

## *Annual Parent Letter for SAYF's 2020-2021 Season*

Dear Parents & Guardians of Young Friends:

We deeply appreciate your family's participation in the Southern Appalachian Young Friends [SAYF] community. The volunteers who sustain this program remain dedicated to its continuation despite the significant disruptions to our daily lives caused by the global pandemic. We have regularly witnessed the strengths of character, compassion and self confidence that SAYF fosters in our Young Friends, and we believe that the spiritual bonds of our community can keep the roots healthy until we can once again blossom together in the light.

With respect for restrictions on social contact in the foreseeable future, SAYF events for our 2020-2021 season are taking the form of internet video meetings. While faces on computer screens cannot provide the immersive and adventurous bonding experience of communal SAYF retreats, we believe they can be an effective means of maintaining community connections with advantages of scheduling flexibility, simplified logistics and global accessibility. Since April, our adult Steering committee and teen Nurturers have held several joint Zoom meetings to fully explore the capabilities of the technology and to adapt our gatherings to the virtual environment. On June 26th we held our first Virtual Retreat experiment and, in evaluation, we have adjusted our community guidelines for online interaction as we continue seeking creative methods of engaging our Young Friends and retaining the joyful, self directed spirit of our retreats.

Based on input and ideas from our Young Friends, we will be offering a flexible schedule of both casual and structured virtual gatherings for current SAYFers throughout the school year. As with any retreat, active participation is encouraged and all SAYF sponsored Zoom meetings will be hosted and shepherded by at least two approved Friendly Adult Nurturer [FAN] volunteers. Recommended best practices for online meeting safety and security will be observed and virtual breakout rooms will be offered for small groups with the "Open Door" policy that FANs can join and monitor these rooms at any time. Activities and scheduling will be determined by participating teen volunteers and Nurturers in consensus with hosting FANs. Our intention is to provide a safe SAYF virtual space that reflects the ideals of being assertively welcoming in support of the social, emotional and spiritual growth of all our Young Friends.

We hope your child will continue participating in SAYF and stay in touch with their Friendly peers through these virtual events and retreats. Event notices and invitations will be distributed via mail, email, phone trees and posted to our [AwesomeSAYFers.org](http://AwesomeSAYFers.org) web site, with our next full virtual retreat event scheduled for Saturday, October 3rd (invitation & details accompany this letter).

**As with our physical retreats, Young Friends will need parental permission to attend this season's virtual events.** A permission form is attached and a signed copy can be mailed or scanned and emailed to our admin assistant (email & mail addresses on form), or approval can be filed via the online form at <<https://forms.gle/sCTTtEhaecJFcZK66>>. The participation of your Young Friend indicates their agreement to abide by the traditional SAYF guidelines and community values included on the back of this letter, as well as any additional guidelines presented at the virtual events. It is ultimately up to the individual teen to act responsibly and strive to be a positive element in the community. Community members who are experiencing turmoil or distress may still attend, but we request that you consult in advance with the adult hosts of that gathering or the Steering Committee clerk to facilitate supportive attention.

== In peace, with gratitude, the SAYF Steering Committee for 2020-2021:

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