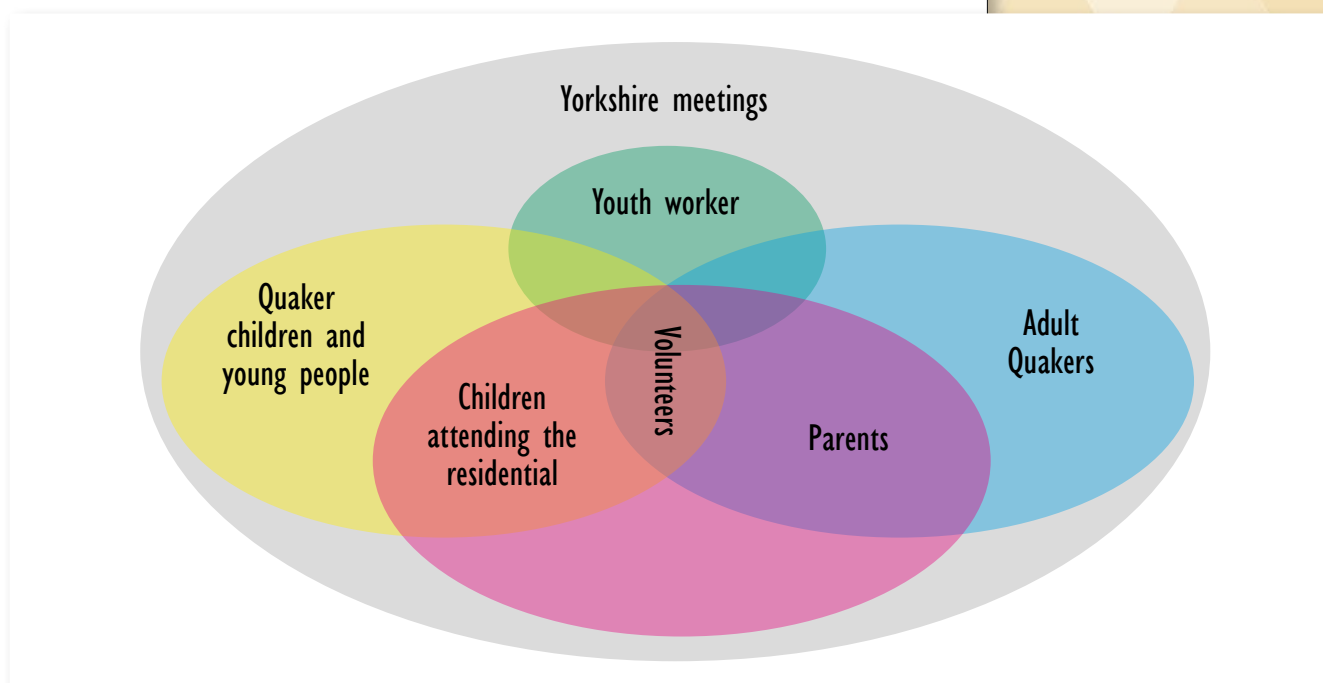




## Working with Yorkshire Friends Junior Holidays

The youth worker in Yorkshire worked for mutual benefit with Junior Holidays, part of the region's longstanding children's provision. Adult and teenage volunteers involved in Junior Holidays benefitted from the youth worker's skills, expertise, experience and enthusiasm and felt empowered to take on additional and new tasks, particularly when moving the residentials online as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The youth worker benefited from opportunities to quickly and easily build relationships with a larger group of children, young people, parents and volunteers from outside of Sheffield, thereby significantly widening the geographical reach of the youth work project.

### Who was involved and benefitted



### Junior Holidays in Yorkshire

Junior Holidays are weekend residentials for Yorkshire children, between 6 and 12 years old, that typically take place twice a year in June and October at various youth hostels around Yorkshire. The weekends consist of games, crafting, a talent show, epilogue and social time. Usually between 15 and 20 children, and between five and 12 volunteers, attend including several teenage and catering volunteers.

