



Quaker Disability Equality Group A Quaker Recognised Body Annual Report 2019-2020

Approved at the AGM on 19:08:2020

Our last Annual Report covered 2018 and the first half of 2019, anticipating holding another AGM at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath. As you know, that was not to be! However, having discovered the possibility of on-line audio-visual meetings, we have planned an AGM to take place on 19 August 2020, at 6pm via Zoom. And we hope to hold the next AGM face-to-face at Yearly Meeting Gathering, in Bath in 2021.

This annual report therefore covers the period from mid-June 2019 to mid-June 2020.

Our Committee



The committee, left to right, Gill, Ade, Bob, Shirley, Lisa, Alethea, Liz, Erica (who took the photo) and Pam (who was not present).

Committee membership in 2019/20 was:

- Liz Anderton - Co-Clerk until the AGM in July 2019
- Gill Coffin - Co-Clerk
- Shirley Torrens - Co-Clerk from the AGM onwards
- Pam Brunt - Treasurer
- Bob Pickup
- Lisa Shend'ge

- Erica Thomas
- Alethea Wigzell
- Ade (Adrian) Couper

We thank Liz Anderton for her service on the Committee and as its co-clerk.

Due to the difficulties created by the lockdown, Nominations Committee has not made any nominations to the Committee for 2020-21, and all Committee members will continue for an additional year.

Our Nominations Committee during 2019/20 was Bob Pickup, Gill Reid and Eleanor Tew. Eleanor will stand down at the AGM and we will be recommending Liz Anderton to join the Committee.

Our membership

We have kept in touch with our membership during the year via

- our email list,
- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/quakerdisabilityequality/>), and
- our website (<https://quakerdisabilitygroup.org.uk>).

We thank Jackie Fowler, who has continued to maintain the website, and Erica Thomas who looks after our Facebook pages.

The number of people who like our Facebook page has now grown to 302, and 320 people follow the page. We are aware that this includes a number of people from around the world and not just in the UK.

On 21st February 2020 we launched a linked private Facebook group, 'Quaker Disability Equality Discussion Group', to give a place where Friends may discuss matters that affect us. We thank Ade Couper and Erica Thomas for setting up and acting as administrators for this group, which has now grown to 84 members. We are able to share discussions that arise on either our email network, or the Facebook group with one another, enabling increased sharing of ideas and experiences.

The following issues have been raised by members using social media recently:

- Neurodiversity and autism spectrum – and Quakers
- Coping with Quaker silence
- Inclusive communications

Our QDEG membership list now numbers 104, although we are aware that we need to check quite how many of those on the list wish to remain as members! We will endeavour to write to all on the list over the next year, which may result in a smaller membership by the time we next report.

Annual General Meeting 2018-19

Our 2018-19 AGM (held at Friends House in July 2019) brought forward ideas for future activity:

- Run diversity and disability courses
- Workshops on disability for LMs/AMs
- Share experience of disability with LMs/AMs

- Advertise these on our website
- Offer speakers on privilege, diversity and inclusion, focussing on disability
- Training for members to run workshops
- Liaise more closely with Quaker Life
- Courses or events for people with a learning disability or Alzheimer's
- Work more with people with disabilities
- Link with other faith groups focussing on disability

A lot of good ideas, which the committee has not yet prioritised!

Yearly Meeting 2019

Following Britain Yearly Meeting in May, we sent detailed comments about accessibility to Friends House, and, not having had a reply, have followed this up again recently.

Yearly Meeting 2020

Our now redundant plan for Yearly Meeting Gathering in August 2020 was to focus on neurodiversity – the term neurodiversity refers to variations in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions in a non-pathological sense. It includes Attention Deficit Disorders, Autism, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia.

We began to think about neurodiversity following a post on one of our social media sites about coping with silence in Quaker worship. This concern was picked up by the membership and discussed online. Committee member Erica Thomas pulled together ideas from the contributions received, and her paper suggesting strategies for coping with silence is available on request.

Diversity and Inclusion

In January 2020, a number of QDEG members attended the National Gathering on Diversity and Inclusion at Woodbrooke. This was an amazing and inspiring event, with some controversy, some challenge, and much to inspire us for the future. It covered issues around gender identity, race, and disability.

The second of two keynote speakers, Fiona MacMillan, spoke to the title “Just as I Am: Disability, experience and identity.” Fiona is a trustee of Inclusive Church and chairs the Disability Advisory Group at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. She is a wheelchair user and has Tourette's syndrome.

Fiona started by reminding us of one of the key messages of the disabled people's movement, “Nothing About Us Without Us”. Too often it feels like non-disabled people make the decisions about what disabled people want or need, without actually asking those of us directly affected by such decisions. She gave us a little insight into her own experiences and journey through disability.

Sadly, for us, Edwina Peart, BYM's Inclusion and Diversity Co-ordinator, who co-led this Conference with Mark Russ, has moved on to further study, and we wish her well for the future.

Mental Health

We continue to keep links open with Quaker mental health activities and organisations. Members of the Committee attended the Quaker Life Mental Health Forum (which is an annual day conference funded by the Retreat Benevolent Fund), and the Mental Health Core Cluster Group, but, sadly, the conference on “Quaker Approaches to Mental Health” scheduled for April was cancelled, due to the lockdown. We also hope to link with a newly forming group, Quaker Action on Mental Health.

Human Rights and Corvid-19

We contributed to the Quaker submission to the House of Commons Select Committee of Inquiry into the Impact of the Government’s Response to Coronavirus on Human Rights, ensuring that disabled people’s rights were included in Friends’ submission.

Financial position

Our financial year is 1st January to 31st December. Our latest examined accounts are for 2019 (attached) and show an income of £1,136 from donations and expenditure of £3,582 giving an overall deficit of £2,447. There were three face to face meetings of the committee felt to be necessary with several new committee members and all were in Friends House which accounts for the deficit. This was anticipated, and reserves covered it. The bank balance is still a healthy, for the time being, £4,990

This year, if lockdown had not disrupted our normal activities, we would again be facing a deficit and needing to find ways of increasing the level of supporting donations. So far donations have been £445 with only the website maintenance charge as our expenditure since our face-to-face meeting was cancelled. Hence the current bank balance is £5,325. For budgeting, we are likely to use on-line meetings more and perhaps hold only one face to face meeting during the year. Thus, there is a breathing space before serious fundraising will be required – but it will come.

Looking ahead

We feel we have had a successful year, but, as you can see from reading this, there is a lot more that we could do. If you feel led to assist, perhaps by writing, researching, listening, or joining/ leading a sub-group, then please get in touch. And we continue to welcome ideas and support from members in taking our aim forward, to “promote Disability Equality within the Quaker context”.



Gill Coffin

Co-clerk

19:08:2020

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