

East Cheshire Area Meeting
1.45pm, Sunday 10th November, 2019, at Cheadle Hulme Meeting House

Minute 19.11.01: Friends present

All our Meetings are represented.

35 Friends are present.

The Trustee present is Geoffrey Clifton.

The Accompanying Elder is Peter Eccles.

Minute 19.11.02: Reading

The poem Cowards by Brian McClintock, from Worn with Pride, has been read in opening worship.

Minute 19.11.03: Caring for Friends

We have heard the names of Friends who are in our thoughts. The Assistant Clerk, with the help of Anne Sumner, will write to them on our behalf.

We accept Liz Morris's request to be released from this service. We thank her for the work she has done over the years.

Minute 19.11.04: Death of Peter Todhunter

We have received this Minute from Frandley Meeting:

“We record with sadness the death of our Friend Peter Todhunter on 20th September 2019, aged 72 years. Patrick Jones will prepare a record of Peter's life for a future Business Meeting.”

We echo this sadness, in recording Peter's death, and continue to hold Hazel and family in the Light.

Minute 19.11.05: Application for Membership: Giles Orton, Frandley

In our September meeting we received an application for Membership from Giles Orton of Frandley Meeting and asked Elders and Overseers to appoint visitors (Minute 19.09.04). However, as Frandley Friends report that they have not seen Giles to speak to since we received this application, we will defer further consideration of this until he is better known to us.

Minute 19.11.06: Application for Membership: Joe Godden, Frandley

We have received an application for membership from Joe Godden of Frandley Meeting. We ask Michael Hennessey and Jennifer Flowerdew to arrange to visit with Joe and report to our next meeting.

Minute 19.11.07: Application for Membership: Keith Braithwaite, Marple

We have received an application for Membership from Keith Braithwaite of Marple Meeting. We ask our Clerks and treasurer to agree names of Friends to visit with Keith and report to our next meeting.

Minute 19.11.08: Transfer of Membership: Trevor Bending of Marple Meeting - transfer from London West

A request for transfer of membership to East Cheshire Area Meeting from London West AM in respect of our Friend Trevor Bending has been received. Trevor now attends Marple Meeting. We are pleased to welcome Trevor, and ask our clerks to communicate this welcome to him.

19.11.09: Transfer of Membership: Barbara Harrison of Wilmslow Meeting – transfer from South Wales Area Meeting

A request for transfer of membership to East Cheshire AM from South Wales AM in respect of our Friend Barbara Harrison has been received. Barbara now attends Wilmslow Meeting. We are pleased to welcome Barbara into ECAM. We ask Denise Renshaw to welcome her. We note that this Minute was agreed by our clerks and treasurer as a BMM, and forwarded to South Wales Area Meeting in time for their meeting yesterday.

Minute 19.11.10: Internal transfer of Membership: Manda Thompson from Disley to Frandley Meeting

Our Friend Manda Thompson has requested that her membership is transferred within the Area Meeting from Disley to Frandley LM. This transfer has been made.

Minute 19.11.11: Marriage: David Keogh and Peter Cartwright - Saturday 2nd November 2019 at Stockport Meeting House.

This was the first wedding hosted by Stockport Meeting in their new Meeting House, and the first same sex wedding in the Area Meeting. It was well attended and a wonderful day. We recognise that further paperwork will need minuting in due course.

Minute 19.11.12: Nominations:

We have received the following nominations to roles in the Meeting:

Role	Period of office	Nominations
Assistant Clerk	1/1/20 - 31/12/21	Anne Sumner
Trustee - Wilmslow	1/1/20 - 31/12/22	Brenda Crothers
Trustee - Marple	1/1/20 - 31/12/22	Julia Clements
Elder – Disley	1/1/20 – 31/12/22	Jan Vulliamy

Elder – Frandley	1/1/20 – 31/12/22	Paul Harrison
Elder – Marple	1/1/20 – 31/12/22	Kathleen Russell
Elder – Disley	1/1/20 – 31/12/22	Bridget Dunbar
Overseer – Disley	1/1/20 – 31/12/22	Belinda Critchlow
Overseer – Frandley	1/1/20 – 31/12/21	Catherine de Haas
Overseer - Frandley	1/1/20 - 31/12/22	Gill Allcock
Overseer – Cheadle Hulme	1/1/20 - 31/12/22	Helen Bohme

These names being acceptable, the Friends are duly appointed.
We thank all Friends standing down from service for their work on our behalf.

