

Peace Pathways – Report to ECAM May 2024

This report covers developments with the Peace Pathways peace education project since we reported last to ECAM in May 2023. Looking back at the report from last year we can say that it's been a positive and exciting year. Much of what we were aiming towards in our last report has been achieved and more, though a few assumptions and aims have not come to fruition yet.

We continue to focus on inputs for primary schools in Key Stage 2 (Juniors), with three main strands:

- a) **Peaceful Schools** – 6 sessions which can be delivered as a course or individual sessions, covering inner peace, building peaceful relationships and being part of a peaceful community based on the materials developed by the Mid Wales Peaceful Schools (Quaker) project.
- b) **Handling Conflicts Well**, based on the sessions we developed and delivered before the pandemic.
- c) **Peer mediation training** (see below)

In addition, we can also offer stand-alone sessions for secondary schools if approached.

Team members and recruitment

As reported last year, the project had regrouped post COVID with a core group consisting of Gill Alcock, Rachel Lewis and Phoebe Spence (all of whom are founder members) plus five new recruits - Sue Pounder, Jan Vulliamy, Véronique Pin Fat, Michelle St John and Ali Ronan. All have been involved in design and/or delivery of session as facilitators or observers. Véronique, in addition, has been heavily involved in delivery of peer mediation for CRESST (the Quaker-founded peace education project in Sheffield).

However there are limiting factors which means in practice that the pool of facilitators is smaller than it seems. Rachel, our most highly skilled and experienced facilitator, has very limited capacity at the moment. Jan and Sue focussing on project operations. Véronique has contributed greatly but has now stepped back to focus on other commitments.

On the plus side, we are delighted to welcome three new trainee facilitators: Liz Ayres and Gill Smith (both from Crewe & Nantwich meeting) and Laurel (a non-Quaker with a strong background in mediation), all of whom attended the recent Peer Mediation training.

Delivery in Schools

In the last report we said that we wanted to focus on primary schools, and hoped in particular to find a local school with whom we could develop a “whole school approach”, that is, an in- depth commitment to peaceful approaches throughout the school.

Initially we hoped this would be in the Stockport area, but we learned that Stockport council already has its own initiative for peace education, and funds a staff member to work with Stockport schools on restorative approaches.

However we were approached by two primary schools in the Warrington area – one via QPSW Peace Education, the other through word of mouth.

The first was **St Thomas' C.E. Primary School, Stockton Heath, Warrington**, who asked us to contribute to their Peace Week in early September. We delivered sessions on 'Understanding Conflict' and 'Handling Conflict Well' to each of their KS2 (Junior) classes over two days. The feedback we received from both pupils and staff was very positive, but so far we have not had any further contact from the school.

We were then asked by **St Basil's Catholic Primary School in Hough Green, Widnes** to come into their school in January as part of a two day 'Peace Focus' which is part of a wider commitment in the school to embedding restorative practices and becoming a more peaceful school. We ran two days of sessions, covering every single class from Reception to Year 6, and again these were warmly received.

The school has a strong commitment to peace, and subsequently asked us to come back to set up a Peer Mediation scheme in the school. This involves training pupils in Year 5 (aged 9-10) to act as mediators in playground disputes. It is a way of embedding skills of conflict resolution within a school community and is especially good for resolving the kind of frequent, low level conflicts and squabbles that happen daily in schools (and elsewhere!) and would normally take up a great deal of staff time.

The Peer Mediation training is taking place in April and May and we are already having further conversations with the school about peace education work with particular classes in autumn.

St Basil's is proving an excellent school for us to work with since they are committed to a whole school approach, and have also done a great deal of work already around restorative approaches, and social and emotional literacy. It shows just how much a school can achieve when peace is at the heart of everything they do.

A further bonus is that St Basil's is part of a network of Catholic primary schools in the Archdiocese of Liverpool and is generating wider interest within the area. The archbishop and primary advisers visited the school while we were there, and are clearly very interested in what has been achieved.

From our project's point of view St Basil's has been the perfect setting for us to build up our own experience of delivery, and for us to pilot the experience of running peer mediation training in a school, which we hadn't had the opportunity to do before.

Focusing on two schools has been useful for this stage of our project where we are building up our capacity again. We do have other potential schools in the pipeline for when our capacity builds.

Training and Development

We were delighted to host three days of Peer Mediation training at Stockport in February. The trainer was Ben Harper, QPSW's national Mediation coordinator. We offered places to all Peace Pathway members, and also to external participants, which generated some income for the project. We provided the venue, food and refreshments and covered Ben's travel costs. The training was excellent – an intense but very exciting development which we look forward to building on.

In addition, we are offering 'in house' training for our new facilitators, and working to ensure that everyone has a chance to consolidate the learning through real-life experience.

Better Project Organisation

We have had invaluable support from Peacemakers, the long-running Quaker peace education project in Birmingham, including a dedicated two days in November for project development. Peacemakers are able to offer this because of their grant funding to develop peace education more widely in primary schools, particularly through projects like ours.

One outcome was that we redefined our groupings and roles, with clearer responsibilities for the steering group, the operations group and facilitators. This spreads the work more equally and reduces reduplication. We each have our own specific areas to focus on.

The steering group (Jan, Gill, Sue, Ali, Phoebe) focuses on strategy and policy overview. Jan clerks the group and Sue Pounder is our safeguarding lead, and also an AM Trustee. The facilitators are all those who are or will be involved in delivery – Gill A., Phoebe, Ali, Michelle, Gill S., Liz and Laurel. The operations team, currently Sue, Jan and Gill A., are dealing with the organisation, internal training, communications, finance and safeguarding aspects of the project. So far this is working well. We are also offering each other pastoral support, with Jan leading on this. We recognise the importance of team building, and opportunities to strengthen our friendships over shared lunches etc.

Safeguarding

We are currently using the main ECAM safeguarding policy, but have also adopted some procedures as suggested by Peacemakers (e.g. providing schools with photographs of the facilitators). All facilitators have DBS clearance at the appropriate level, and we will be accessing the online training offered by the NSPCC for working in educational settings. We have not had any incidents relating to delivery, and have ensured that we know who the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead is before going on site.

Financial update

We have received income from the two schools where training has been delivered (£238), plus a generous donation from South Manchester Quakers (£90). We only charged the schools our travel costs, as the sessions were part of our training experience; we are reviewing this, and the fee for the Peer Mediation training later this month will be around £500.

We have had significant expenditure since September, particularly meeting travel costs (we offer to reimburse expenses incurred for attending training and meetings as well as delivery), catering for the Peer Mediation training (lunch and refreshments for 11 over 3 days), plus buying resources. We are building up a resource bank of books and equipment, including providing copies of key books (e.g. Learning for Peace) for all project members. At the moment our outgoings total around £850, although the final total for January – June will be higher as there are some outstanding expense claims. We are very grateful to the support from ECAM, and the help of Brenda Curran and Frances Hill, AM Treasurers.

Ongoing Challenges and Aspirations

We do not yet have a very diverse group of facilitators, and this may continue to be the case whilst we rely on facilitators who are able to offer their time unpaid.

We still hope to enable schools to run their own peace education programmes (a target identified last year). This would mean delivering training to school staff but at the moment we do not have the capacity or experience to do this. To date we have delivered one twilight session for staff at St Basil's and in May Gill Alcock will be working alongside Ben Harper in delivering 2 days of Peer Mediation trainer training to a group of Manchester teachers.

We want to develop our website and social media presence, and also have more attractive and accessible promotional materials; this will be an aim for the coming year.

Gill Alcock, Sue Pounder

07/05/2024