

Strengthening peace in the United Kingdom

Peace Child International

Of all the organisations benefiting from a Quaker peaceworker this year, Peace Child International can probably claim the most unusual origin: it started not as a campaign, but as a musical, first performed at the Royal Albert Hall in 1981.

With two Nobel peace prize laureates among the audience, that performance sparked off Peace Child's journey around the globe. In 1982 the show premiered in Washington DC, and the score and lyrics were made available so that young people anywhere could reinterpret the play to reflect their own concerns and ideas about peace.

Over the next six years there were more than four hundred performances of the show. In the US, the Peace Child musical became the vehicle for young people to make their voices heard in calling for an end to the Cold War: Peace Child brought the first Soviet children to America in 1986, beginning a series of annual youth exchanges between the US and USSR.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the musical was reimagined by young people in countries in conflict around the world. It was performed in Cyprus and the countries of Central America; in India; in Armenia and Azerbaijan; in Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, and in Israel–Palestine, which now has its own Peace Child offices working to promote peace

education among children on both sides of the conflict there.

In 1992, in response to a friendly challenge from a UN diplomat, Peace Child produced a book about young people and the environment – the Children's State of the Planet Handbook. The Peace Child movement began to look at the environment, sustainable development and human rights. It put green issues at the heart of its work to find new and creative ways for children and young people to speak out about their visions for a peaceful future.

“Peace Child International empowers young people to be the change they want to see in the world.”

Peace Child website

Today, Peace Child is committed to empowering young people to be heard in the peace movement. At its biennial World Youth Congress – held since 1999 – young people from around the world come together to promote



The Peace Child USSR tour, 1986

the role that they can play in the field of sustainable development and the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. One of Peace Child International's aims is to get 0.7% of world development aid spent on initiatives led by under-25s – a modest goal, considering that 51% of the world's population falls into that age group. Meanwhile, the “Be the Change” campaign encourages and equips young people to start their own development projects, from waste management in Senegal, to the creation of an “eco-library” in Georgia; from reversing deforestation by planting mango trees in Ghana, to the construction of drinking water pipes in Tajikistan; from the conversion of old railway carriages for use as a community cinema in Argentina, to designing and distributing free, sustainable “eco-bags” to shoppers in Poland.

Peace Child International has come a long way since that first evening performance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1981, and today it continues its work with the passion and commitment of the young to achieving a peaceful and sustainable future.

Find out more about Quaker peaceworkers – visit
www.quaker.org.uk/appeal