We are pleased to appoint J W to attend the YP Participation Day on 7th December at Friends House, which runs in parallel with Meeting for Sufferings.

We are pleased to accept Ann Lewis' offer to attend the Trustees Conference on "Becoming and being a registered charity", on Saturday 21 March 2020, at Friends House, in her role as Trustee of the Area Meeting, and appoint her accordingly.

We ask for names of 15-18 year born 1/9/2002-31/8/2005 to be appointed as representatives to Junior Yearly Meeting (to be held in Bath as part of Yearly Meeting Gathering 1-7th August 2020) to be brought to us at our next meeting.

We ask for names of Friends to represent us at the Quaker Peace and Social Witness conference at Swanwick March 20th - 22nd 2020 to be brought to the clerks by 31/12/2019, who may appoint up to three Friends on our behalf by a Between Meetings Minute (BMM) as this needs to be decided before our next AM.

Minute 19.11.13: Simpler Meetings – meeting Chester 30th November

We have heard that Anne Sumner, Bridget Dunbar and Ann Lewis of Disley Meeting, Jacqui Moore and Gill Alcock of Frandley Meeting, Jill Maguire of Macclesfield Meeting, Tim Carlisle of Stockport Meeting and Celia Davies, Pat Baker, Jenny Flowerdew,

Elizabeth Lees and Frances Hill of Wilmslow Meeting are hoping to attend the Simpler Meetings meeting at Chester Meeting House on 30th November. We look forward to benefitting from their learning, both in Area Meeting, and in our local Meetings.

Minute 19.11.14: Asylum and Refugee Network Conference QARN Conference 27th - 29th September: Report

Sarah Worth has told us that this conference of over 60 participants was “stunningly exciting” with a heady mix of joy, alarm, rage, fear and inspiration. She reflected that it has made her even more passionate in continuing her volunteering.

Aspects of language used in this context can be quite alarming, in the way it develops sense of “otherness”, and making some people uncomfortable in our country.

We have reflected on the importance of QARN network and the very good practical work done by participants, in this horrendous environment.

We thank Sarah Worth for her passionate report and commend the written report and poem Brave Space (attached) to Friends.

We encourage Friends to consider how this may be pursued, perhaps at our July Area Meeting, and to send ideas to our clerks.

Minute 19.11.15: Intervisitation Schedule 2020

Friends' visits to other meetings in the Area Meeting are a very important support to our links as a single Area Meeting. The intervisitation schedule for next year indicates a minimum of visits required, but may be adjusted to suit both visiting and visited meetings. This was circulated with the Agenda, and is agreed and attached to these Minutes.

Minute 19.11.16: Prequel to Cowards music - Commission

We have heard an extract from a piece of choral music called ‘Cowards’, composed by Taylor Giacomini using material from the poetry anthology Worn With Pride. Taylor was paid £600 for the Cowards piece from the overall budget of the ECAM Choices Then and Now Project, themed around Conscientious Objection. Cowards has been completed and performed at Regional Gathering in 2017 and various venues since and has since been recorded in a professional studio at a cost of £80, which has been paid by Area Meeting.

By Minute 18.09.12, Area Meeting commissioned Taylor to compose a second piece, which she has now completed. This is called “What Good will come of War?”, and fits as a “prequel” to Cowards. £550 has been contributed towards the £600 agreed for this, and we ask our treasurer to pass the total £600 to Taylor for this work topping-up from Area Meeting accounts, and then a further £70 for the cost of recording when this piece is recorded.

Celia Davies and Pat Baker have told us of Taylor’s ideas for a third component, shorter, to follow Cowards, and provisionally called “What will you say?” to finish the whole choral piece. We are pleased to hear of the completion of the prequel, and keen to see the whole completed, and ready for performance. We encourage Pat, Celia and Taylor to work further to develop ideas of how this third piece of work might be funded, and taken forward in other respects, including performance. We agree to underwrite the

costs of this, including recording, up to a further £600, and hereby commission this work, welcoming individual contributions toward this.

Minute 19.11.17: Meeting for Sufferings: 4th - 6th October: Report

We thank Jacqui Moore for the written report circulated with the agenda. In particular, Jacqui has reminded us to respond to Local Government consultations on Sustainability (noting that Cheshire East has one ongoing).

She has highlighted in particular the question of “what can we as Quakers say about assisted dying that is different from the debate around us, particularly in a society which discriminates against dependency.”

Our attention is drawn to the three questions on Stewardship, as some of our number explore Simpler Meetings.

