Quaker Youth Development Work

Programme evaluation executive summary

February 2021

Executive summary

Introduction

The Youth Work development project is a pilot project, which aims to work with local and area meetings to build capacity and make a difference in their ability to strengthen the young Quaker community through a range of opportunities. The project has employed two full-time youth workers: one in Sheffield and Yorkshire and one in Bristol and the West region.

This evaluation explores the following:

- set-up and delivery of the project,
- who has participated in the project,
- feedback on the project so far,
- the difference the project has made to young people,
- the difference the project has made to local and area meetings and BYM,
- key learning for future phases of the project.

It is intended to support decision-makers in making informed decisions about the future of Quaker youth work.

With two pilot areas and small numbers of individuals involved, the evaluation is mostly qualitative. It is based primarily on interviews with key stakeholders, supported by monitoring data from the project. For more detail on data sources and limitations please see section 1.2.1.

Project set-up and delivery

The project has delivered a combination of regular sessions and one-off events for young people in both regions, as well as work with local and area meetings to build capacity and support engagement with young people. The youth development workers have also supported national youth work including facilitating at events and developing resources.

During the Covid-19 pandemic all delivery was moved online and sessions were held more regularly, with greater frequency than face-to-face sessions had been prior to the pandemic. Online sessions were more accessible for some young people.

Please see section 2.2 and 2.3 of this report for more detail.

Set-up of the project took significant work at local level and by national staff to clarify arrangements for hosting the youth development workers and define respective local and national responsibilities. Developing Memorandums of Understanding took significant work, time and negotiation, and, even once these were in place, a great deal of local liaison was needed to clarify expectations and establish local processes. Navigating Quaker structures and processes was challenging even for local Friends who had extensive previous experience in roles within local and area meetings.

Involvement with the project

Local support contacts found it difficult to compile a list of young people connected to local meetings as they were often not found on membership lists. This makes it difficult to be confident that all young people connected to meetings had been reached by the project.

A local stakeholder in the West region identified three categories of young people, in addition to those already engaged with meetings, for whom the project could be 'attractive and worthwhile', identifying them as:

- Loosely associated: For example, they were the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Friends, who only attend meetings with their grandparents.
- Lost: Young people who had 'drifted away' from the meeting – for example, older teenagers.
- Latent: The children of people who themselves had only just become interested in Friends and were not considering how their children might also benefit.

Up to twelve young people were regularly attending face-to-face project sessions in each region, with numbers fluctuating depending on the time of year. There was hope from some stakeholders that numbers would have been higher.

There is detailed demographic data for 48 of the young people who have engaged with the project through attending the regular sessions offered, and minimal data for a further twelve young people who joined the project more recently. Demographic data is not held for young people who interacted with the project through one-off outreach events, estimated to be over 200 further young people.

As at February 2021, almost half of the young people who have engaged with the project are currently between the ages of 13 and 15.

More participants identifying as female have engaged with the project than those identifying as male or gender variant. The majority (39 of 48) are White. Seven young people have disclosed a disability.
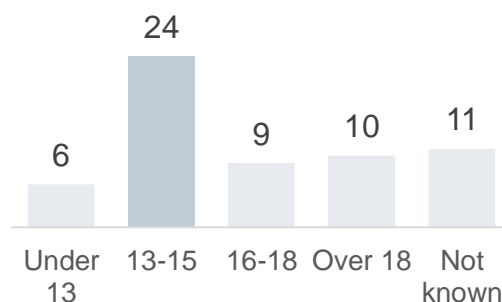
The majority (48 of 58) of young people engaged with the project have a Quaker parent or carer. A minority (9 of 51) of the young people had not had previous engagement with Quakers before the youth project. For those who had engaged previously, the most common method was through attending local meetings. Just under half of the young people (23 of 51) had previously attended regional, local or national Quaker youth events.

Attendance numbers and geographical spread of young people increased during the online sessions run at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, as did the number and type of sessions the project offered to young people.