Although Junior Holidays have been running for a long time the group

of volunteers involved and their skills and experience isn't stable. Junior Holidays were just recovering from a few years of low volunteer and attendee numbers when the youth work project started.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the youth worker contributed to Junior Holidays by:

- sharing ideas and suggestions at planning meetings,
- delivering a training workshop for adult volunteers on handling challenging behaviour and situations
- coming along to residential and taking responsibility for running particular activities, especially large group ones
- supporting the teenage volunteers in their volunteering and own personal development.

### Adapting to COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, adult volunteers felt out of their depth and thought that they had to cancel Junior Holidays completely. However, the youth worker suggested moving the 2020 residential online instead and made both of them happen despite the challenging circumstances, as explained by a volunteer:

**[The online residential] would not have run without the youth worker, they just couldn't have run because us as volunteers, we don't have the skills and the expertise in the technology, but also in how to run activities online.**

While fewer adults were involved, teenage volunteers took active roles in running sessions, especially in the evenings. Indeed, the online residential offered teenage volunteers greater opportunities to contribute to planning on an even par with adult volunteers, to shape the programme and develop and run their own activities. For instance, teenage volunteers led on and delivered drama games sessions, epilogues and bedtime stories, which were 'super fun' for the 18 and 12 young people respectively who attended the June and October events.

### Guiding, encouraging, reassuring and upskilling existing volunteers

Adult and teenage volunteers were able to learn a great deal and develop their own skills, confidence and overall approach as a result of the youth worker's support. Volunteers suggested that the following contributions from the youth worker were most helpful to them:

- 'doing stuff we could continually learn from'
- sharing ideas from wider Quaker children's and youth work practice
- having a 'supportive and can do attitude'
- being a reliable, consistent contributor
- bringing lots of enthusiasm and energy
- bridging 'the gap between adults and children'.

Volunteers explained that it was like having a professional support for, and at the same time 'a validation' of, what volunteers were doing.

Particularly for teenage volunteers, the youth worker's support and mentoring has allowed them to grow in confidence and out of their 'comfort zones', value their contributions and skills, and go after things they are passionate about in all areas of their lives. For example, one of the teenage volunteers has felt empowered to lean into her passion for reducing the stigma around periods by educating both boys and girls, as a direct result of the youth worker providing reassurance and encouragement. Overall, the teenage volunteers have come on in leaps and bounds as one of the adult volunteers explains:

**The youth worker played what I think is quite a crucial role in developing the confidence of the teenage volunteers [...] to take on board some of the activities and have more confidence in their abilities to do that and through the youth worker's support the teenagers who've come along have really developed massively.**

Also, teenage volunteers have carved out a much greater role in Junior Holidays for themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic, which the youth worker is keen to build on in future:

The actual teenage volunteers didn't get that many opportunities to lead on anything. [...] So I think there was something just about giving them some ownership and some authority and some of the luxuries and the privileges that adult volunteers have to shape what they wanted to do. And I think that might have helped them feel even more included, less sort of tokenistic. You know, I have to say, the teenage volunteers made [the online residentials] happen.

### Enhancing Junior Holidays

As a result of the youth worker working with the volunteers and getting stuck in at the residentials, Junior Holidays were made even more accessible, inclusive, diverse and fun. Large group activities could happen that volunteers previously felt hesitant about delivering (on their own).