Minute 19.11.18: Regional Gathering

We have received the following Minute from Frandley Meeting:

“We thank the organisers of the Regional Gathering on the Peace Testimony, which took place on 2nd November 2019 in Liverpool Meeting house, for a very thought-provoking and powerful all -age day.”

We note that the next Regional Gathering is being planned by Andrew Backhouse and others – and will be held at Wilmslow Meeting House and the Guild on 24th October 2020.

Minute 19.11.19: Quaker Life Rep Council Report 11th – 13th October: Report

We thank Sarah Worth for the written report circulated with the agenda. Sarah has challenged us around the current narrow definition of health and illness, particularly as it relates to mental health conditions, and where support should be coming from. Our attention is drawn to the resource detailed in her account. She will be bringing further questions and angles for discussion to the Elders and Overseers meeting on Tuesday 12th November.

We remind Friends of the AM Mental Health Day at Wilmslow Meeting House on 1st February 11.00-4.00 with Bev Smith (Quaker Mental Health) and Alison Mitchell (Retreat Outreach Worker).

Minute 19.11.20: Annual Pantomime trip

Our Children and Young People’s Committee have again arranged for an opportunity for those who wish to, to go to the Pantomime at The Plaza in Stockport on Sunday 5th January, after an All Age Meeting for Worship and a festive shared lunch. The panto will be Jack and the Beanstalk. We agree to fund the tickets for all children, at £12 each.

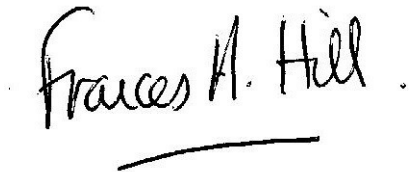
Minute 19.11.21: Annual Duties

Local Meetings are asked to report to our January meeting on the completion of their annual duties. These include the regular and right holding of Meetings for Worship, making use of the Advices and Queries and the reading of the Epistle from BYM, the holding of regular meetings for church affairs and compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Minute 19.11.22: Thanks

We thank Cheadle Hulme Friends for their hospitality today.

Signed in and on behalf of the Meeting:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frances A. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Frances Hill, Clerk

Local Meetings please note:

19.11.12

19.11.14

19.11.21

Notices

Friday 15th November 7.30pm : 2019 Transition Wilmslow Lecture: 21st Century Transport: A Vision for Cheshire Dr John Whitelegg Wilmslow Guild, 1 Bourne St, SK9 5HD

John Whitelegg is Visiting Professor of Sustainable Transport at Liverpool John Moores University and an Associate of the German transport research organisation Zentrum fuer Mobilitätskultur in Kassel in Germany. He has authored 11 books on sustainable transport and related issues. He has worked on sustainable transport projects in India, China, Australia, Germany, Sweden and Slovenia and with the European Parliament and European Commission. He is the technical author of the world's first technical standard on reducing demand for private motorised transport and published by the British Standards Institution, a member of the International Advisory Board of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate and Energy in Germany and a board member of the Californian organisation "Transportation Choices for Sustainable Communities", an invited contributor to seminars and training course on road safety at the World Health Organisation in Geneva and the founding editor of the journal "World Transport Policy and Practice"

Book via: <https://www.wilmslowguild.org/courses/-21st-century-transport-a-vision-for-cheshire-friday-15-november-2019/1123/>

Sunday 17th November, 7.30pm "War School" film (15+ rating) A different take on remembrance. Wilmslow Quaker MH., 1a Bourne Street, Wilmslow, SK9 5HD

It was meant to be "Never Again", but what do today's UK Veterans have to say?

'Why would a Veteran throw away his medals?'

'Is perpetual war really what we need for future generations?'

Everyone welcome to a **free** showing of this controversial film. This documentary is set against a backdrop of Remembrance with veterans speaking out about the rise of militarism in civilian life.

Accessible venue, light refreshments

Entry by ticket - phone Pat Baker 01625 528997 or

Eventbrite www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/film-war-school-tickets-72942792857

Kurdish People in Syria – What's Happening and Why. Saturday 23 November, 4.30pm. Central Manchester FMH, M2 5NS.

Free. with Kurdish, Quaker and Anti-War Speakers. Opportunity for networking afterwards.

For further info contact smosl@yahoo.co.uk

Elizabeth Coleman

Manchester & Warrington AQM Social Justice Group

elizcol@dialstart.net

Preparing for the general election

General elections are a key opportunity to influence future decision-makers. How can we engage with candidates to share our views and values?

