in Northeast Philadelphia, Pa. I’ve been doing this for about two years now, and every Monday my mom delivers the lunches with the Sunday Love Project, the organization that coordinates the effort. . . . The fact that there are so many organizations trying to end food insecurity in Philadelphia yet it’s still a major issue is really concerning to me.”

—*“Food Insecurity in Philadelphia”*  
by Noa Phillips (they/them), Grade 9,  
Abington Friends School in  
Jenkintown, Pa.



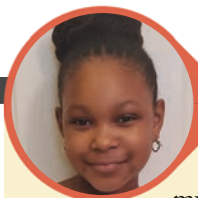
“When I saw these people begging for money, looking hopeless, I felt grief-stricken, and this made me determined to do something. I have learned in meeting for worship at my Quaker school how important it is to assist others in your community, and here there were people that needed help. I did not want to be a bystander and do nothing. I wanted to take action, but I did not know how.”

—*“Learning to Help the Homeless”*  
by Charlie Kerry (he/him), Grade 6,  
Sidwell Friends School in  
Washington, D.C.



“For the past few months, I’ve been researching, brainstorming, and writing about gun violence. I wrote a piece quite similar to this one, and I am going to send it to North Carolina’s senators and my local representatives. . . . I have come to the conclusion that guns are the problem. We need better background checks, and we need to completely cut off use of military-grade weapons. I mean, come on, they’re made for killing humans. If we want to prevent gun violence, we need to prevent guns as well.”

—*“Made for Killing”* by Olive Shull  
(she/her), Grade 7, Carolina Friends  
School in Greensboro, N.C.



“I was watching TV when my mom got up to get a phone call. I saw the look on her face, and I knew something was wrong. I asked her if everything was okay, and she said yes, so I was not bothered. Soon she had changed her clothes. I asked her where she was going, and she told me something I will never forget: she said that my cousin had gotten shot. I felt my heart drop. After a few days we found out he was okay and he was going to live.”

—*“Standing Against Gun Violence”*  
by Nia Daniel (she/her), Grade 6,  
Greene Street Friends School in  
Philadelphia, Pa.





“One song can create a relationship, and I helped make one song. . . . Robert Glasper asked me and other Black boys who were friends of his son Riley to say names of people who were killed by the police. I liked doing this because it felt good to honor them. I was six years old when I said Amadou Diallo’s and Sean Bell’s names along with two other victims. And then Riley starts talking about how being Black is beautiful. The songs on the album made me feel strong and proud to be Black.”

— *“Communities and Protest Songs”*  
by *Ralph Richardson III (he/him)*,  
Grade 5, *Brooklyn Friends School in*  
*Brooklyn, N.Y.*



“I slowly approached the whiteboard at the front of the classroom and yanked the cap off a red marker. I did not want to choose a country that a lot of people would know about. What would be the purpose then? I wanted to choose one that was unknown to my classmates so they could learn something new. In my best handwriting, I wrote: ‘Freetown, Sierra Leone.’ I had chosen it simply because I love the sound of the country’s name as it dances on my tongue. My classmates glanced up at the words in confusion.”

— *“Teaching About Africa”* by *Graciana Kabwe (she/her)*, Grade 6, *Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“We want Black history and culture to be integrated into the curriculum equitably throughout the school year. It would be a constant reminder that Black people matter, and that we wouldn’t be where we are today without them. Right now, many students forget Black history is such a vital part of American and world history, and are only reminded in February. Some of us are planning to talk to our school principal about it, while others are writing letters to Congress and other government officials about why it has been condensed to a 28-day period.”

— *“Black History Matters”* by *Tara Prakash (she/her)*, Grade 7, *Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“People waste hours of their life just by waiting. Humans in dire need of medical attention wait while their lives are slowly fading. The long wait times in the ER, especially at Baptist Hospital, are ridiculous, and the reason for this is the lack of trained medical professionals available to serve the high need. The bathrooms at the ER should also be safer for those who are vulnerable to injury from a fall. My grandmother, for instance, was diagnosed with Stage 4 brain cancer, and she spent her last months waiting at the hospital to see medical professionals.”

— *“Too Much Time Waiting”* by *Sarah Sheets (she/her)*, Grade 10, *New Garden Friends School in Durham, N.C.*



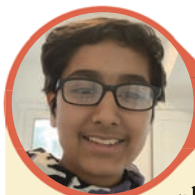
“My brother is a picky eater, so at times whole meals go to waste. I also see people throwing away extra food and leftovers from parties without even giving it a second thought. All of this food waste goes to landfills, and it releases methane gas, which speeds up climate change. . . . This is a huge problem. The wasted food is taking up space in landfills when it could be composted instead, but not everyone has the option to compost.”

—*“Food Waste in North Carolina”*  
by Whitney Williams (she/her),  
Grade 7, Carolina Friends School in  
Durham, N.C.



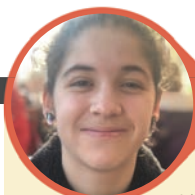
“It started with a class-wide discussion about how we could help the school community. We settled on lowering our energy use on campus. Along with four other classmates, I volunteered to be on the committee tasked with implementing this stewardship project. . . . Some of our initial proposals included weatherproofing the windows to make the heating more efficient, turning off lights right after leaving a room, and using timers for chargers. There was a lot of conversing and debating about what we would be able to do best.”

—*“Energy Use in the Classroom”* by Louise Pappa (she/her), Grade 7, New Garden Friends School in Greensboro, N.C.



“Littering can take a beautiful place and turn it into a garbage dump. A few weeks later the park remained unused, and nobody really did anything about it. The trash just kept piling up. Finally, it got to the point where someone had to do something. A senior in high school tried to address the problem with some others, but they soon figured out that it would take a lot more than three people to clean this park. She sent out an email to people in the neighborhood, but didn’t get many responses. However, they didn’t give up.”

—*“Saving the Park”* by Gobind Gosal (he/him), Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C.



“What I wish for my school and others is that kids have better access to the knowledge they need to be better stewards. In recent years, the percentage of teaching that is dedicated to outdoor education has dwindled considerably, when it should be a crucial part of school. Experiential learning and outdoor education supports emotional, behavioral, and intellectual development. Studies show that this type of learning helps children to develop independence, creativity, empathy toward others, problem-solving skills, self-discipline, and much more.”

—*“Both Student and Steward”* by Camille MacKenzie (she/her), Grade 9, Abington Friends School in Jenkintown, Pa.