A number of factors affected young people's participation. Young people often referenced their other commitments as a factor in not always being able to participate. This meant that they sometimes prioritised one-off national events such as weekend residentials over regular sessions, or other local provision where it was available. Some young people, parents and project staff also mentioned that some sessions were more appealing to young people than others in terms of content. Young people were particularly keen that regular sessions did not 'feel like school.'

In the West region, the change of youth development worker and the gap between workers also affected participation, with some young people not returning after the project restarted.

It is also possible that the project may have reached all, or almost all, eligible young people within easy reach of the major cities in which face-to-face provision took place. This possibility is supported by the fact that the

online delivery engaged more young people who were geographically more remote, on the edges of regions or in neighbouring regions, but did not necessarily engage more people in the main cities within each region.

There was greater engagement by volunteers in the West region than in Yorkshire, where the development worker has been challenged by lack of volunteer engagement at times.

Several young people who have transitioned out of the youth project have returned to help facilitate youth project sessions. Young adults offering near-peer facilitation provide role models to young people and support to the project.

The general level of participation of local and area meetings, beyond initial key contacts, was not as high as hoped, particularly in Yorkshire. This is despite the fact that it is felt that meetings are positive about wanting to engage more young people.

It was felt that ideas for project activities in both regions were strongly youth-led, with appropriate contribution from adults to make them happen and adult leadership to introduce new opportunities and be flexible about changes. However, interest among young people to design and facilitate sessions and activities was low – they had clear ideas about what they wanted from sessions and suggested ideas and activities but generally did not have the capacity or interest to run activities or sessions themselves, although there has been movement towards more young people stepping up during online sessions.

Satisfaction with the project so far

Strengths of the project so far

The predominant feeling from local stakeholders and young people in both regions was that the young people who have engaged with the project have enjoyed it and were broadly happy with it. Young people valued the relaxed and accepting feel of the sessions and the mix of discussion and activities.

> *The sessions are relaxed and we have fun. It's great to be around other young people my age in an environment where people aren't judging you – one that's open and friendly and secure. That's important, because at school there's social pressures and you're always being judged. (Young person, West region)*

> *I joined the group thinking would be boring but it was fun, interesting and welcoming (Young person, ad hoc feedback, West region)*

Local stakeholders and national staff were impressed by the youth development workers' response to the situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and their ability to transition relatively seamlessly to online work. Parents and local stakeholders frequently described online provision and connection with the youth development workers at a challenging time as a 'lifeline' for some young people and families.

> *Online meetings once a week have been a real lifeline for some of the young people. And the online residential that's being organised is a great way to make sure that young people still feel like there's an event going on and they can still connect with their other friends. (Local stakeholder, Yorkshire)*

Parents, local stakeholders and national staff have also been impressed by the skills of the youth development workers and their ability to experiment with new approaches.

> *I would say that [the youth development worker] is completely brilliant at listening to young people and running activities that they're going to enjoy. And just bringing out the best in those young people and investing in those relationships. (Parent, Yorkshire)*

Areas of challenge so far

One key area of challenge is that in some cases parents' expectations differed from what the young people wanted. This was more strongly the case in Yorkshire, where young people wanted more of a 'youth club with a Quaker ethos' than a social action group, while parents were concerned that not enough social action was taking place. Communication between the youth development worker and parents was important in managing expectations.

Some parents, young people and stakeholders suggested that some project events, particularly in Yorkshire, took longer than anticipated to be arranged or had to be cancelled or postponed at short notice, sometimes as a result of inadequate numbers or a lack of volunteer support. There was also a gap in momentum in the project in the West region during the period in between one youth development worker leaving and the next one taking up the post a few months later.

Group dynamics, particularly where the group was small with a large variety of ages, were raised as an area of challenge on a few occasions. While some young people found the group dynamics difficult, others appreciated the mixed-age aspect of the group and found it an inclusive space.

Local stakeholders noted that it was a challenge to fully cover the region. Youth development workers had planned for a hub-and-spokes strategy, but further work in area meetings outside of the hub city had been put on hold as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic also provided opportunities to connect across the region without travel.