Grace Da Costa, the new Public Affairs and Advocacy Manager at BYM, has written a blog and briefing on how local meetings can prepare for a general election. Read it at www.quaker.org.uk/blog and contact politics@quaker.org.uk with any questions. *Briefing attached.*

Mental Health: What is our Quaker Ministry? Saturday, 1st February, 11.00 – 4.00
Wilmslow Meeting House, 1a Bourne Street, Wilmslow, SK9 5HD

Facilitated by Alison Mitchell and Bev Smith the session aims to offer space to reflect on issues around mental health and to hear about some of the exciting things Quakers are doing.

Regional Gathering at Wilmslow 24th October, 2020

A date for your diary.

REPORTS

	Page
Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network Conference, 27th-29th September: Reflections	10 - 12
Meeting for Sufferings, 4th-6th October, Report	13 - 15
Quaker Life Representative Council 11th-13th October : Mental Health Conversations	16 - 17

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network

Reflections from the Conference: 27th - 29th September 2019

For nearly three years I've been volunteering, one day a week, at Asha - a drop-in and advice centre for asylum seekers and refugees in Stoke-on-Trent. The centre was begun some 20 years ago by former asylum seekers keen to give something back to the community that supported them as they underwent the gruelling process. So when the opportunity of attending this Conference came up, I was very glad to be able to attend.

I've written about my impressions and attempted to outline important issues under three headings.

The witness given by asylum seekers and refugees.

Valuable witness was given by several asylum seekers and refugees, which was always moving, frequently harrowing and yet also a celebration of the resilience of people to overcome immense challenges. The more harrowing aspects I won't dwell upon in writing this, because I'm sure Friends can well imagine... And there are all too many times when the difficulties individuals face are compounded by a cynical, unforgiving system that deliberately puts obstacles in their way.

Conference was treated, however, to several tremendous performances: poetry, music, song, dance, art - all given by people who had been through or who are navigating the system. These were hugely enjoyable and they lifted the spirits against a sombre background of considering the cruelty that humankind is also capable of.

The 'System'

Obviously most of the time at Conference was spent considering and discussing the 'system' which has been set up and which faces all asylum seekers and migrants as they arrive in the country.

NB The use of language, as also discussed below, can be confusing. "Migrant" applies to anyone from another country who is hoping to live in the UK.

"Asylum seeker" applies to anyone who needs to claim asylum, often because they are fleeing a hostile and dangerous situation in their home country. There is no such thing as a "bogus asylum seeker" - anyone can ask for asylum, including those who are here for economic reasons. They have no recourse to public funds and cannot look for employment.

"Refugees" are people whose claim for asylum has been - at least temporarily - granted. They may initially be given "limited leave to remain".

All were agreed that the present "hostile environment" is deliberate, very confusing and intimidating. One of the worst aspects is the use of detention

(e.g. Yarlswood), where people, often women and children, can be incarcerated indefinitely (the only country in Europe to do so).

One former asylum seeker described her experiences as being viewed by the authorities, in what seemed to an automatic, trained response, as “a monster, suspect, a criminal, a liar”. Fear amongst the present UK population is deliberately whipped up (see below, again – the use of language: “swamped, a flood” etc.) in order to perpetuate this hostility.

I could continue. At length. Like many of us, I find these attitudes extremely upsetting.

However, we did look at what we can do. We can:-

- offer support, both practical (e.g. Meeting House space, the Sanctuary Everywhere Programme)
- consider donating to the charities that provide support
- be informed, be aware
- write to our MPs and other people in the positions of power
- spread the message; for example, asylum seekers are not given local authority housing, they do not take people’s jobs, they do not carry infections etc. etc. [all examples given of things that have been said]
- be welcoming, acknowledge our joint humanity and offer kindness whenever possible; be aware of our own history!

The mesh that allows myths to thrive.

One of the workshops offered (6 in all, we were each able to do 2) looked at the language used to promote the hostility; one daily newspaper is regularly the culprit, using headlines that distort and inflame. However, a lot of language used is more subtle and we all need to be alert to the use of hype and propaganda. The public is regularly invited to feel shocked and affronted by apparent abuses of resources. For example, in one such article there was outrage that asylum seekers “can afford smart phones” ! Yes, indeed many asylum seekers I’ve met do have smart phones – how else do you deal with the online methods of ‘communication’ used by the *Home Office; keep in touch with your family; receive appointments; keep informed about the latest legal situation etc. etc. Their only other option is to access the computers at, perhaps, the library – an hour at a time...

