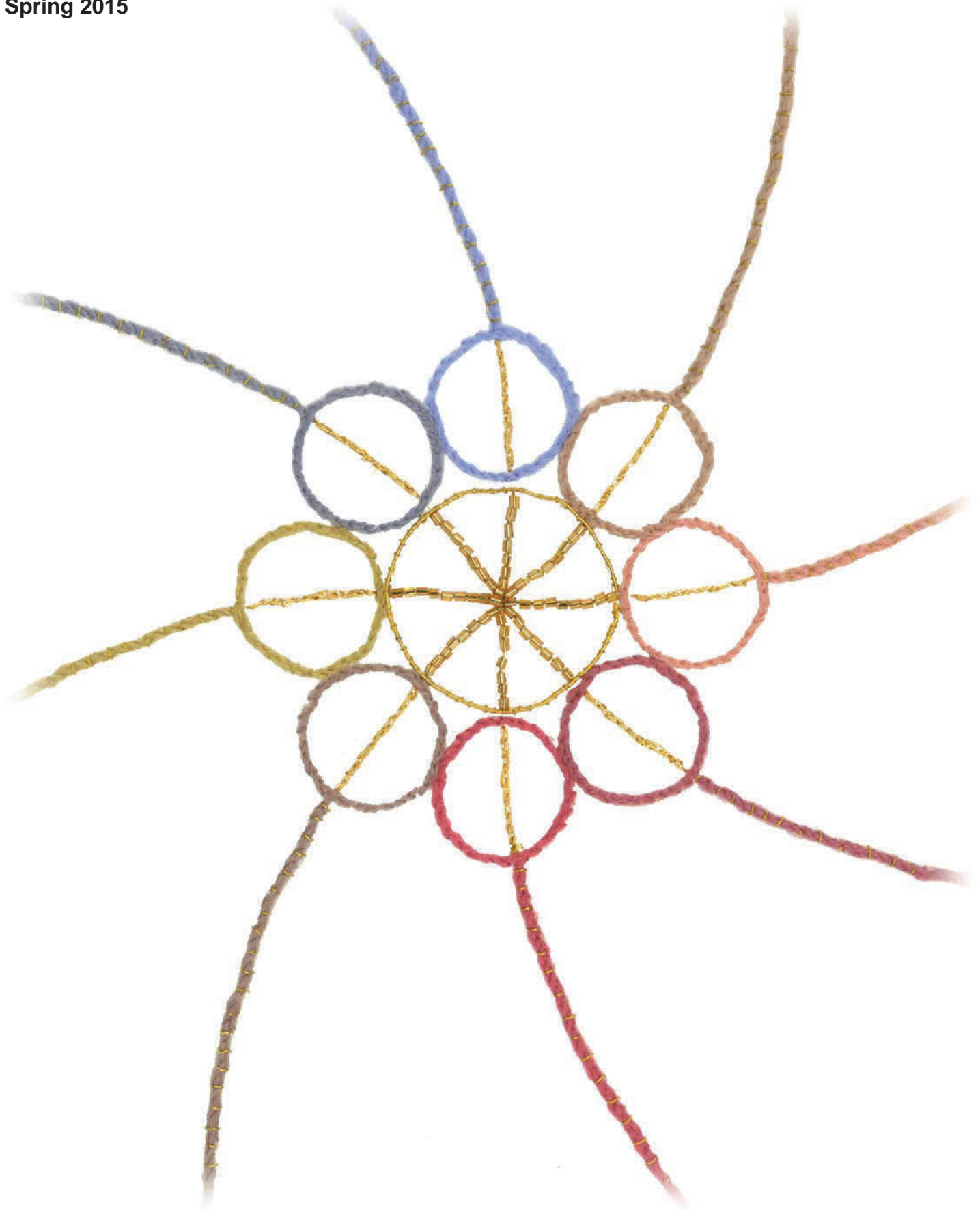


Quaker Life

Network news

Spring 2015



Quaker Life Network news

Quaker Life Network news is an annual publication from Quaker Life. This edition shares stories of interest of some of the Network's activities in 2014 and 2015.

It is published before each Yearly Meeting and is circulated among the Quaker Life Network membership electronically, unless a paper copy is specifically asked for. A paper copy is sent to each local meeting and is also available to Friends attending Yearly Meeting.

Content is generated by Quaker Life staff and Network members. We ask Quakers who have worked in meetings or have been involved in activities for the Network whether they will write about their experiences.

