

REPORTS

Area Meeting March 2017

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Forced migration: How can Quakers respond?

Julia Horn (Stockport meeting).

The conference took place in early February 2017, at Woodbrooke. The issue of forced migration is a tested concern for Friends-it has been a problem for us for many years. This was a very "full" conference in many respects. About 90 people were registered, and there were twelve workshops to choose from. The Cadbury room was full to overflowing, with people, energy, compassion and hope. East Cheshire Area Meeting had three delegates in attendance, so we were able to choose a number of different workshops in order to gain the most information. Each delegate will bring their ideas, observations and report to their Local Meetings and contacts. Anne attended Pragmatic engagement of the spirit and City of sanctuary, creating a culture of welcome. I attended workshops on the Immigration Act 2016 and enforced destitution Til reported back from a play about forced migration, and the personal suffering that this causes. The key speakers gave us facts, context and history of the forced migration crisis, which will go into our local meetings. The atmosphere felt sad, but hopeful. Regular meeting for worship sustained us and the silence was welcome.

The conference had a clear connection with Quaker central structures and European Quakers. Law, Human Rights and the causes of migration were our focus for the weekend. We held an awareness of injustice from a spiritual perspective.

Current responses.

These range from Food Banks and spare room projects to large political movements. Our responses begin with the refusal to create the "hostile environment" that Theresa May has demanded. The most consistent issue over the weekend was that of working with other faith groups/belief based groups and political movements, in order to make short term imaginative projects into structural changes.

Levels of response.

Every day personal responses like welcoming migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are the starting point. Small daily

interactions may be more powerful than large gestures and discussions. Using current political structures to challenge beliefs and attitudes are at the next level. After this, freedom of information requests about where “taxes” and fees collected from forced migrants go to, how much they raise and what they are used for may help to inform discussion. At the wider level, arms trading, conflict/war, climate change and economics may form a discussion about the structural causes of forced migration, and who is ultimately responsible for many people having to leave their homes in fear and poverty.

Conclusion.

We can respond by caring about the individual people who become our neighbours and colleagues. We can consider how the new laws risk turning us into criminals, if we hold out a hand of friendship to a person who does not have legal rights to remain. We can question the government, the media and people in power about how they treat people in need-whether strangers, or people from a different group. We can refuse to create a hostile environment for anyone, because our world is already far too hostile.

Forced Migration: How can Quakers respond?

Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network conference, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 3-5 February 2017

Like many Friends, I (Till Geiger) have been appalled by the plight of the Syrian refugees over the past few years and become increasingly concerned about the wider “migrant crisis” in Europe. Equally worrying has been the fact that the rising public concern about this issue has contributed to the rise of populist nationalism in many countries and arguably leading to the Brexit vote in last June’s referendum. The migrant crisis and referendum result has pushed the questions of ‘who belongs?’ and ‘who should belong?’ to the top of the political agenda making this conference particularly timely. Since 23 June 2016, I have personally become concerned about being possibly forced to leave Britain after living and making my home here for over thirty years. Anxieties fueled by the recent decisions of the Trump administration reflecting the general hostile environment towards refugees and (forced) migrants. My personal concerns about these issues led me to attend the QARN Forced Migration conference at the beginning of February.

At the conference, about 100 Friends reflected on the current work undertaken by Quakers and others in this field, attended workshops to learn more about different aspects of the issues, and discern how Quakers should respond. These issues and concerns directly relate to many of our shared testimonies of peace, truth, equality, and social justice. I was heartened to learn about the work of Quakers are doing in this field. For example, the Quaker Council for European Affairs and the Quaker United Nations Office are publishing helpful reports providing valuable information as well as campaigning for refugee and migrant rights at international level. At a local level, many Friends are helping to establish cities of sanctuary transforming the hostile environment into one of welcome and personal support for many refugees and asylum seekers. This work has been documented in a recently published QCEA/QARN report entitled ‘Quaker faith in action: Friends’ work in the area of forced migration’ (available at: <https://www.qcea.org/2017/01/new-report-on-european-quakers-response-to-forced-migration/>). The report shows that there many things that we can do individually to help refugees.

For me, a highlight of the conference was the performance of the new play “The Bundle” by Journeyman Theatre which retold the asylum case of a

Chechen woman who fled with her children to Britain. This harrowing play brought home to me the personal dimension of forced migration.