Outcomes for young people

The project increased engagement in Quakerism for those young people who participated regularly, significantly so for some. Increased engagement did not necessarily manifest as more regular attendance at meeting for worship, but rather in young people identifying more strongly as a Quaker and forming their own relationship with Quakerism.

> *I think [the youth development worker] has sustained [the young people's] attachment to the meeting even if they're not in evidence on a Sunday as they used to be. (Local stakeholder, Yorkshire region)*

> *I was about to stop going to Quaker meetings. But then I joined the Quaker youth project and I'd say that's been quite a big part of me not having done that. It's part of the reason I've stayed with Quakers and carried on going to meetings. (Young person, West region)*

Young people reported feeling more accepted within Quaker spaces and discovering a sense of shared values, leading to belonging. This was raised as a significant factor in enabling their increased engagement in Quakerism. The discussions during sessions played an important role in this.

> *You can't form an opinion on something without discussing it and seeing like all the sides of it. I think that the whole process for me of going to these Quaker groups has made a big impact on who I am as a person and as a Quaker. (Young person, Yorkshire region)*

Young people became more aware, and had greater understanding, of Quakerism and what was available to them at a national level.

> *SYFAN has helped me to understand what identifying as a Quaker is. It's shown me that not all Quakers believe exactly the same things and that that's ok. (Young person, Yorkshire)*

> *It's meant that I'm more active in Quakerism, because [the youth development worker] has sent me opportunities of things I can get involved in at national level. I've been a lot more involved because of that. (Young person, West region)*

Making new connections with other young people enabled young people's increased engagement with Quakerism. This manifested itself more in a sense of bonding as a community of young people than in strong, new, individual friendships.

> *I like the fact that I get to talk to other young Quakers because I don't think we would really see each other if it weren't for that … We just get to talk a lot together and we just get to know each other quite well ... I guess I just feel more connected with other people, other young people. (Young person, Yorkshire region)*

> *I think, for Quaker young people, you can quite often tend to see yourself as more part of a national group, because that's where you get your kind of most vivid experiences of Quakerness because they have such a brilliant time at their national events. Whereas, I think SYFAN brings some of that sense of being amongst your peers, but amongst your local peers, and amongst people whose families know each other, and whose family is part of the same community and it brings them together. (Parent, Yorkshire region)*

Young people reported engaging in, or being supported in, new social action through the project but no evidence suggested that this has translated to increased social action outside of the project.

Significant personal changes were achieved for some young people including: increased confidence; greater ability to manage difference; a slightly smoother transition to adulthood; new skills and the chance to contribute them.

Outcomes for other groups

As well as changes for young people directly, the project aimed to create change in adults within local and area meetings (including attenders at meetings and adults volunteering to support or work with young people). Intended changes were also identified for Britain Yearly Meeting and the Society as a whole.

Adults learnt new things about working with young people from the youth development workers. Local stakeholders noted that, as had been intended, adults were better able to manage issues around safeguarding and risk assessment. Involvement in the project also increased their confidence, 'joy and meaning'.

A few closely involved adult stakeholders have improved their relationships with young people and other adult volunteers.

There was felt to be some change in attitude of local and area meetings towards young people and engaging them. Changes in action to involve young people have been so far limited to a small number of initiatives, which have had varying medium-term success. There have been some all-age initiatives related to sustainability and climate justice, and a small number of young people have been better able to engage in working groups that have met online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

> *I do think it's made them [adults in the meeting] remember that we exist. They don't really forget but it's made them want to be more inclusive of young people and make an effort to do that. (Young person, West region)*

Some parents and young people reported feeling less in contact with each other in a Quaker setting than before the youth project. A call was made for more all-age events, where those that have been held so far were felt to be successful.

I think a common feeling from the adults at the meeting is 'Oh, it's the teenagers tonight, but they're not really part of [the meeting]'. (Young person, Yorkshire)

There's not very much engagement between the Quaker youth project and the adult Quaker community. That's the impression I get. As it's the youth project, I'm not sure that's a key part of it. Ideally the adults would know what's going on with young people and vice versa but I'm not sure it's a key part of the agenda. (Young person, West region)

Through the youth development project, more young people have participated in national Quaker events.