We also value stories from Friends who have used the Network to contact and work with each other without informing Quaker Life. Our Network of Friends is not dependent on linking through Quaker Life, and sharing our experience of direct engagement is one way of helping this to develop.

If you wish to contribute to a future edition of Quaker Life Network news, please submit articles to qlnetwork@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1007 for further information.

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Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition of Quaker Life Network news.

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Like our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/QuakerLifeNetwork.

Quaker Life Network

Network review

This year the Network has continued in its engagement with Friends and meetings. It has become apparent to me that the number of Friends who are subscribed to the Network email will reach the milestone of 1652 (the year George Fox travelled around the North-West of England) during 2015. The communications reach much further than that because I am aware of lots of Friends who send on the information to others within their meeting and beyond.

You may have noticed that last year the Network changed its logo. Quaker Jean Lyon responded to the request for support with this and a new image was developed. Jean's story of spiritual connectedness through developing the image is told in this edition.

In 2014 five new clusters were formed: Chaplaincy Cluster; Quaker World Relations Committee Cluster; Quaker Values in Education Cluster (that has since re-shaped its work and become a listed informal group); Island Quakers Cluster; Quaker Parenting Cluster.

Clusters are informal groups of Friends that engage with each other in relation to a particular area of work. The structure of clusters is flexible so that each one's form serves its purpose rather than being of a fixed model.

A key piece of work that you can read about on page 4 is the Mental Health Cluster's stories project, which has led to the publication *Encounters with mental distress: Quaker stories*, which will be available to buy at and after Yearly Meeting in May 2015.

Being Friends Together is a new resource developed by Quaker Life and Woodbrooke. It is based around an online resource that supports meetings in their learning together. Network members are supporting meetings by walking alongside to help them to make the most of the resource and events. Find out what is wanted and whether you could be a meeting visitor.



Oliver Waterhouse
Network Development Officer

The Quaker Life Network is one of the key tools that Quaker Life has available to help its objective of supporting Friends and meetings and develop connections within the wider Quaker community. Some of the ways it has helped are to:

***respond to conflict | plan and deliver events in meetings
review work | proofread publications | connect Quakers
offer advice and support to Friends | walk alongside***

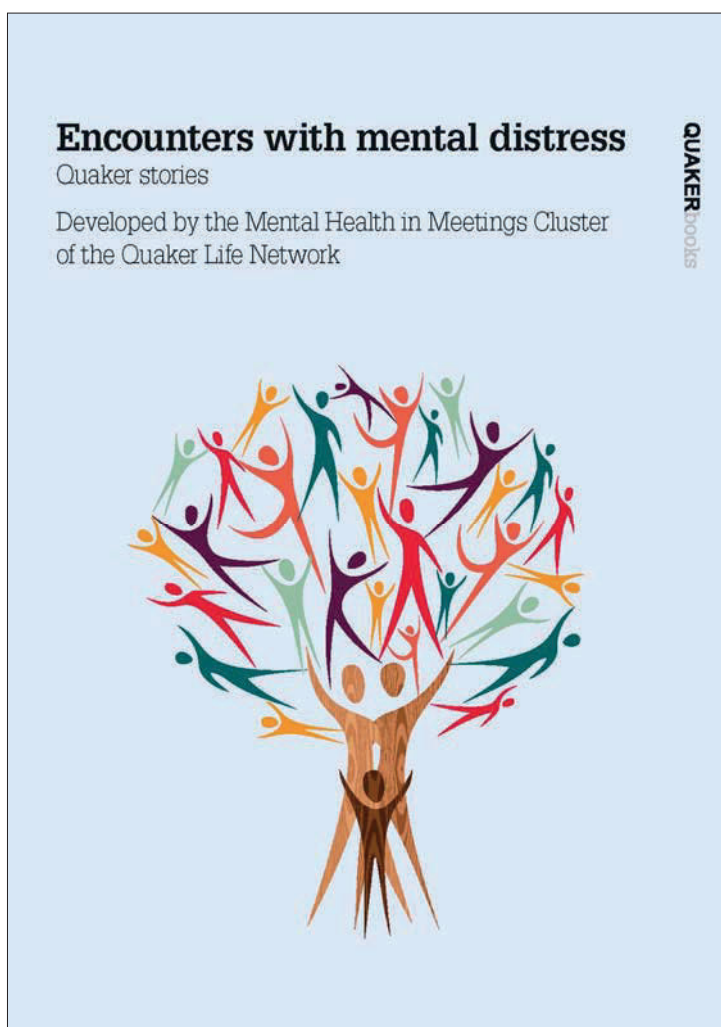
Some of the work of the Network is carried out by interest groups or clusters. Clusters can be created around any area of work where there is a need identified. Quaker Life Central Committee holds an overview of clusters' work and approves the formation of new clusters.