The deliberations at the conferences helped me to make sense of current developments and to gain a better understanding of current government policy which is deliberately creating a hostile environment for refugees, asylum seekers, non-European migrants and more recently EU migrants. As part of the hostile environment, these policies regard all asylum seekers as potentially illegal migrants despite the protections afforded to them under the Refugee Conventions. The shared concern about the growing government's hostile environment led the attendees to adopt a strong minute calling for a Quaker Statement on Forced Migration which I would urge all Friends to read (available at: <http://www.qarn.org.uk/homepage/minute-from-the-forced-migration-how-can-quakers-respond-conference-5-february-2017/>).

Notes on Workshops:

Anne Baker wrote:

Workshop 1 - Pragmatic Engagement of the Spirit - Charles Tauber (by Skype)

Charles talked about the importance of recognising and treating those affected by the experience of being a refugee, their journey, their treatment and complexity of settling into a new country/community, and those involved in helping (volunteers etc). He described how the effects of dealing with the traumas of refugees can lead to serious mental health issues. He has developed a training programme which can be delivered on line - or free in host cities/towns (with a contribution towards expenses) - Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET).

Workshop 2 - City of Sanctuary - creating a culture of welcome - Barbara Forbes of QARN

Barbara invited participants to talk about their experience of being involved with a CoA, and encouraged questioning within the group to share knowledge, best practice, opportunities etc. for those areas thinking of embarking on the process or developing activities locally. Swansea was cited as probably the most advanced and active. See www.cityofsantuary.org

Till Geiger

Workshop 1 - **Immigration Act 2016 - confronting the "hostile environment"**

In this workshop, Barbara and David Forbes of QARN traced the origins of the government's policy to create a "hostile environment for illegal

migrants" including asylum-seekers. This attack on asylum-seekers led to the creation of an identifiable class of "foreigners" including permanent residents and European citizens. Drawing on his experience of advising asylum seekers, David highlighted the draconian measures of the 2016 Immigration Act and urged us to defend the most vulnerable (i.e. the asylum-seekers). The workshop brought home to me the pernicious nature of current government policy and the urgent need to resist the further tightening of immigration legislation in line with recent pronouncements of government ministers.

Workshop 2 - Cities of Sanctuary

Like Anne, I attended this workshop facilitated by Barbara Forbes. Not involved myself in a City of Sanctuary, I was inspired by the actions of many cities to make refugees and asylum seekers welcome and support them in practical ways.

Suggestions for Action

- 1) Lobbying of MPs on these issues
Immigration legislation, arguing for Britain to do more in terms of accepting refugees, questioning the use of foreign aid budget to support refugees and asylum seekers in Britain.
- 2) Filing Freedom of Information requests
To establish to what use the Health Service Charge is being put;
Treasury Solicitor about the retrospective application of law;
Local Authority: Policies on Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- 3) Support QARN in discerning its statement on Quaker Policy on Asylum and Refugees. Possible organise further Listening Tour event within AM
- 4) Fund or help to fund places for refugee children at Quaker schools.
- 5) Organise performance of 'The Bundle' by the Journeyman Theatre to raise awareness.

Report of Northern Friends Peace Board, Bolton, March 4th, 2017

Reports from working groups

a) Sustainable Security

Barry Mills has spoken to a written report from the group's meeting of February 28, 2017. We note the proposals for a number of workshop activities and support the group in developing its work along these lines outlined in the report. Practical skills will be encouraged in future work. We have been reminded that nationally Friends House have people working on the media and NFPB can add a local dimension to this work. Janet Fenton has told us that in Scotland there have been moves to help groups with media work.

We also note that members of the group are willing to continue to serve on this group. Barry has said that new members would be welcome, and also feedback on the work being done. We are grateful for the work that this group has undertaken over recent years and are pleased to confirm that we would like its members to continue its work, as well as inviting other interested Friends to contact the NFPB office if they would like to contribute to this strand of our work.

b) Nuclear Weapons /Barrow

A small group met on 17th February and a report has been circulated. Jocelyn Gaskell has spoken to this report. The group feels that, with the decision now made concerning the renewal of Trident, that NFPB might usefully focus on: encouraging our government directly, and encouraging others to put pressure on the Government, to play an active and positive role in UN negotiations towards a Global Nuclear Weapons Ban treaty linking with other groups and organisations in promoting arms conversion and alternative employment to address climate change. A video of The Lucas Plan conference is available, and was recommended by Jocelyn (<http://lucasplan.org.uk/videos-from-the-conference/>). She has said that she feels that involvement in arms conversion initiatives is important.