The youth development workers have contributed to national CYP (Children and young people) resources and modelled excellent equality and inclusion in youth work.

Governance, support and management

The youth development project is managed and funded at a national level, but 'owned' locally. There is a national reference group for the project and line management of staff is carried out by a member of the national CYP team. Regionally, local support groups offer guidance to the youth development workers and two local support contacts from those groups offer more involved help, advice and contacts from a local perspective.

The national reference group has been useful for information sharing but would benefit from greater clarity about its purpose, in particular whether it has responsibility for governance and if so, how.

Local support contacts have been extremely helpful to the youth development workers, when in place. Yorkshire has been without local support contacts for a significant period.

Having key local support group contacts who are committed and enthusiastic has been very enabling for me. Not just saying, 'That's great!' but having time to put towards it. (Youth development worker, West region)

The role of the local support groups has shifted over time and differs between the regions. In Yorkshire more practical support is desired from the local support group.

Young people currently involved in the youth project are needed on the local support group in both regions, though young people who have recently transitioned out of the project are involved in local support groups. The way young people are involved in the group needs to be dynamic and flexible.

National management of the project has worked well. The youth development workers' contact with Friends House staff has been continuous and 'as and when' needed and this has been sufficient for the project. Links have strengthened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key considerations for future work

The effect of having paid youth development workers

Having paid youth development workers was identified as a great benefit, but some staff members felt that some local and area meetings may have stepped back from their responsibility to young people, which is key to the sustainability of the work.

There's been elements of this project where meetings have gone, 'That's great, [the youth development workers] are doing that so we don't have to' as opposed to ... 'Here's an opportunity to get involved.' That's understandable at a time where for lots of Quaker

> *communities it's as much as they can do to maintain things, and maybe it's an unrealistic*
> *expectation for them to want to get involved in a wide variety of stuff and engage with local*
> *communities and young people in a way that's new. (Central staff member)*

For the continued involvement of and feeling of belonging, young people also need relationships with adults in their local meetings, in addition to youth workers. Youth development worker appointments are short term compared to average length of membership and stability of local Quaker communities.

Size and location of region

Youth development workers have been covering very large regions with differing levels of engagement and expectations from meetings within them. It was suggested by a central staff member that a clear expectation of time spent in each part of the region would help meetings to manage this.

Interviews did not often discuss any question of whether the youth development worker should be locally or nationally hosted. Local knowledge was not raised as a requirement or a particularly important part of the role. A central staff member noted that it would be very hard to run face-to-face sessions and build intergenerational communities without being locally based. The ability to provide consistency and build strong relationships with the young people was of vital importance. One local stakeholder felt that the new online work carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic had 'renewed their optimism' about the sustainability of the project and stretching the worker's resources over such a large region.

Success, engagement and value

The evaluation has highlighted that there are varied understandings among stakeholders (including parents, local stakeholders and staff) of what the success of the project would look like.

For some, success is based on sustaining and extending the number of young people regularly attending Quaker youth provision and ideally Meeting for Worship on a Sunday. Some local stakeholders raised the question of whether the project had been worth the money given the numbers engaging regularly. For others, the transformative impact that paid youth work may have on the lives of individuals, not just in terms of Quaker identity but in terms of navigating the challenges of teenage life and self-development, was of equal if not higher importance and the question of value for money was therefore answered differently.

This suggests that there is scope for some clearer thinking, based on the findings of the evaluation, about what the aims of any future work should be. It is possible that developing a theory of change (an illustration of the intended change and how that will be brought about) for Quaker youth work may be a useful part of the process.

Governance considerations

It is not clear whether all regions would have the capacity to provide the necessary governance and support required by the project. In a small community, where much of the momentum for specific projects is dependent on individuals' energy and gifts, capacity is often a difficult issue to manage.