Contact: qlnetwork@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1007

Quaker Life Network

Encounters with mental distress: Quaker stories

In May 2013 the Mental Health in Meetings Cluster Core Group asked Friends to share stories of their experience of mental illness and distress. Having received in excess of forty different stories the group wanted to find a way to share them with Friends, so we have published a book that will be available from Yearly Meeting 2015. This article is an edited version of the introduction of the book and gives an insight into some of the work that Network members have been doing to try to help with this area of Quaker meeting life.



It was in response to Isobel Lane's article in *The Friend* on 24 May 2013 that Quakers started to share stories of their experience of mental illness. We wanted to try to understand some of the difficulties that Quakers were experiencing and thought that asking Friends to tell us would be a good place to start. It was a leading, and with the same faith that guides Quakers in many decisions, we followed it.

Stories started to come in. It took a while before the Project Group, made up of members of the Quaker Life Network Mental Health in Meetings Cluster, decided what to do with them. Initially, we were hoping to discover from Friends what their experience has been, what sort of things were happening in meetings and in what ways those meetings were coping.

The group has also had its own story in its work together producing the book. The request was for Friends to share their experiences and in addition whether they would be happy to have that story shared in its entirety or if they would prefer it to be anonymised for confidentiality reasons, for their own protection. On reading through the stories and starting work on the book, anonymity was a topic that the group kept returning to. Reflecting upon the themes that came up in many of the stories, we felt that it was not only the people who have shared their story but also others around them that may

We knew that there would be a huge diversity in what was happening in meetings. We also knew that there would be a great variation in the way that meetings responded to different situations.

need that protection as well. It took some time before we finally decided that what we thought would be best was for all of the stories to be completely anonymous; to try to keep safe any person or meeting linked to a story that we felt might be easily identifiable. Removing the identifying information from the stories was a big piece of work. It was also difficult because we felt that we wanted to be respectful to the stories and their authors. They had shared stories that contain emotion, compassion, hurt and in many cases love and friendship.

Would individual situations be recognised?

Perhaps, yes. But the area of mental health is very diverse and many similar mental health experiences, behaviours, and life situations are played out in more than one place. So a situation may be recognised but it may be one that is taking place in more than one meeting. What became very clear as we got to know the stories is that although these stories are probably played out in many different ways in other organisations, religious or not, these stories are Quaker stories.

The result is a collection of stories. As with the confidentiality issue it was not a straightforward process deciding how to present the material. What we have tried to produce is a series of powerful stories that share open and honest

accounts of a range of issues related to mental illness and distress, that are present in Quaker meetings. A concern of the group was that by carefully editing the text we might lose some of the spiritual and emotional impact that comes from the very personal nature of many of the stories, yet the power of those stories remains. It felt important not to direct the reader by interpreting the stories for them and so we have tried to put the stories together simply in a way that they read well together and support one another. The book is intended to be accessible to the reader, whether Quaker or not.

We are immensely grateful to all those who have sent in their stories and to everyone that has shared a story informally. We hope that reading this book will be helpful to everyone in meetings and that it helps to allow greater communication, mutual understanding and compassionate care. If it does this, then it has fulfilled its purpose.

A copy of *Encounters with mental distress:*

Quaker stories will be sent to each local meeting. It will also be available to buy from the Quaker Centre Bookshop at Friends House or online at www.quaker.org.uk/shop.



Oliver Waterhouse
Network Development Officer



Richard Summers
General Secretary of Quaker Life



Ruth Charles
Children & Young People's Officer



Tabitha Driver
Librarian



Thais De Oliveria
Quaker Life Support Officer

Quaker Life staff and work

Quaker Life's purpose is to strengthen and sustain the fabric of Quaker life throughout the yearly meeting, a remit which covers faith and practice: both spiritual nurture and the practical tasks required for the running of our Quaker meetings. This work is currently focused in six main areas and Quaker Life staff work in four teams.