Beyond the residentials the youth worker helped some of the older children to find other opportunities to access Quaker events. Also, before the Covid-19 pandemic, the youth worker was working to plug the slight gap in current provision between Junior Holidays (for 6-12 year olds) and Holiday School (for 13-18 year olds) by organising a dedicated residential for 11 to 13 year olds to run at the same time and in the same place as Junior Holidays. A volunteer explains:

**The plan was that the youth worker would run the 11 to 13 year old bit. And we would have all the children together for some bits, and then break out into the different holiday age groups. So we could all plan it and work together.**

However, the future of this potential new residential is less certain without the continued driving force of a youth worker behind it, as one of the volunteers reflects:

**I don't think we'll manage that without the youth worker. I think that was a bit too much for the committee in the future. It would need another input, which is what the youth worker gave saying 'I've seen this need I think we can fulfil it' and I felt we could do so and the**

**committee was willing to take it on because the youth worker was holding it.**

### Stabilising provision through greater continuity and strategic direction

Volunteers felt that having a youth worker contributes to greater consistency and stability over time which may in turn reduce the vulnerability of Junior Holidays, as explained by one:

**The volunteers don't come every time so it does depend on which particular group you've got as to how well the whole thing goes. So the youth worker was a continuity and a reliable anchor for the work.**

The youth worker feels that this consistency is also important for children and young people who have a better transition from children's into youth work and may be less likely to reduce their engagement with Quakerism as a result:

**I think by being present as young Quakers grow up and seeing a youth worker who was doing things with teenagers, they see a very linear path into getting involved in things because they see me doing youth groups for teenagers or they see me go into holiday schools and I think it gives them a very clear transition route. [They might think] 'Oh, the youth worker does that so when I get to 13 maybe I'll go to that'.**

### Establishing a presence across Yorkshire quickly

As volunteers explain, the youth worker's involvement with Junior Holidays helped to quickly establish a presence across Yorkshire, which enhanced the youth work project:

**We already had a group of young people and there was a mailing list as well and so a set of contacts that the youth worker could access... and a group of volunteers as well, who were working with young people... So that was set up and ready to go.**

Similarly, the youth worker agrees that:

**In terms of Yorkshire knowing me, and**

knowing my role and seeing value in it, Junior Holidays has been the catalyst. Because people have really seen the impact. They've heard from young people.

### What made the work successful?

1. Drawing on the professional expertise to make the work children and young people-led, and involving them in all aspects of decision making from the start, as explained by a young person:

**Quakerism is all about hearing everyone's voice, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, and it's very good at that. But we're still not the best at hearing children's voices. And they have a lot of really important things to say.**

2. Making the most of the crucial role teenagers can play as near peer facilitators in children's work, expressed by a young person:

**The youth worker's quite good at understanding how important it is to have teenagers involved in children's events, because sometimes [children don't] feel comfortable talking to an adult, but talking to a teenager maybe feels a bit more like a friend.**

3. Being really clear about boundaries and thinking about where a youth worker can add the most value. It's not about handing all the work and responsibility over to them but about using them to enhance what is already going on, says a volunteer:

**We were always aware that the youth worker's role wasn't coming to run the Junior Holidays, but that they could add an additional element to it. They could bring their skills and meet the gaps really that we needed to fill.**

### Tips for the future

When thinking about future work, the following things that this work taught us are useful

to bear in mind:

1. While Junior Holidays volunteers were able to share a substantial contact list for children and young people with the youth worker, we have also found that information held by local meetings tends to be patchy. This means that some children and young people may have been missed. Therefore, it may be good for local meetings to review their records about children and young people before a youth worker starts so that they can hit the ground running.
2. A degree of tension may arise between aspirations linked to working in ways that are child led and those linked to working in ways that foster spirituality. This may be a result of children not choosing spiritual activities as a priority. It may also come about as a result of trying to make spiritual activities more engaging for children. While the right balance will depend on the particular circumstances, it is worth exploring this when planning activities, as explained by a young person and the youth worker:

**I would say, it's harder to get the kids involved with epilogues and spiritual things. If a lot of it is based around some sort of physical activity, like [arranging] glow sticks [into various shapes], for example, they don't really reflect on their day, which is what the epilogue is for. [...] That's just something that may be a little different to the original young people's holidays.**

**I think it's a balance. If I'm honest, I don't know many young people of that age that enjoy epilogue, because it is very spiritually based and it's about reflection and internal thoughts, and they find it quite difficult. [...] but we always put it in because I think it does challenge them still.**

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