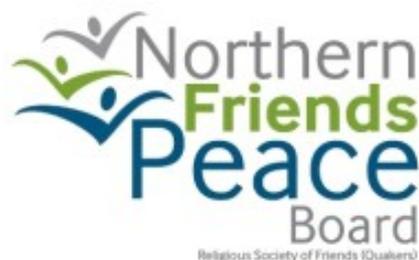


Building Peace in Diverse Britain

Summary Report of a Northern Friends Peace Board project



Even before the riots in some Northern English towns in 2001, there was a concern about a lack of peace in some towns and cities. Contributory factors included economic marginalisation, cuts to youth services, a culture of violence and communities that were divided, with insufficient meaningful contact between different social and ethnic groups.

At a consultation in 2001, a number of areas were identified that it was felt Quakers in particular could play a positive role. These included supporting listening and dialogue and other positive peace-building approaches, as well as taking action against racism and prejudice.



To this end, we ran a series of conferences and events between 2005 and 2009. That work gave us an opportunity to learn with and from partner organisations, with Quakers and non-Quakers, to share some of our thinking with a wider audience and to support those most concerned to challenge prejudice and to promote peaceful relations within and between communities.

In a leaflet we published in 2006, encouraging Friends to reflect and act on these concerns, we quoted Advices and Queries (passages 33) as below, the words of which have continued to guide and inform our work.

33. Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?



In 2010 we were successful in getting additional funding, from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, to take this concern forward in new ways. We initially organised two one-day events, entitled **'Building Peace in Diverse Britain'** and **'Talking Together'**, in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The first brought a wide range of people together, building on contacts that we had built up through earlier work on these concerns. The second was focused more specifically on dialogue and conversation, providing a space for two organisations – St Ethelburga's and Talk for a Change – to share their learning and understanding.

Young People... It has been clear throughout our work on peace concerns generally and on these issues in particular, that Friends and other participants recognised how important it is to support and engage with young people. The next phase of the project therefore developed that focus. At events on the theme of Young People, Peace and Community, in 2014 and 2015, young people from groups on both sides of the Pennines engaged in lively discussion, participated in workshops and gave short presentations about their activities. For a considerable number of these it was the first time that they had met with young people from other towns and in some cases from other cultural/faith traditions. Through the different workshops, activities and discussion, the following emerged as areas of importance for the young participants, in terms of building peace in our communities.

- Being ignored and not taken seriously
- Cultural diversity
- Age discrimination
- Bullying
- Stereotypes and prejudice
- Human rights
- Gender equality
- Relationships with the police
- Facilities and activities for young people



At all of our events we have sought, in a sensitive way, to provide a model of working that encompasses our commitment to equality and peace and shares something of the Quaker approach, including at times periods of silence.

We have **reviewed** the work as a whole during the summer of 2015, a time of growing concern about Islamophobia and national identity/ties, and about the difficulties facing young people in today's society. NFPB minuted, in part:

"... what are the seeds of conflict in our own communities, how can we nurture the conditions of peace? How can we build relationships and travel alongside others? We will explore ways that this vital work around these areas of concern can continue with renewed vigour."

The following are some points of **learning** from our own work that might be helpful to Quakers and others:

- There is great value in paying attention to the process and creating the right environment for good listening.
- We have much to learn from other community projects that seek to build and promote better relationships.
- This area of peace work, as so many others, is long-term.
- It is important that young peoples' voices and experiences are heard.

A longer version of this report is available to download from our website via:

<http://nfpb.org.uk/publications/reports-updates-newsletters>

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