Oliver Waterhouse
Network Development Officer

Quaker Centre Bookshop

As well as carrying a comprehensive range of posters, leaflets and information about Quakers, the Quaker Centre Bookshop stocks a wide range of books on Quakerism, Christianity, world religions, peace, sustainability and other related topics including a sizeable children's section. Bookshop staff join with the Ministry & Outreach Team.

Contact: QuakerCentre@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1030



Nounou Vongphit
Bookseller

Library of the Religious Society of Friends

The Library is one of the largest collections in the world relating to Quakers and their activities. It is an inspiring resource for understanding Quaker work as well as Quaker history, faith, thought and practice. Founded in 1673 the Library's collections include books, periodicals, manuscripts and pictures, as well as the archives of the central organisation of Quakers in Britain. Today we aim to collect and preserve Quakers' historic and continuing recorded heritage, increase access to information about the Society of Friends and encourage study in Quaker and related activities.

Contact: library@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1035



Michael Booth
Support for Meetings Officer



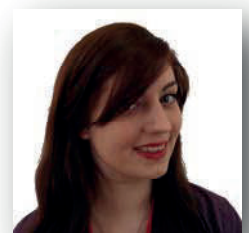
Melissa Atkinson
Visual Resources Officer



Marleen Schepers
Quaker Prison Chaplains Officer



Lisa McQuillan
Records Manager



Lily Moss-Norbury
Bookshop Manager



Wendy Tennant
Outreach & Bookshop Assistant



Alistair Fuller
Head of Outreach Development



Andrew O'Hanlon
Outreach Development Officer



Cat Waitbaka
Youth Participation Officer

Children & Young People's Work Team

Our vision is that all young people and children connected to Quakers are a valued part of vibrant Quaker communities where spiritual development is paramount. We work to achieve this by offering resources to local meetings to help their engagement with children and young people; by providing events to enable children and young people to come together in a Quaker setting; by supporting those working with children and young people; and by making available training opportunities for meetings, individuals or groups to consider their work with children and young people, to develop fresh ideas and to explore new approaches.

Contact: cypadmin@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1014



Chris Nickolay
Children's Officer



David Blake
Head of Library & Archives

Ministry & Outreach Team

Ministry & Outreach Team staff offer guidance, support and resources to meetings to encourage them in their life together as Quaker communities. We help meetings to find ways of being welcoming and more visible in their local communities and to develop and express their sense of Quaker identity. This includes supporting office-holders, providing advice to chaplains and offering guidance about marriage, safeguarding and other legal requirements. Staff and Quaker Life Network members work to help deepen and strengthen the life of meetings.

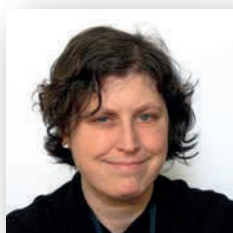
Contact Quaker Life: qladmin@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1143



David Irwin
Project Cataloguer



Libby Adams
Archivist



Jennifer Milligan
Senior Library Assistant



Jane Kirby
Project Archivist



Howard Nurden
CYP Head of staff team

Developing the new Network image

The Network in stitches

In 2014 the Quaker Life Network sought to develop a new image. This project was offered to Network members with a small amount of guidance and ideas as to how a new image might be developed. Jean Lyon of Lancashire Central & North AM responded to the request and tells of her experience in carrying out this task.

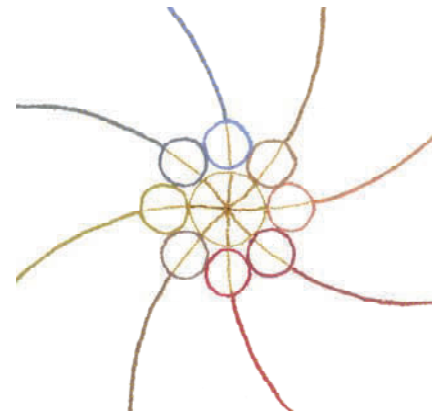
Several months after the Quaker Life Network profile picture was changed on Facebook I am still amazed to see something which I created. It is also fascinating to see it against a backdrop of Pendle Hill, where George Fox had his vision "in what places great people were to be gathered". Pendle Hill is included in the 1652 pilgrimages coordinated by Quaker Life from Swarthmoor Hall. Pendle Hill is in Lancashire where I live.

