



# PEACEWORKER JOURNAL LETTER

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<http://www.medact.org/>

Dear Friends,

The past months have flown by since we finished training at Woodbrooke and I set out as a UK peaceworker. Besides sharing with you some of my experiences so far, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for this opportunity to work for peace and also for the incredible support of QPSW on this journey.

I am working at a global public health charity called Medact, based in London. Medact has a small team of staff, and over a thousand members across the UK. It aims to mobilise the health community to act on the underlying drivers of ill-health across four main areas: peace and demilitarisation, economic justice, health and human rights, and climate and ecology.

The main body of my work so far has to been to help organize a conference on 13-14 November at Friends House. Called *Health Through Peace*, this conference saw 700 people come together across both days to discuss the impact of violent conflict on health, focussing on the mandate and vision of the health community to combat militarism and work towards peace.

*Health Through Peace* marked the first step towards achieving Medact's goal of revitalising the medical peace movement, which grew in Britain during the 1950s and 60s out of anti-nuclear medical campaigning. If the cross-generational energy, passion and determination that was so



tangible during the conference is anything to go by, this first step promises to be a powerful springboard!

The bombings in Beirut and the terrorist attacks in Paris coincided with *Health Through Peace*, and amid all the horror, outrage and fear, it was a privilege to find myself part of a conference in which the health community positioned itself to face the greatest challenges of humanity with determination and hope. The vision of the conference was encapsulated in a closing speech by Dr Sarah Alhulail, who had written to Noam Chomsky during a time of disillusionment. His typically fervent and genuine response struck a chord, I believe, in all the conference delegates: “We can give up hope and help ensure that the worst will happen, or we can grab what rays of hope there are. It’s not much of a choice really.”

Much of my time during the conference was spent managing an excellent team of thirty volunteers, most of whom were students in either health or peace related fields. It was deeply encouraging to see the commitment and engagement of young people to join efforts to work for peace. In fact, since working at Medact I have continually been inspired and challenged by the vision and enthusiasm of members of the health community who are engaged in campaigning and advocating for a healthier world. Working towards peace and combating militarisation requires the active engagement of people from all sectors of society; and the health community can be mobilised as an extremely powerful voice for a more peaceful and thus a healthier planet. As one delegate at the conference said to me, *peace could be seen as just another word for health*.

Since the conference, I have begun organising events across the UK to continue to revitalise the Health Peace movement, in collaboration with Medact local groups, Medsin (a student organisation) and other partners. An invitation to all conference delegates has already resulted in multiple expressions of interest from health and peace activists around the UK who wish to be involved in organizing workshops or events in their local area in 2016. I hope that over the coming weeks before the end of 2015, this interest multiplies and spreads through the UK health community. More information about these next steps can be found on this page: <http://www.medact.org/healthpeace/> along with filmed lectures, recorded seminars and photographs from the conference. Please do get in touch if



you would like to be involved in the Health Peace movement: you can email me at [rhianalouise@medact.org](mailto:rhianalouise@medact.org).

I have also been working on the coordination of a paper on the recruitment of under 18s into the UK armed forces. This paper focuses on the psychological and developmental stakes involved in the recruitment of minors, and joins with organisations such as Forces Watch, At Ease and Child Soldiers International in calling for the recruitment age to be raised to 18. It is a great privilege to be able to work with these fantastic organisations and I am hopeful that this paper will provide a powerful contribution to the call to raise the recruitment age; as well as an opportunity for mental health professionals to join efforts to combat the militarisation of young people in the UK.

Beside the privilege of working daily alongside inspired and committed people in the Medact office, and Medact members and volunteers at the conference or in preparation for future events; I am so grateful for the network of support that I have in my fellow peaceworkers. Holly, Zara and I correspond regularly to encourage each other in our work, and we are looking forward to visiting Daniel and Patrick in Geneva next year, as well as meeting together in Brussels in March.

After living in various places in the Midlands, rural France and Sicily during the past six years, I am greatly enjoying the compacted vibrancy of London life. From joining in with a climate change march just a few tube stops away, to volunteering for the Chagos Support Association (a cause I have felt deeply about for some time), and walking to work along the Thames and across the beautiful Tower Bridge, I have much to be thankful for. Every Friday, Holly, Zara and myself send each other an email to reflect on what we are most thankful for that week. As a UK peacemaker I owe this journey into the world of peacebuilding to the generosity and commitment of Quakers to peace. I am so thankful to all of you for that gift, and above all for the inspiration and encouragement you are to me.

In peace,

Rhianna