

Quaker Youth Work FAQs

Background

The initial pre-pilot research project (2016) showed that there was a need to have someone locally who can take ownership, responsibility and be a driving force for Quaker youth work, working with local Quaker communities.

The evaluation report of the project (2018-2021) showed that “having paid youth development workers was identified as a great benefit” as this gave Quaker communities support with administrative, programme planning, training, legal aspects and models of good practice, as well as excellent professional direct youth work provision.

Both adults and young Quakers welcomed the increased opportunities locally for worship, gathering in community, intergenerational work and having young people’s voices heard. This directly relates to the vision as explained in ‘Our faith in the future’ and is integral to the principles and values of the Integrated Strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities.



Purpose

To have a paid youth worker who will work with local/area/regional Quaker communities so that young Quakers aged 11 to 18 have access to Quaker youth “provision” in their locality. The intention is that this youth worker will build resilience and make a difference in the ability and capacity of Quaker communities to strengthen the young Quaker community, make links with young people within the locality and develop peer / intergenerational Quaker communities.

Project Framework, going forwards

1. The Quaker youth work project encourages the employment of youth workers to support Quaker communities.
2. Meetings or groups of meetings identify funding for this work.
3. The youth workers to be employed centrally to reduce the administrative burden on regions
4. The youth workers would be managed centrally so consistency and a joined up approach is maintained
5. Quaker Life Team Leader Youth, Children, Families manages this project and workers.
6. 10% of regional youth workers time to be given to “national” projects, to support YM wide CYP work and develop transitions between regions and age groups, sharing good practice among youth workers (including national support and training opportunities and development of resources) and for cost recovery of HR/management etc. but would also benefit workers through networking etc.
7. Youth work posts must each be minimum 50% of working week, for an expected minimum of least two years.
8. Application for a post to include a budget set out with anticipated costs and evidence of income to meet this including details of office space if applicable, IT and activities
9. Support must be identified within local context. Each AM will need to provide one person (e.g. CYP work advocate) to collectively meet quarterly with youth worker and team leader to provide a local context, identify desired work priorities and support reporting to AM's and trustees. One or two of this group should also be in regular and frequent local contact with the youth worker. This group would provide local context and identify desired work priorities and be involved in the reporting tot to AM's and trustees.
10. Each local youth worker would provide one written report that would be circulated to trustees of each AM, at least annually.
11. There would be an agreement in place though a Memorandum of Understanding between BYM and AM's involved.
12. Project areas to report back to BYM yearly (committee with oversight of the project in its entirety) with the impact of the work evaluated through the relevant structures of Support for Quaker Communities (SfQC).

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Quakers reading the NCVO summary and main reports of the Developing Quaker Youth Work Pilot Project asked some interesting and useful questions, these have been summarised, explored and answered here by staff managing the project.

Glossary

For ease of reading, the words **the Quaker community** commonly refers to the combination of meetings undertaking the project. This could be one local meeting, an area meeting or most probably, a group of area meetings.

Young person, in this context, means someone aged 11-18. The youth worker might well do work that aids transition from children's work (0-11) or work that aids transition to young adult work 18+.

1. What aspects were the most successful? What were you most proud of in the project?

The Quaker Life Central Committee reference group, BYM staff and stakeholders involved in the project, were really pleased with the overall success of the youth workers in maintaining the connection and involvement of young people to Quakerism and to their Quaker community during a time of great change and personal growth and discovery, when disconnection from Quakerism is common. Intergenerational connections that were developed were a source of great satisfaction for all ages, whether for learning, worship or social times.

The professionalism of Quaker youth workers enabled better inclusion for those with additional needs. This awareness and planning also meant that activities were then better planned and delivered more effectively for all whatever their characteristics.

The responsiveness and support of Quaker youth workers to the needs of young people during the pandemic was impressive, they responded quickly and over a sustained period of time offering support, connection and sense of community, structure and purpose.

Giving young people opportunities for more participation in different Quaker contexts such as national BYM events, Woodbrooke courses and opportunities to facilitate and lead within local and area meetings and at regional, national and international events.