My adventure in creating the image commenced in June 2014 when I tentatively responded to a request in a Quaker Life e-newsletter. The adventure was to be a pilgrimage in stitches.

The design will have a different impact on each individual. My hope is that each experience opens to a greater depth of life and being. I noted one comment on the Quaker Life Facebook page from one 'liker' that the design speaks of diversity and connectedness.

What did my pilgrimage mean to me and how does the image impact on me now?

The initial steps of my pilgrimage were taken with felt tip pen to work a design inspired by an image found online of intertwined threads sent to me by Oliver Waterhouse, Quaker Life Network Development Officer. At the heart of my design was gold to represent the Light of Quaker Life, and for me it was necessary that the gold was worked throughout. Two other



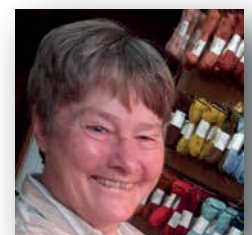
imperatives were to work eight colours into the design which are used in Quaker publications and to have a sense of movement in the design to represent the fact that Quaker work is with issues of the present day.

The next steps took me to the Quaker Tapestry to select the colours of wool to use in the embroidery. I am thankful to Bridget Guest for her help in this task. It was by referencing the pantone colour chart we got as good a match as we could. I had never heard of pantone colours before.

Then I explored gold work and after talking with several friends I risked using beads in the centre. This was a vulnerable moment as I had never worked with beads before and certainly was not experienced in using gold thread.

I now often look at the profile image and see a flower at the centre and maybe the spokes are the tracks of the seeds taken by the birds or the bees to grow in rich fertile soil somewhere else, fed by the rain and the Light.

The final steps of this pilgrimage took me to a graphics firm in Preston who kindly scanned the embroidery in order that I could email a copy of the image to Oliver in London. Amazing technology!!



Jean Lyon
Chorley Local Meeting

Conflict Cluster training day

Quaker Life Network members work with meetings that are experiencing conflict they have not been able to resolve through their local, area or regional structures. Each year they meet for a training and networking event.

Ten members of the Quaker Life Network Conflict Cluster met at Friends House to exchange news, ideas and training resources. The cluster, which includes trained mediators, experienced elders and Friends with other relevant experience, offer meetings throughout Britain Yearly Meeting support during times of conflict. The support can be telephone discussion, visits to the meeting, workshops offering skills to be accessed when needed, the facilitation of clearness and threshing meetings and other creative ways of working with conflict. The group who met in London have worked together for some years and are becoming a cohesive group who share openly and begin to know each other in the Eternal Ways. There was some concern expressed that there have been few calls for our help in the last year. Sadly, our experience tells us that this is not because of absence of conflicts in meetings but that meetings are still reluctant to acknowledge conflict. Research shows clearly that Quakers, like all religious groups, have frequent conflicts; having a testimony to peace makes no difference. It is how we deal with it that hopefully speaks of who we are. One member of the group reported that a meeting that had asked for help to deal with a difficult situation felt almost 'named and shamed' rather than accepting that conflict is a normal part of a group dynamic.

The majority of the day was spent exploring exercises that could be used in the teaching of ways of working with conflict from very different sources. They gave us insight into ourselves, creative ways of approaching conflict and a rethinking of the words we use in these situations and how we reframe a situation as

simply and clearly as possible.

From an exercise taught at an SGI (Soka Gakkai International) Buddhist Conference at Taplow Court, we role-played different responses to confrontation and how we were personally affected by the various styles of response (some Friends had brought along their inner leading man and took part in this exercise with great aplomb). An exercise in nonviolent communication led us to look with care at the element of judgement that can be contained in certain words and to the accurate description of key situations. The third offering using AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) principles invited us to use the labyrinth as a peaceful and creative way to explore conflict. All the exercises from whatever source highlighted deep listening and accurate reframing and added depth to our existing knowledge and understanding. When we added to this deeply gathered worship, it was no wonder that we felt we had experienced a useful and productive day.



Shelagh Robinson
Stoke-on-Trent Local Meeting

Quaker Life in meetings

Quaker Life's work is about strengthening and sustaining the fabric of Quaker life in our yearly meeting. This work is currently focused in six main areas: faith and practice, diversity & inclusion, children & young people, meeting house staff, outreach and pastoral care.

