**Report to Quaker Life Central Committee from Quaker Life Representative Council Planning Group**

**January 2024**

As it states in Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P) Quaker Life Representative Council (QLRC) is maintained by Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC) to provide Friends with opportunities to ‘share both spiritual and practical experience of living their Quaker lives’ and to be a ‘…channel of communication for education, inspiration and consultation.’

*(QF&P, 5th Edition, 1995-2004, Chapter 8, The centrally managed work of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 8.09)*

I have been the convenor of the QLRC Planning group since October 2022. In that time, we have planned and delivered two quite different Rep Council experiences. This year we had a new planning group and throughout the time have had just one convenor. A member of the planning group was also released from service meaning we were down to just four people. The time taken to organise and plan meetings leading up to events is time consuming and having such a small group also has an impact at the events, especially in October when we were running an in-person event and the input needed from the small number of us left on the planning group was at times quite overwhelming. People as a resource are essential to ensure that the planning group can work effectively and so we are looking forward to some new people joining us along with a co-convenor, as soon as possible.

On March 24th – 26th 2023 we were still online and approx. 57 Friends gathered via Zoom from Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime. The planning group had carefully considered the timing of the sessions and acknowledged that being on Zoom can be tiring, we encouraged Reps to look after themselves and do what felt right for them. This meant that several Friends did not attend all the sessions, but we were still able to create a feeling of community through the conversations had in home groups. We decided to have time away from screens on Saturday afternoon and not to have a session on Saturday evening.

Our theme for the weekend was ‘Spiritual Nurture: Filling your Bucket’. This theme grew from a keen sense in the planning group that many Friends are trying to ‘pour from an empty bucket’. We felt it would be useful and timely for Friends to have an opportunity to come together as a community and find the space we need to nourish ourselves spiritually through conversations and the ideas and support of others. The focus over the weekend came very much from the experiences shared by those Friends present and was inspirational, in how we find our ways into stillness and how we are nurtured spiritually. The opportunity to meet with local development workers on Sunday morning was something that friends found useful.

Coming together at Milton Hill House in October 13th – 15th 2023 was very exciting, to be able to meet Friends face to face after having such a long time delivering QLRC via Zoom. It meant we were able to expect those unplanned conversations that we have when we meet which can be so insightful, it’s often chats over mealtimes or coffee breaks that can be informative and inspirational. The ideas that other Friends are implementing in their Quaker communities inform us and give us ideas of things we can be doing in our own communities. It was great to hear the buzz of ‘chat’ throughout the weekend; at mealtimes, on walks and sitting together in the Autumn sunshine.

Our theme for Octobers QLRC was ‘Our life is love: Finding nurture in our Spiritual communities’ The idea was to continue from March and to give Friends opportunities to think about our specific communities. The planning group had 10.01 in our minds as we planned the weekend.

‘Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another and helping one another up with a tender hand.’

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| *(QF&P, 5th Edition, 1995-2004, Chapter 10, Belonging to a Quaker meeting, Our community, 10.01)* |

We invited Zélie Gross to speak as our main speaker on Saturday morning as her book ‘With a Tender Hand’ linked with the ideas we were thinking of and seemed to be a good choice. Zélie’s session; ‘Corks and Boulders, anchoring our Worshipping Communities’ provided friends with the opportunity to think creatively about their personal boulders and their communities’ boulders. Zélie introduced us to the idea of different aspects of our Quakerism and spirituality being like boulders - the things that anchor us. Thinking about what anchors our Eldership and Pastoral Care (the themes from ‘With a Tender Hand’) Who We Are – ‘Our Fatih in the Future’, Our Values, Our Witness and Our Spiritual Practice. This provided a catalyst for further thinking and conversations in home groups and allowed Friends to be reminded about the importance of these things that anchor us.

We were grateful for the support from Judith Baker, who, as a local friend, was able to invite Friends from Abingdon Local Meeting on our behalf, to join us for Worship on Sunday morning. Judith was also able to put us in touch with a local friend who very kindly researched and planned a walk for our free time session on Saturday afternoon. This Friend, Liz Matthews was unfortunately unable to join us on the day, but we were lucky to have her husband, Guy who did a wonderful job guiding several Friends on an interesting and informative local walk. We thank Liz and Guy for their time and support.

As a local Friend it was great to welcome Tim Gee to Milton Hill House on Saturday afternoon. He was able to share his experiences of the wider Quaker community and the Worldwide Family of Friends. We sang together and talked about how we could use George Fox 400 celebrations as an opportunity for renewal in Britain.

Unfortunately, the number of people attending QLRC in October was low and in terms of venue and staff costs it is not viable to hold events like this twice a year. The hybrid nature of the event was difficult due to the technical issues we had, and friends online struggled to hear well, although in their feedback online Friends did say they understood how we were trying to make it a positive experience for them and that they appreciated how they were made to feel welcome.

We were lucky to have some Local Development Workers (LDWs) with us at Milton Hill House in October and the session on Sunday morning, run by Wendy and Jac, was a good opportunity for Friends to learn from each other. Using the skills and expertise of LDWs to educate, inspire and discuss different ideas and ways of supporting and nurturing our spiritual communities is a way forward and means that QLRC is now not the only means for Friends to learn, be inspired and debate how we move our Quaker communities into the future.

On behalf of the planning group Sophie Smith presented a paper to QLCC in November and a minute has been written supporting a proposal to hold QLRC as 3 or 4 one day events across the country and a hybrid residential event every second or third year. So, the next residential could possibly happen in October 2025 or 2026. When looking for a venue to hold a hybrid QLRC we must ensure that it is accessible via public transport and the technology needed to hold a hybrid event is adequate with on site support.

I have been incredibly grateful for the productiveness of the planning group, as well as the focused support given by Sophie Smith the Quaker Life staff member, which I greatly appreciate.

Jen Neal