2. What were the expectations for the programme and what could we expect?

- a) **Realistic Expectations:** In the pilot project, Quakers in meetings had different expectations from local and central staff, QLCC and those directly connected to the project though the local support group. Staff and QLCC worked on the understanding that this was an experimental project and expectations here were about finding out what was possible. It is important to both have high expectations of what a Quaker youth worker can achieve but also remember that to deliver safe, effective events,

develop all age community or to embed youth participation within a meeting takes time, commitment, professional understanding from both the youth worker and from the Quaker community also. For example, a professionally run youth group meeting of two hours probably takes at least four hours additionally to arrange, recruit volunteers, plan and resource programme, promote, reply to enquiries and then to do follow up work with individuals or families as needed.

- b) **Involvement of Meetings:** A Quaker youth worker needs the involvement of the local and regional communities of Quakers to provide context, make connections and have a commitment to change. This applies both within the work they, as meetings, do with young people and within their meeting structures that then enable young people to participate and integrate. A meeting would need to commit energy alongside the youth work to develop structures and process that allow for an all-age loving community.
- c) **Parental Expectations:** In both pilot project areas, staff and support groups had to work through differing expectations from parents, young people and other stakeholders. Any new projects could expect that there will be differing expectations and that these expectations will need to be explored and that ultimately activities will be youth-led. Clear communication will be vital, particularly so that youth workers can meet inclusion and diversity and safeguarding needs.
- d) **Clarification of expectations:** The Quaker community needs to be clear about the desired impact of the work, the expectations of the activities and also be realistic about the capacity of the worker and community.

3. How far is the work youth-led?

The youth work comes from a place of always being open to young people to bring suggestions, to have a place where they can voice ideas and lead where they wish. Young people can choose to facilitate with or without support as they wish. Youth workers also offer a space in which young people are under no obligation to have responsibilities for running things if they don't wish to.

Youth workers have skills in unpicking, understanding, responding to and advocating for young people's concerns, interests and needs.

Working towards intergenerational involvement means overcoming a pattern and culture of exclusion of young people. Designing for the needs of young people means events are likely to be dynamic and inclusive for all.

Young people might not be explicit in what they want but youth workers will use their experience and skills to plan, and what young people actually do and do not participate in needs to be taken into account when planning.

4. If we have a youth worker, does that mean we don't need to work with our teenagers?

If meetings leave their work with young people solely to a Quaker youth worker, the young people may have a good time, develop strong peer support but this will not progress towards an integrated all-age community. Employing a youth worker provides professional expertise to work with young people directly and to help the meeting develop ways in which its structures are more suitable for participation and inclusion of all ages. Building the relationships between young people and the others in the meeting benefits all, but does require adults to also be with young people.

5. Where is a paid youth worker needed to provide direct work with young people? Where can they walk alongside other Quakers?

- a. Providing inclusive opportunities for young people to explore Quakerism and connect with each other and the wider Quaker community requires particular expertise and plenty of time. Some meetings are fortunate to have skilled Friends who can facilitate and resource this. Other meetings may feel less able or well-resourced in this way...
- b. Youth work is a professional skill and a youth worker is trained and experienced in establishing and maintaining relationships with young people and community groups, including:
 - i. understanding how young people develop during adolescence and how to offer appropriate support
 - ii. developing trusted relationships and voluntary engagement of young people
 - iii. understanding how to establish boundaries, challenging behaviour and de-escalate conflict
 - iv. providing a safe environment for young people including the importance of safeguarding
- c. Direct provision of youth work using these skills and knowledge can enable the distinct process that supports a young person's personal, social, educational and spiritual development
- d. Working with other Quakers in the community the youth worker can model some of these skills and build confidence in friends being alongside young people. Youth workers can also build confidence in friends around safeguarding and reporting, which the evaluation found to be key areas of concern and new learning for adults. Youth workers can raise awareness of issues around working with young people and highlight issues of relevance for young people. Working with friends in the community, the youth worker can also help build intergenerational community.

6. Why do we need volunteers when we have youth workers?

Youth workers do not work in isolation. Safeguarding procedures in themselves mean that there should always be two adults working with young people. Volunteers from Quaker community are therefore essential to support the work of the youth worker. It also allows for skills to be shared between the youth worker and volunteer. Volunteers might have a particular interest or expertise that can be used as the "hook" to interest young people and begin exploration into an issue or value. Working with volunteers also aids the connection between the generations in the community and intergenerational relationships can be developed.