Friends and meetings can ask staff for support and guidance on all of the above. Quaker life will also respond to requests to work with meetings and it is our policy to use experienced Friends for this whenever we can, which helps build capacity and relationships within our yearly meeting. In these instances the Network helps by enlarging the pool of Friends we can call on and allowing Friends to indicate a willingness to offer service for a particular piece of work.

This article looks at the process a meeting might go through in making a request and at some examples of the type of request Quaker Life receives.

What might a meeting expect when it makes a request to Quaker Life for support?

We suggest that for most requests from meetings two Friends work together. This is to help share ideas in the planning stages of the process and to try to avoid having just one person's perceptions for the workshop. It also allows the visitors to support each other in the delivery of what they develop together. The time it takes from receiving a request to the delivery date can vary but we suggest that meetings allow about eight weeks to be sure that there is sufficient time available for planning.

When suitable visitors have been found for the event they are put in touch with the meeting and planning can begin. We encourage visitors to meet up with and have some planning time with a small group for the meeting that has

made the request. It helps for visitors to know at least one face that they will encounter on the day of the event, and also creates an opportunity for a few of the Friends from the meeting to build up some trust with the people that are going to work with them. There are times when visitors will work with a meeting on an issue that is creating emotional or spiritual tension. A meeting in advance can begin to open up a safe space for local Friends and visitors to work in. It allows an opportunity to explore ways for visitors to acknowledge issues that they know might arise and put them to one side so that the focus can be the piece of work that is being requested.

Planning for a meeting event is largely done between the visitors and the representatives from the meeting. Sometimes a Quaker Life staff member might act as a link to the request and offer some support as needed. This is normally done upon the request of the meeting or the visitors and can be a helpful way to make sure that things don't get missed or to avoid work that is unnecessary, an example of which would be the creation of documents that Quaker Life holds basic templates of.

Resources are available online and in paper format. Most of these are free to download and Quaker Life sends them to meetings for free. All resources are available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop and can be ordered by:

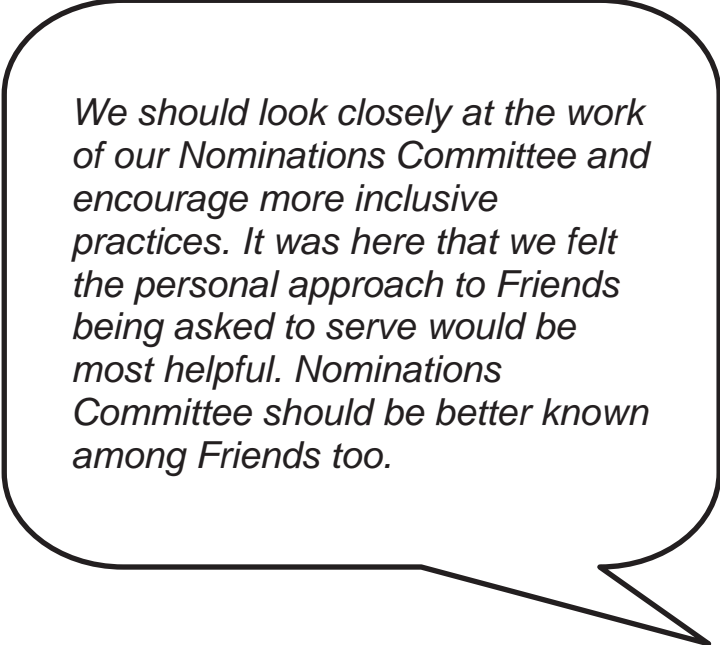
- calling **020 7663 1030** or
- emailing **QuakerCentre@quaker.org.uk**

Find the resources online at the link below.