[*The *Home Office*...? A language issue here, maybe? All were agreed that this is too *cosy* a name for an institution that generates the hostile environment.]

The use of photo-journalism (intended to shock and therefore sell papers) gives some information about what people endure in order to reach the place where they can claim asylum. But the reasons people flee their home countries is seldom heard about. It is not ever made clear that no one uproots themselves on a whim, that decision to seek asylum is never taken

lightly or flippantly. People are fleeing situations of immense danger and threat, in a way that we – in the safe West – can hardly imagine.

We have, for example via wars and alliances with certain countries, created many of the circumstances that people are fleeing from. And as climate change becomes increasingly problematic, the numbers of people fleeing climate catastrophe will also increase.

There is a tendency, present at Conference, to feel helpless and even guilty about our comfortable, privileged lives. (The word privilege arose very many times during the weekend.) However, we should not lose sight of the actions, however apparently minor, that we can all take to contribute to changes in attitudes and practical support.

On our first evening, this poem was presented. I'll let it speak for itself.

Brave Space

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing
As a safe space
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world
We amplify voices that fight
To be heard elsewhere
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know
We will not be perfect
This space will not be perfect
It will not always be what we want it to be
But...
It will be our brave space together
And...
We will work on it side by side.

Miki Scott

Sarah Worth
October 1st 2019

Report to ECAM of MfS 4-6th October 2019 held at Woodbrooke

Sustainability

This topic was a major focus for this MfS.

MfS has oversight responsibility for our BYM commitment on working to become a low carbon, sustainable community. BYM considered this at YM in May and the 2019 Swarthmore Lecture is now available in book form and as a video <http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/learn/about/swathmore-lecture>. MfS will also report annually to BYM on progress.

We were asked to bring news of what was happening in our AMs, so I took copies of the minute from our AM MfL and other local initiatives that I was aware of to share in our small groupwork.

In our main session we had reports of examples and reflected on 5 strands

Eldership – Swathmore Lecture

Oversight – Meeting of Friends in Wales – the disjunction between our economic systems and the needs of the Planet.

Living Faithfully – Cotteridge Friends – the decisions we make in our daily lives.

Right Ordering – Quaker Stewardship Committee – how we manage our property (ie. use of 'Good Energy' by Meeting Houses has saved 760 tonnes of carbon).

Witness – QPSW Central Committee – being at the heart of non-violent movements for change, for example hosting Greta Thunberg, anti-fracking, climate coalition Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, convening a faith group to meet with the Minister for Energy and then civil servants, Anya Nanning Ramamurthy (age16) representing Quakers in Britain, speaking alongside other faith leaders.

Friends are preparing carefully to witness at the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow on 17th November 2020 – an opportunity to influence 'the World'

Court and Prison Register

MfS reviewed the purpose and practice of recording names on the Register.

The Recording Clerk introduced a paper on the historical origins and our current practice. MfS confirmed that the Register would continue to record the names of Friends and Attenders who appeared before the Courts for matters where the State was interfering with their ability to practice and witness their faith 'under concern'. (Advices and Queries 35)

Acting 'under concern' implies discernment. The responsibility for establishing Friends are 'acting under concern', and that they consent to this to be recorded, normally lies with their AM. (QF&P Ch.13). Before forwarding details to MfS AMs need to be sure of the facts and that the Friend concerned consents to the information being recorded and made public.

Assisted Dying

Two AM Minutes from North London and Staffordshire asked MfS whether Friends should support a change in the law. (An Attender in North West London AM, Chairs a campaigning group to change the law, and a member of MfS from Staffordshire's disabled daughter decided to end her life at Dignitas in Switzerland).

The present legal position is that 'active euthanasia' or 'assisted suicide/dying is against the law in the UK. However, 'passive euthanasia' where death will be caused by withholding or withdrawing life-preserving treatment is lawful and people can make 'advanced statements' about what life-preserving treatment they might wish to have withdrawn or withheld.

As this was a subject I was involved in considering in detail on behalf of my profession (Social Work) a few years ago, I attended the small group session on this issue – a very deep and supportive experience.

MfS were aware that Friends were exploring this issue and dying and death more generally. There were differing and deeply held views expressed.

AMs are encouraged to explore the issues further in a loving and respectful way, without the expectation of unity. The Minute has been sent to Quaker Life Central Committee. We were recommended a booklet produced by Leeds AM, but other materials so far listed to support this exploration are predominantly pro-change and need to be balanced with further references.