Janet Fenton will be participating as a WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) representative at the UN Global Weapons Ban Treaty negotiations. She welcomed the proposal of support from the NFPB: there is support for this present in the Executive and the Board. She asked and received agreement for the Board to give her a travelling minute to the Meeting which she attends in New York.

We encourage Friends to take action in contacting their MPs or relevant ministers in the Government, putting the case for active and constructive participation by the UK in the negotiations towards a Global Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. In particular we should ask how they intend to take seriously the government's commitment to the non-proliferation treaty.

We support the small group in exploring the other avenues it has identified in its report and look forward to hearing further from them about how this work might be taken forward perhaps by input into the work of a QPSW peace worker.

The Group is small and would be delighted for more members to join. Janet would be happy to join the group.

QPSW One-year peace-worker

We have welcomed Hannah Larn who is currently working at the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Foundation for Peace in Warrington as one of the three QPSW Peaceworkers appointed this year. Hannah has said she enjoys informing Quakers of the work she is doing. The project gives young people a start in peace work and helps them to make contacts in that world throughout the country.

Hannah has told us that the other two peace workers are based one in Lancaster and one in London with different organisations. The workers get training in August and then have the rest of a 12 month period in their placements.

In 1993 two boys were killed by an IRA bomb in Warrington. One of them was 12 year old Tim Parry whose parents chose to respond with a search for understanding the conflict which gave rise to the death of their son. They then founded the Foundation for Peace in the name of their son and the other boy killed. They then raised £5m for a peace centre in Warrington. The focus of the Foundation is on prevention and relief, and it becomes involved with support for groups and individuals who have been involved with violence leading to deaths: recently the victims of the shooting in Sousse, Tunisia have been helped.

Hannah has told us that the prevention work has taken place at schools and with women's groups. The expression of different opinions is encouraged by open discussion and games. Delivery is mostly in the North of England. Connections have been made with EU and UN institutions. Hannah told us she has worked with a boy band, Mr Meanor; she organised a tour of the band all over the North. Hannah has experienced the different responses of young people; *Think About It* is a Youtube video on the project.

She told us that she is now working in Liverpool with young women looking at conflict resolution and leadership skills for young people who will go on to encourage discussion on their communities on these issues. She is tying in Quaker approaches with the Foundation's material. She is also working on Small Steps for Peace with young children in schools with a booklet – Good can come from evil. On 5th July in the Peace Centre a peace conference is being organised by Hannah and colleagues for young people and which will include a session led by Quakers. Other sessions will involve making peace cranes and encouraging young people to become involved in peace work through politics.

Forced Migration

Tim Gee, who has joined us for this meeting, is currently employed by QPSW to research and consult with Friends about the best way of coordinating and supporting Quaker work related to forced migration. Our meeting today comes at a time when

Tim is visiting Friends around the country to outline some of the issues being considered and invite responses to a number of questions:

What is not being done that needs doing (or needs doing more)?

Which of these things are Quakers particularly well placed, willing and able to do?

Who are the partners with whom Quakers could work?

How can we ensure this programme works 'with not for' forced migrants?

How can we ensure that our programme offers a systemic critique?

How can a QPSW programme at a national level help work being done by Friends in their localities?

Work with and for those seeking sanctuary has been part of the peace witness of NFPB members for a number of years so we have welcomed this opportunity to reflect on the issues in the wider context of Quaker witness and action.

Tim has told us that he has come to QPSW from Christian Aid where he worked on the issue of refugees. He has informed us that Meeting for Sufferings established that more Quaker meetings are working with refugees than any other question which has led to this QPSW initiative. Tim told us he has been visiting Meetings all over the North and has established a list of questions to ask Meetings referred to above. He has shared with us some of the varied, unusual and daring initiatives which Local Meetings have undertaken. He has said that his visits and subsequent conversations have left him inspired by what he has learned and ready to return to Friends House with ideas of how to take these ideas further in project plans. As a start, the third week of June will be refugee week and about 20 Quaker events have already been proposed.

Report prepared by Christopher Bagley, being a shortened version of the NFPB Clerk's Minute.