www.quaker.org.uk/resources-eldership-and-oversight

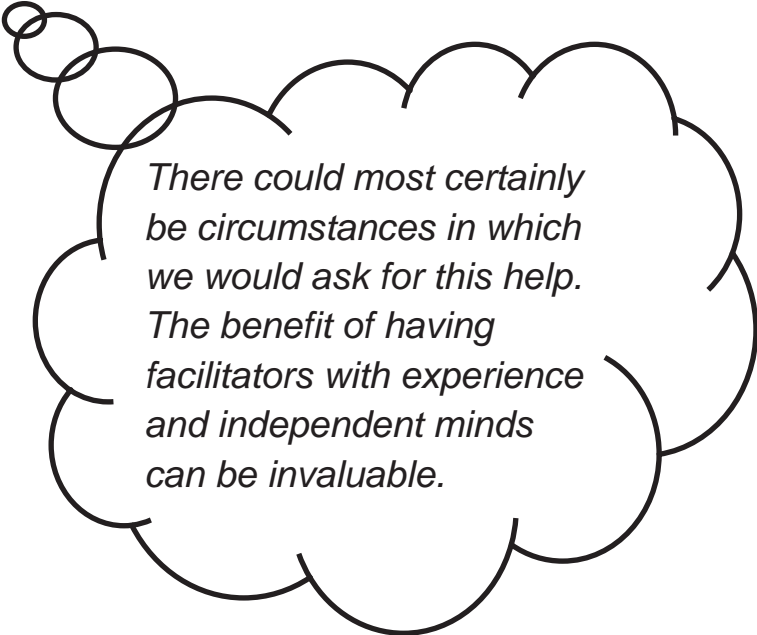
Meeting visits in 2014–15

In the past year Quaker Life Network members have offered to work with meetings all across Britain. We suggest that meetings evaluate the events in some way and it is helpful if meetings choose to share their feedback with us. Here is a selection of the comments that have been shared with us over the past year.



We should look closely at the work of our Nominations Committee and encourage more inclusive practices. It was here that we felt the personal approach to Friends being asked to serve would be most helpful. Nominations Committee should be better known among Friends too.

Area meeting asked for a visit to explore conflict. We found that later that day during area meeting we were able to put into practice some of what had been discussed and done during the morning session.



There could most certainly be circumstances in which we would ask for this help. The benefit of having facilitators with experience and independent minds can be invaluable.

We were offered a process for change and it's very simple:

List the positives and the negatives and then change one thing at a time. Change the easiest thing and then re-evaluate.

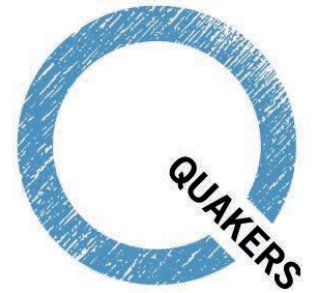
This day gave us the chance to do that. We have identified three fairly easy things after which we can share more time together to see what we need to do next. This day has not given all the answers but it has provoked serious thought and given us a sense of direction.

Specifically we identified the lack of spiritual nourishment; an overwhelming need for more contact with each other – simply time spent together.

A lot has happened since the Special Area Meeting and much of it has been caused or affected by that meeting. Amongst the things that have happened so far, two of our members have been to find out more about our buildings, adjacent area meetings have been consulted to see whether they have similar problems to us, and some new volunteers for trusteeship and the Clerking Team are now under consideration.

Being Friends Together

Being Friends Together is a learning project from Woodbrooke and Quaker Life which is all about supporting Quaker meetings in their ongoing development as living communities of faithful people.



Images: © Mike Pinches 2012 and © Jane Hobson 2013

It is an easy-to-use online resource, packed with activities and ideas from previous Quaker learning projects, some newly written and recorded material and suggestions for useful websites, courses and activities that meetings can engage with. As well as helping meetings to grow as communities, we hope that Being Friends Together will help them to develop spiritually, deepen their sense of Quaker identity and live out their Quaker testimony in their lives and localities.

Being Friends Together encourages meetings to engage with a simple and very helpful process to help them review where they are as Quaker communities. It will help meetings begin to identify where they might like to focus their energy and attention when planning their learning. Some meetings engage with this themselves using a simple do-it-yourself version of the process. However, meetings can request a visit from two experienced Friends who will visit a meeting to help them discern

what might be the best way in to using the resource.

A number of Network members have taken part in the training for this and are already working with meetings to support and encourage them in exploring and making the best use of the rich resources contained in Being Friends Together.

To find out more, explore Being Friends Together online at the link at the bottom of the page. Some resources are available to look at free of charge, including the featured activity, but to get access to the full range of Being Friends Together resources, meetings (or individuals) will need to take out a subscription at a cost of £35 per year. Just follow the prompts on the website to subscribe. You can also fill in the online form to ask about a visit from Being Friends Together facilitators. Or you can email together@quaker.org.uk.

<http://together.woodbrooke.org.uk>

Contact

Quaker Life Network:

Oliver Waterhouse, qlnetwork@quaker.org.uk, 020 7663 1007

Website:

www.quaker.org.uk/qlnetwork

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/QuakerLifeNetwork

