

## **Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017, Thursday Session**

### **Mairi Campbell Jack's Introduction**

My name is Mairi Campbell-Jack. I'm employed by Britain Yearly Meeting and General Meeting for Scotland to work on political and parliamentary engagement. I focus on the Scottish Parliament, and have been working on economic justice and on militarisation in schools.

In our work on economic justice Quakers in Scotland wanted first to identify the issues and opportunities. One of the things we did was to join the Edinburgh Radical and Independent Book Fair to organise "Creating a Just Scotland: Transforming our land and taxation policies", a symposium with three well-known authors. Although I wondered about putting on an event about tax at 10am on a Saturday morning, we had a diverse audience of about 200, with people sitting in the aisles and crowding round the doors. By working with the Radical Book Fair we had extended our reach, talking to people who may share many Quaker values, but are not drawn to Quakerism. Through this strand of work we are still discovering new partners in organisations like the Chartered Institute of Taxation and the Islamic Finance Council.

When people with different skill sets come on board, change can happen. A former employee of Google, who had received funding for anti-militarism work, told me about search engine optimisation. He wants to ensure that pacifist organisations come up in the top ten searches when young people google "how to join the army". The peace movement has known for a long time that the military exploits gaming, media and search engines for its recruitment needs but haven't had a coherent or workable plan to counter it, due to a lack of knowledge or resources. If we only work with those who look like us, act like us and sound like us, and know what we know, then we miss something important.

I've worked in partnership with Forces Watch on the Quakers in Scotland's petition to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee, calling for greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on armed forces visits to schools in Scotland. The ability of Forces Watch to analyse and interpret data has been invaluable. Their knowledge of armed forces policy and recruitment has been thorough and enabled us to submit detailed and accurate responses. My knowledge of the Scottish political landscape, understanding of the Scottish Parliament and my Edinburgh base, have meant that our strengths and weaknesses have complimented each other.

While it is important to respect the autonomy and different views of other organisations, nothing will happen if you don't make the first step. We attended the SNP annual conference last year and set up five meetings, including two with Cabinet Secretaries. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

Common values are important. Are we sufficiently aware of what they are? If we focus on our differences in some matters, we may overlook our common values like truth and

integrity, simplicity and equality. There are many and sometimes unlikely people who can unite with us under a shared value and common purpose.

Although we have radically different views on same sex marriage, we found an ally in the Roman Catholic Church on our work challenging militarisation in Scottish society. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Scottish Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference wrote to the Public Petitions Committee of The Scottish Parliament, saying under-18 recruitment is an "intolerable crime". With 18% of Scottish schools being catholic schools, their contribution is very welcome.

Working with other organisations is not always easy. I had an experience with an organisation last year who reneged on a promise at the last minute. That unfortunately cost me personally £200. While the vast majority of other organisations we work with are very supportive, it is important to check you both hold the subtler values of meeting deadlines, being clear who is doing which pieces of work, and communicating well.

There are many ways of taking our work into the world. Recently a catholic writer reached out to me on twitter and the result was an article in the Scottish Catholic Observer strongly arguing for an end to the recruitment of minors in the armed forces.

The crucial thing is, just be there. There is a power in being present. Regardless of our geography or physical limitations, we can use social media and online communication tools to help us reach out and make new connections.

Balance is key in all this. Balance does not mean to never wobble, but comes from being able to find your way back to centre once something has made you sway. Things will sway you unless you are firm in your centre, in your core. Don't let casual dismissal of your cause change your mind, don't take your eyes off the focus. You cannot balance unless you have a point to focus on. Organisations, communities and movements are no stronger, or no weaker than the people who are in them.

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