The experience in the pilot project was that the youth development worker gained most of the volunteers through local support contacts, finding that people often did not respond to general requests for support, but would respond to 'a specific ask to a specific person.

Modelling, training and working alongside youth work volunteers is important to sustained expansion and integration of work with young people into Quaker communities.

7. Why did youth workers need to spend so much time working with adults?

Much of the work by a Quaker youth worker is not very visible, the relationship building with different role holders, committees groups and individuals, both adult and young, take significant time to develop.

It takes time to develop and design projects and develop ways of working that will encourage the participation of young people in Quaker communities. It takes time for adult friends to understand that their structures and processes need to adapt to be more young person-inclusive and how to make those adaptations. These changes will help to ensure a longer-term integration and participation of young people in the meetings.

The culture shift that enables the meeting to be more open for youth participation and integration also enables the community to continue to be more inclusive to other less-included groups too. This work might, for example, be directive in planning for business meetings that are all-age or in designing learning opportunities suitable for different ages or thinking about inclusive communication channels. Youth workers could also model how work can be for different generations together and also, support young people to participate in “Adult” structures or train adults in skills needed to work with young people.

8. Why do youth workers work with this age group? How can we best work with/support young people on the age borders?

Research in many faith groups, including in the Religious Society of Friends, shows that the times that young people disassociate from their faith coincide with other stages of development and schooling changes. These are 11+ 13+ and 18+. Working with young people specifically at these times gives them a peer group and a space in which they can develop their own relationship to Quakerism and also allows them to develop intergenerational connections that embed them within the Quaker community. Young people may still benefit from the youth work as they transition to young adults and may themselves benefit the youth work by contributing as near peer facilitators. Youth workers can aid transition from children’s meetings and into adulthood at each end of this period, alongside meetings’ own pastoral care systems. Youth workers would be expected to work with other staff and friends with the Quaker Life transition strategy to support this work.

9. Governance: Who owns, manages and decides on the nature of this work?

As the work is held by Quaker Life, the work needs to be in line with the BYM trustees’ strategic priorities, the Quaker Life and Woodbrooke Integrated Strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities and in line with “Our faith in the future”. The governance of the work needs to be held by the Quaker community, deciding the impact that they wish to see and then the work needs to be managed by the youth workers and their managers as professionals to achieve those results.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting from the youth worker to Quaker community and their trustees would be necessary. A model process could be that Friends in the Quaker community decide on the impact they would like to see and then a support group of local friends including young people, would give local context to the youth

worker, with more intensive and direct support from an individual acting as a key local support contact. Together the local support contact, youth worker and professional manager could develop a work plan, carry out and evaluate work which would be reported back to local Friends and reviewed against the agreed intended impact. Each stage of the process should be designed to involve young people. Bearing in mind a recognition that most young people do not want to be involved in a committee, it is suggested that young people's involvement will need to be more natural and fluid, rather than through a nomination process; for example, young people might be welcome to drop in to local support group meetings on a one-off basis.

10. Who offers professional management and support to youth workers?

The management of the work and the workers is the responsibility of the Quaker Life Team Leader, Children, Young People, Young Adults and Families. Further details and discussion can be arranged with our Youth, Children & Families team at cypadmin@quaker.org.uk or by calling 0207 663 1160.

11. Why do regional work at all? Why not continue doing all youth work online so anyone can join?

If we only continued youth work online, there would be no local community built up, either of young people able to connect in a locality, or of all-age community. All Friends then miss out by not being part of an intergenerational local community. Online youth work and online community-building work can add another dimension to regional work done face to face.

12. How could we engage more young people who aren't Quakers?

The pilot youth project engaged with young people who aren't Quakers in two ways: by proactively offering community activities or having a presence at community events, and by welcoming and supporting young people who were new to Quakerism to regular youth sessions. This outreach work was carried out with the ambition of helping Quaker values to be active in the world and offering something to young people that was distinctively Quaker and not already happening in the wider community.

Visit www.quaker.org.uk/cyp for more information on our youth development work. You can contact our Youth, Children & Families team at cypadmin@quaker.org.uk or by calling 0207 663 1160.