

Young Friends Regional Meeting – Report to East Cheshire AM 11.5.25

Summary of report

This report recommends the laying down of the Young Friends Regional Meeting in its current form. It considers its activities and successes, the challenges it faced and learning points.

Background

Following a request from some ECAM teenagers and young adults (YAs) in 2021, ECAM agreed to support the setting up of a grouping, called Young Friends Regional Meeting, through which YA could continue to meet for weekends after they had become too old for the current CYP activities of Yealand, Teenage General Meeting and Summer School. It was also hoped that continuing to come together for weekends, hopefully termly, would help give the YA involved the confidence to make the transition together into the national Young Friends General Meeting for 18-35 year olds, which ECAM YA and their friends were not currently moving into.

ECAM agreed in minute 21.05.12 to support the group financially with £200 and practically through the offers of two ECAM older adult Friends, Gill Alcock and Emma Killick to support the group. 4 ECAM YA and 2 Manchester and Warrington YA formed an organisers' group with Gill and Emma in support. ECAM has given further support in that the ECAM Treasurer at this time (Brenda Crothers) handled payments and the ECAM Safeguarding Officer (Sue Pounder) helped them work through safeguarding policy issues.

Activities and Successes

The group set up and maintained a Whatsapp group for YA who had attended Summer Schools and TGM. They worked together and planned, organised and catered for day or weekend get togethers at Central Manchester Meeting House in November 2022, Liverpool Meeting House in February 2023, Lancaster Meeting House in June 2023 and again at Central Manchester in November 2023. The format resembled Teenage General Meeting weekends. These included speakers from YFGM, from Northern Friends Peace Board, an exploratory walk round Lancaster and the Castle, and a Peace Walk round central Manchester, as well as craft activities, games, meals and fellowship. Attendance was around 8 YA Friends.

Feedback from the weekends was that they had a lovely community feel.

The group also did some initial planning to hold further weekends at Bolton Meeting House in February 2024 and Stockport Meeting House in June 2024 but in the event these did not progress.

The YA members of the organising group in effect had greater responsibility than in other Quaker contexts (eg TGM and Summer School committees) and so have increased their skills and experience in residential and Quaker event organisation.

The group worked well together and maintained bonds and friendships during their transition into different geographical places and post-school life. It also helped them keep their sense of a Quaker identity.

Older Friends in the region also were warmly supportive. ECAM friends gave practical support with organising, financial transactions and safeguarding. Friends at Central Manchester, Liverpool, Lancaster, Bolton and Stockport all agreed that YFRM could book their Meeting Houses at no cost.

Challenges

The group struggled to get other YA to travel to and participate in weekend residential events. The group undertook publicity as and when they could, including through the Whatsapp group, speaking to upcoming YA at Summer Schools and sending out publicity for upcoming weekends. Further they had ensured that the weekends were very cheap £15 and they had indicated that there were possibilities for travel and attendance bursaries. Nevertheless, their target demographic of 18-23ish year olds were also experiencing great changes in their lives and so found it difficult to commit or make the arrangements to participate.

The group had hoped that there would be more YA coming forward after each event and through Summer School to help with organisation. However the small numbers attending did not allow this. As a result there was a lot of organising to be done by a very small group of YA at a time of great change in their own lives as they moved geographically and with time demands from educational courses etc. It also meant that the group relied completely on the skills and time of this very small group, and had no spare capacity for example to do more outreach. They had hoped that there would be new input and therefore turnover in the planning group, which would share out the commitment needed, and keep better contact with upcoming YA each year.

Given the small numbers, a transition into the national YFGM was not achieved. The main barriers are thought to be that YFRM weekends are not well publicised, and that YA do not know that there will be someone they are familiar with at an event.

For the supporting older ECAM adults there were also challenges. One of the two needed to withdraw due to other commitments. Further, there is no obvious place in ECAM or regional structures for someone in this role to talk through queries or issues since this did not come under the remit of ECAM CYPC. Quaker Life Local development Workers/CYPC staff have been interested in principle in the group but not been able to follow this through.

The YA involved initially are now part of the Summer School adult helper group. This has been great in keeping their links between themselves, and identities as Quakers. But it also means that they do not have the same need for or capacity for a further YFRM group.

The current group of YA have now moved on with their lives and do not want to organise further YFRM events. There is currently no successor group of YA.

Learning Points

Whilst YFRM may have run its natural course in its current form, it may be that the needs it sought to address around the transition and opt[ions for young adult Quakers at the age of 18 remain and will recur in the future. So it is worth capturing some of the learning points. These include:

- That the transition to YFGM remains challenging for YA in our AM and region, as well as any transition to Quaker groups in new geographical areas that they move to. (On the positive

side, one of the YA does now plan to go to YGFM more frequently and will publicise it to others that they know.)

- That ways to keep links between and with YA who have grown up in our region such as through being helpers at Yealand, TGM and Summer School are important to maintaining their connection with Quakers and with fulfilling personal satisfaction and growth
- That there may still be a role for specific events, including residential events for 18-24 year old in our region.
- That if further YA in our region want to be involved in setting these up they can count on significant good will and practical support from older AM and LM friends as well as contacts made
- That nevertheless the demands on an organising group of YA are significant. At present national Quaker structures do not offer much practical support . AM support therefore should consider the overall demand on any organising group as well as the specific mix of skills they have.
- That if older AM Friends are appointed to support a group of YA then AM should consider how these Friends can draw on advice and support on any issues arising.

Conclusion

That YFRM in its current form is laid down and that the remaining monies from the £200 initially earmarked by ECAM are reassigned to general ECAM funds.