The Minute asks 'what can we, as Quakers, say about this that is different from the debate in the world around us?' We were asked to be aware of our privilege in a society which discriminates against 'dependency'.

Trustees

BYM and Woodbrooke Trustees have been meeting and working together on a Memorandum of Understanding. Both organisations are planning decentralisation of services to support Meetings and Nations and Regions in learning and organisation.

BYM Trustees are contributing to the legal costs of a coalition of Charities seeking a Court declaration of the law on charity trustees to enable them to take account of the impact of their investments on climate change.

Stewardship

We were reminded that the essence of stewardship is making sure our assets – property, cash and people – are doing 'God's work'. Whilst AM Trustees have particular responsibilities for this, AMs should set their strategic directions.

AMs are asked to reflect on 3 questions

1 How do we help our meetings to keep sight of the spiritual basis of our stewardship?

2 How do we manage the dual responsibilities of AM in session and AM trustees, in setting strategic direction of our area meetings?

3 How much diversity in the organisation of AMs can BYM support?

Safeguarding

BYM is being reviewed by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, along with many other faith bodies, with the aim of making children safer within faith bodies. There is a public hearing next March and recommendations are likely to be published at the end of next year.

Speaking Out and Advocacy

This is always an interesting and encouraging topic – reports on how we, as Quakers, are trying to influence our wider society, using different media. Recent examples included a briefing leaflet on Climate Change, collaboration with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Climate Change, hosting Greta Thunberg at Friend House, supporting the Global Climate Strike on 20th September, working with Stop the Arms Fair and Roots of Resistance, joining with others to warn of the danger of Parliamentary prorogation and producing materials in preparation for the General Election.

Matters AM may wish to consider further

Assisted Dying
Stewardship

Jacqui Moore, ECAM Representative to MfS
November 2019

Quaker Life Rep Council: Mental Health Conversations

This highly intense and inspiring weekend encompassed many aspects of mental health, probably all of which we can easily agree on:-

The need to:-

- recognise and accept all forms of mental ill-health as they arise within our Meetings
- understand each manifestation as well as we can
- support individuals with mental ill-health difficulties, in many, diverse ways – sometimes requiring imagination and creativity
- be ready to listen with kindness and open hearts
- continue to communicate, as effectively as possible, with the individual and with each other

So far, so relatively obvious. But in reality, life is complex, full of contradictions and knotty issues – which usually interact and cross-over in ways that necessitate great thoughtfulness.

For example:-

- the interface between mental ill-health and physical ill-health are not always obvious, e.g. the stress and depression caused by long periods of isolation and time away from work or friends
- the unpredictability of how a mental health condition might reveal itself
- the huge dilemmas concerning the “who/how/when” of what can or should be done and whether this can be consistent

In my own experience, I have lately struggled to define the notion of illness, any type of illness, and how this is viewed by our support services (i.e. the NHS, Care Services etc.). When does the NHS intervene and when does it deem a form of illness (e.g. dementia, anorexia) to fall outside its remit? Also, for example, it is now well known that autism spectrum condition is an organic condition, with a genetic basis – but the concomitant anxiety (particularly in girls and women with the condition) becomes problematic in ways that the NHS might then perceive as being within its remit.

These issues, and many more, arose during the weekend – along with an immensely moving range of brave and honest personal testimonies – amply illustrating what I’ve briefly outlined above. There were further testimonies, as well as a wealth of written materials, for us to consider – and to ‘problem-solve’ in our smaller groups as best we could. The dilemma of “what to do?” and “what should/can we do?” was sometimes near to overwhelming – and I had to remind myself regularly that I was merely someone seeking to think about ways to help, support and respond. Because, of course, to experience these dilemmas as an individual with mental health issues can be truly overwhelming.

Activities

In our groups, with feedback to the whole group, we explored a range of activities that suggested ways to offer practical support.

Rather than outline these here, they would probably be best shared in our Elders and Overseers Meeting, with Elders and Overseers feeding back to their own Meetings. A very helpful resource here is the publication:

Encounters with Mental Distress
Quaker Stories

Developed by the Mental Health in Meetings Cluster of the Quaker Life
Network

£5.00 available from Quaker Books

However, by far the most helpful resources were the encounters and experiences of our individual Meetings, examples of dilemmas which were very fruitful ways to consider how to go forward. I would urge Friends to find ways to share, imagine and create ways to understand and support the mental health of our Meetings.

Sarah Worth
October 2019