One local stakeholder suggested that it would be useful to have a 'network' of advocates who could provide practical support, as well as a reference group for more strategic support. The youth development worker in Yorkshire suggested that ongoing open dialogue and joint planning at strategic points might also be helpful.

Balance of youth work and community development

For the youth development workers, 'community work' with local and area meetings and other Quaker stakeholders proved a greater proportion of the work than expected. This was found to be necessary in order

to enable the wider Quaker community to include, host and accept young people. [See section 3.3 for estimated proportions of work.] One central staff member suggested that in future the youth development worker job description be altered so that it laid out 'more about community building, rather than just youth work'.

Two local stakeholders, a parent and a youth development worker felt that more all-age work would be desirable.

> I feel the one thing that's been learnt is that separating the teens out from everyone else is actually a little bit divisive and does remove them from the life of the meeting. If they're too separated out then there's no chance to engage them. (Local stakeholder, West region)

> What I should have done in hindsight is organised more all-age events. So instead of the ceilidh, I should have said, 'Tell you what, myself and the young people will plan an event and invite adults from the meeting. (Youth development worker, Yorkshire)

Balance of in-reach, outreach and community service

Youth development workers were keen to move into more outreach and community service work. However, it is not clear whether local meetings were enthusiastic about this approach or were prepared for change if more young people with looser links to Quakers were to become engaged with the meeting.

> I think they [local stakeholders] mostly just want it to be heavily weighted on their young people being supported. However, they also want other young people to want to join in but don't really value how that would happen … We could do outreach, but then when we had reached people in the community that then wanted to access the meeting, I don't think the meeting is ready to receive them. (Youth development worker, Yorkshire)

Local support groups agreed to trial some more outreach and community service, but did not initially see it as a priority. In interviews, staff and local stakeholders were clear that to them outreach was not about evangelising, or just about trying to recruit people, but about offering a Quaker presence in the community, along with providing community service in some cases.

Working with other initiatives

The potential for youth development workers to work more closely with local development workers was raised several times as a possibility for future regions.

One youth development worker noted an overlap in roles, as a portion of the work they were carrying out with local and area meetings was general development work, and meetings sometimes approached them with general queries, which they signposted on:

> Some people in meetings here expressed that some of their members have issues with mental health, so I signposted to the mental health empowerment officer [at BYM], which was useful. (Youth development worker, West region)

Given the specific skills needed for youth work, it may be that collaborative arrangements between youth workers and local development workers may be more effective than one individual attempting to cover everything.

One parent also suggested strengthening links with other non-Quaker youth workers locally

Recommendations

Recommendations from the evaluator team

These recommendations have been developed by the evaluator team, drawing on the outcomes of a workshop held with key local and national stakeholders on 5 September 2020 as well as the evaluation findings.

Short-term (final year of the project)
1. Continue to develop and test online engagement with young people.
2. Consider whether online engagement should extend beyond the two key regions, in the short term.
3. Pilot outreach and community service opportunities, if circumstances change to allow in-person work.
4. Continue to build community in local and area meetings to support all-age and intergenerational worship, social interaction and community.
5. Develop a theory of change for the future direction of the project, or otherwise clarify understandings of success, engagement and value for money.

Medium-term – beyond the end of this project cycle

This evaluation report is intended to support decision-making beyond the end of this project cycle. The key considerations for such decision-making are outlined in Chapter 8 of this report.

If the decision is made to continue or expand paid youth work, the following recommendations are suggested.

6. Review and simplify governance and support structures both locally and nationally.
7. Create systems for strong collaborative working with local development workers, particularly where regions overlap.
8. Clarify and manage expectations among parents and local stakeholders, especially where regions are larger.
9. Work with Quaker communities in the regions to understand their aspirations for all-age community and their understanding of what may need to change to become an all-age community.
10. Review the youth worker job description to emphasise the need for and importance of community building.
11. Codify good practice and learning from the pilot, drawing key learning from this evaluation report as well as the expertise and skills of staff and stakeholders, so that future work begins on a foundation of good practice.

