



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Journal Letter from Manchester

Zara Rizvi, September 2016, Journal Letter No 3

Omega Research Foundation

Dear Friends

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."
The Dalai Lama

In some ways, it really doesn't seem like a year ago since I began this journey. It's hard to believe that it's been twelve months since my preparation period at Woodbrooke, where I spent a wholesome week, alongside the other new Peaceworkers, contemplating the year ahead and wondering what was in store. In other ways, it seems like it must have been longer than twelve months, given how much has shifted in my life since when I began.

My work at Omega has been interesting and engaging and I have learnt a great deal. On a practical level, I've developed creative computer skills I never thought I was capable of, led workshops and presentations and produced human rights reports. In my most recent project, I put together a digital story of Omega's work on the European Torture Trade Regulation. It traces how their research and lobbying over the past ten years has led directly to prohibitions and trade controls on equipment which is used for torture around the world. Piecing together the narrative of how Omega's work has directly influenced policy in this way was a perfect final project, reminding me of their vital influence and contribution to peace and human rights.

On a more personal level, the year has presented a number of opportunities for self-reflection. Learning unfamiliar skills in a new environment is challenging. I questioned whether I was up to the job a number of times and had to work at not being embarrassed to ask for help. I struggled early on with the new technology and took a while to find my feet. I quietly questioned whether my work was considered valuable and frequently compared myself to others.

Although a little difficult at times, these insecurities were perhaps inevitable. I left a permanent job where I had felt competent and comfortable to take a leap of faith into

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the unknown. I'm pleased to say that despite the initial uncertainty, I don't regret it for one moment. For the first time ever, at age 30, I'm not wondering whether I'm in the right field of work or subtly hoping for something "better" to come along. Although I cannot be certain of what the future holds, there's an authenticity in what I do and a trust that I'm on the right path. When I attended my interview for the Peacemaker Scheme in the spring of 2015, I shared my heartfelt desire for a career which could both nurture my spiritual practice and meet my urge to be active in the world. This was a big ask, but I feel the scheme has more than delivered.

I think the key to feeling at home and energised in my work has been the inspiring network the scheme has tapped me into. In our office building in Manchester which houses many social change groups and activists, at the QPSW meetings and conferences, at our Peacemaker and QUNO meet-ups; I find myself surrounded by people who have a heartfelt commitment to positive change. I hear their stories and see the fruits of their action and I'm propelled to keep plugging away. As I reflected in my last journal letter, I feel the most rewarding part of the year has been my sense of involvement in a wider peace movement that is bigger than the sum of its parts. It's not always been easy working against the tide, but whilst acknowledging the setbacks, I can wholly see and appreciate the many successes that make it not just worthwhile, but utterly essential.

Going forward, the Peacemaker year has led directly to more opportunities in the field. Omega have extended my contract on a part-time basis and I'm soon to start a second job to run alongside this at BASIC International, a nuclear disarmament think tank in London. This time next year, I'll be returning to Palestine for three months on the EAPPI scheme. Another amazing scheme coordinated by QPSW, EAPPI volunteers provide protective presence and carry out human rights research throughout the West Bank, before returning to the UK to carry out advocacy and lobbying work against the occupation. EAPPI will provide yet another life-changing, if very challenging opportunity and I feel so fortunate to have been accepted.

I don't feel I can say thank you enough times to QPSW and Omega for this past year. I'm also full of gratitude to Holly and Rhianna, the other two Peacemakers who have supported me and been kind and inspirational friends. In the past twelve months, I have developed personally, professionally and spiritually, made friends for life and become part of movement which truly touches the deepest part of me.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Zara