



Quaker Peace & Social Witness

A summary of action under the care of Britain Yearly Meeting

Quakers find that their experience of worship leads them to try to change the world for the better. Many act as individuals, with others in their local meetings or through a wide range of charities and campaigning organisations. But some kinds of work are best done by Quakers in Britain acting together, and local work can benefit from liaison, resources and encouragement provided from the 'centre'.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) is a hub for local and national Quaker action for peace and justice and is committed to nonviolent social change. We support Quaker witness in local communities in Britain and overseas, and represent Quakers at national and sometimes international levels to parliaments, governments, business and the general public.

All of QPSW's work strives to reflect and express Quaker testimonies to peace and nonviolence, simplicity, equality, justice, community, sustainability, truth and integrity (see *Quaker faith & practice* 8.11). We aim to respond adventurously to leadings of the Spirit.

Much of the work described here is carried out by the team of about 20 paid staff in QPSW, based in Friends House. Their work is overseen by QPSW Central Committee, made up of 17 (15 from January 2015) appointed Friends from across Britain who give their time on a voluntary basis. It is this committee which has the responsibility for taking the strategic decisions, and in particular discerning which of Friends' many concerns should be worked on at yearly meeting level. It appoints sub-committees of Friends to oversee specific programmes of work at a more detailed level. Staff in the Communication & Services Department provide several kinds of specialist support for the QPSW work programmes.

All of these staff and committee members form part of the 'centrally managed work' of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), overseen by BYM Trustees. The Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva and the Quaker

Housing Trust link closely with QPSW and are given substantial support by BYM, but they are legally independent organisations with their own trustee bodies. Their work is nevertheless described at the end of this leaflet.

Peace work focused outside Britain

East Africa – We are working with Kenyan Quakers and other partners to build a nonviolent grassroots peace movement by helping peace activists change the core conditions that lead to violent conflict. We have trained trainers in several provinces of Kenya and we support them as they spread the tools of active nonviolence to those who want to challenge injustices. A book about African Quaker peacebuilders, *This Light that Pushes Me*, has been published and an exhibition is available to borrow. See www.quaker.org.uk/kenya.

Israel and Palestine – The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) aims for an end to the occupation. It sends volunteers – Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) – to provide protection by presence, support Israeli and Palestinian peace activists, monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and undertake advocacy. EAPPI is an international World Council of Churches programme. EAPPI UK/Ireland is a joint project of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland and other partners and is implemented by QPSW. Returned EAs are keen to speak to meetings, churches, etc. See www.quaker.org.uk/eappi.

Conciliation – We have a small team of appointed Friends, coordinated by staff, who support and strengthen key groups of local conciliators seeking to bring to an end the violent conflicts in one or two parts of the world. They keep in close touch electronically and visit the regions as needed, acting as facilitators and accompaniers of the processes of establishing peace and reconciliation. As the work is sensitive, it is not described in detail on our website.

Peace work focused within Britain

Peace Education – This work equips Quakers, and others, to promote and develop peace education in their local schools and communities, nurtures the peace education movement, creates and promotes resources and challenges militarisation. Recent publications include the *Teach Peace Pack* and *Conscience* (for use in primary schools) and *Conviction* (for secondary schools). See www.quaker.org.uk/education.

Peace campaigning and disarmament – This work aims to inspire Quakers to hear the call to action of the peace testimony, by campaigning against the growing militarisation of British society, against Trident nuclear weapons and for a peacebuilding approach to security. We also support the UK peace movement. See www.quaker.org.uk/disarm.

One-year peaceworkers – Each year we recruit people who want an opportunity to apply their commitment to working for peace, and fund a placement for each of them with an organisation working on an aspect of peace in Britain or overseas. In 2014/15 there are three based in Britain, one in Burundi and – for the first time – one in Congo (DRC). They are often invited to speak to local meetings. See www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw-placements-and-peaceworkers.

Turning the Tide – This work is about using the power of nonviolence to ‘turn the tide’ of injustice, oppression and disempowerment and to build an inclusive, sustainable and fair world. We seek to improve people’s understanding of nonviolence and their ability to use its tools and methods to take effective steps towards that goal. We do this by offering workshops, resources and advice. We are in the process of re-focusing the work so that it offers ongoing support for Quaker meetings and groups that want to make changes in the world. See www.turning-the-tide.org.

Justice work focused mainly in Britain

Economic Justice – We are increasingly focusing on assisting Quakers and others to explore what sort of economic system is needed if we are to live within the constraints of the Earth’s natural resources. We provide resources on economic justice in the UK and internationally, such as newsletters, briefings and presentations. We have also developed, with partners the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, the new website www.yourfaithyourfinance.org. See also www.quaker.org.uk/economic-justice.

Sustainability – We aim to drive and support action and reflection, to help BYM become a low-carbon, sustainable community, as agreed by Yearly Meeting Gathering 2011. We help Quakers and others to live more environmentally sustainable lives and to explore the connections between sustainability, economics and peace. We seek to influence governments and others, to help transform Britain into a more sustainable society. See www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability-peace.

We have added a staff member to strengthen links among Friends and support their actions on economics and sustainability.

Criminal justice – Quakers have a longstanding historic involvement with the criminal justice system. This continues today with a commitment by Quakers to encourage greater compassion within the criminal justice system at all levels, from the effect upon individuals to government policy. Recent publications include a discussion framework for Friends, ‘Why Prison?’, and a briefing on how to offer practical help to families and friends of someone in prison. See www.quaker.org.uk/crime-community-justice.

Housing – Quaker Housing Trust (QHT) is the yearly meeting’s own housing charity: a practical response to a spiritual concern. Through loans, grants and advice QHT supports projects that are meeting the housing needs of people who are often overlooked. Created as the national channel through which Friends can directly put their own money into social housing, QHT receives no money from Quaker central funds. But QPSW provides the part-time staff support for this work as a further reflection of the yearly meeting’s concern for housing issues in its corporate work. See www.qht.org.uk.

Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Geneva

A team of 11 staff, including three one-year Programme Assistants, engage with the UN agencies based in Geneva (and to some extent in Bonn and Rome) to help the UN work effectively for peace and justice. They currently focus on Human Impacts of Climate Change, Peace & Disarmament, Food & Sustainability and Human Rights & Refugees. They work closely with QUNO New York, which is part of American Friends Service Committee. See www.quno.org.

Helen Drewery, July 2014