Recommendations from CYP team

In parallel with the evaluation team, the CYP team at BYM developed a series of recommendations arising from their understanding of the report and workshop, which are reproduced here.

It is recommended that BYM:

1. Recognise that modelling of values, expectations, skills, equality and inclusion in youth work (children/family work) is skilled and professional work.
2. Continue to develop relationships between local youth workers and 'national' staff team: Continue to employ both youth workers both regionally and nationally. There is huge benefit from different perspectives of national and local; both are needed to develop relationships and expertise, build on the volunteer base, support young people at events and aid young people's transition to national work. Experience of regional work aids support for other regions without a worker to provide better youth provision within their Quaker communities. Relationships also need to be continued with other BYM/ Woodbrooke staff to watermark children/young people's and family work throughout all engagement and provision.
3. Measure work in value, not just numbers attending.
4. Host Quaker activities for young people. To support young people in Quaker communities, both within local meetings and across regions, there needs to be provision for work that is:
    a. ongoing
    b. one off
    c. face to face
    d. online
    e. residential work,
    - which can be carried out by national staff and by accompanying local friends

5. There should be both direct provision for young people and intergenerational development work within Quaker communities, this could be done alongside local development workers.
6. Developing all-age business meetings. Work is needed with area meetings to develop and support provision of methods of engagement that promote all-age attendance and participation in area and regional business.
7. Watermark youth work as an essential consideration in Quaker provision, alongside that for children, families, young adults, equality and diversity, so we can accompany Quaker communities in their journey to be more inclusive and welcoming.
8. Continue to develop transition work which allows for more flexible work between young people and young adults (NB safeguarding)
9. Continue to Support Volunteer Development. Hold regular twice-yearly training within many regions to spread skills, so work can be supported and carried out by wider pool of volunteers.
10. Develop links with Quaker Schools and support the connection between Quaker schools and their local Quaker communities.
11. Continue transition work between children/young people and young people/young adults.
12. Continue online youth work training/accompanying volunteers
13. Support families.
14. Fundraise so that regional workers can be employed to do above 10 steps.

If a paid local youth work position was to be set up, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. The support group is set up by a simpler structure of a trustee/ CYP advocate from each Area meeting in the group holding the youth worker and a fluid involvement of young people.

2. Consultation with young people is carried out when work is to happen in a particular local or area meeting.

3. This work might be in conjunction with consultation work with Elders/Overseers/children and young people's committees and would involve the CYP advocate.

4. Memorandum of Understanding should be set up before (paid) worker is in place to aid clarity of expectations for local friends.

5. Office Space Office space: ensure the worker has company, office space with others either other Quakers or youth workers preferably. imperative that IT equipment is sufficient.

6. GDPR work with local data protection officer within area or regional meetings and with date protection staff at BYM to make most of lists and contacts.

7. A focus on non-Quaker Youth work in summer or working with national events e.g. YMG. Explore support for regional events.

Suggested role description and model for paid regional youth work

- Youth worker to be based in a hub.
- Run a regular monthly youth group in up to 4 places where there are existing numbers of teenagers.
- Run an online group fortnightly for each of these groups alternately with the physical group.
- Run online group(s) for more remote young people fortnightly, perhaps for different ages.
- Work with a Meeting to engage young people in the locality with youth work e.g. supporting refugee young people and engaging them through football.
- Support an All-Age Area Meeting; one per year for each Area Meeting in the region
- Support national work through online support meetings to share expertise and learning from others involved in Quaker youth work.
- Support local children's camp/holiday so one residential per year is for children up to age 13.
- Support young people's programme at Area Meeting residential
- Work with 11-18s primarily but support transition from children's work and into adulthood.
- Work with CYP advocates to support them and identify other areas of work.
- Supported by small team of trustees and by CYP advocates/others who are active in CYP work in the region.
- Connect with other CYP and Quaker youth work staff for regular training, exploration and work development.

Visit www.quaker.org.uk/cyp for more information on our youth development work.
You can contact our Youth, Children & Families team at cypadmin@quaker.org.uk
or by calling 0207 663 1160.