

Friargate Meeting
Children and Young Peoples' Committee
Report on Activity during 2017

Children and Young Peoples' Committee met on five occasions this year, and have organised a Children's Meeting each week. Attendance at the Meetings continues to vary, with a maximum of around 10 attending, but we usually see around 6 children. The ages range from babies to around 11 years: we notice that attendance does tend to drop off once children are in secondary school. This reflects the fact that the children are very busy, and often have conflicting commitments on a Sunday.

In the first half of the year we tried to establish a monthly Meeting for older children, and let parents know that it would be available. We did get one or two showing interest, but not enough to sustain the group, which has lapsed. We keep in mind the possible need to break into two groups, and we encourage Volunteers to come prepared for the possibility of older children meeting apart from the younger ones if it seems appropriate.

There is a quite a large pool of children who attend at some times, so the group will be different most weeks. Nevertheless, the children have established good friendly relationships, and are willing to join in together with our activities. They are able to manage differences in interests and aptitudes, and I have been impressed by the positive attitude the children all seem to bring to the Meeting.

This year has seen a growing need for Creche provision as we have had two or three babies attending quite frequently. Alongside this we have continued to run a single group for all the older children, although this remains challenging to Volunteers both because of the numbers who may attend, and also because of the range of age and interests. Volunteers have been very flexible and mutually supportive, and willing to help out if needed on extra occasions.

We have been using Fox Room for our Meetings. We find both the children and their parents like the feeling of ownership that room allows, and the fact that they can socialise after their meeting without being interrupted by the rest of the Meeting. In addition, it gives the Volunteers a chance to clear up without feeling in the way. Nevertheless, we do occasionally hold the Children's Meeting in the Penn room, and are confident that the Meeting will continue to support us in making use of whatever parts of the Meeting House seem most appropriate to the needs of the Children and their Meeting.

I am grateful to Sally Harding for taking a lead in organising the Children's notice board in the Penn Room, which allows us to display some of the work the Children produce in their Meeting.

We have found it useful to plan our activities around some quite broad topic areas. This year we have looked at New Beginnings; Parables and Bible

Stories; Earth, Sea and Sky; and Christmas. In addition, we focus on the major festivals as they occur – I hope you have had the experience of children leading some programmed worship, which takes place at Easter, Harvest, and at Christmas.

The Volunteers have continued to think about what is the intention behind the Children's Meetings, and to balance the need for child-friendly care with the wish to convey some sense of what it is to live a Quaker life. We hope we achieve this, largely through the way the activities are presented rather than through didactic teaching.

We run the Children's Meetings in line with the Area Meeting Safeguarding Policy. All Meetings are supervised by two Volunteers, both known to the Meeting. One is designated the 'Safeguarding Volunteer', and is responsible for the welfare of the Children: they will have been through our induction process including seeking references, a brief interview to ensure they understand what Safeguarding is about, and obtaining a DBS check. We think this allows us to ensure the welfare of the Children, while allowing new Volunteers to join the rota without being put off by the process. It also allows people to occasionally help with the Children's Meetings if they don't want to be part of the regular rota.

We recruit Volunteers from the Meeting by personal invitation. We will only approach people who are established in the Meeting or who we know well for other reasons. The Children and Young Peoples' Committee continuously keeps in mind the need to recruit new Volunteers, and I am very pleased that we have had two or three new people join the rota over the past year.

They have replaced long-standing members of the Volunteer group who have put down this responsibility. I am very grateful for their contribution – usually over many years. It is pleasing that we currently have a group of Volunteers of a wide range of experience and ages, and it does feel like the future staffing of the Children's Meetings is as assured as it can be.

I am very grateful to the continuing commitment and energy of all our Volunteers. They have worked with a very wide age range and, at times, large numbers of children. It is a testament to their success that the children continue to attend and appear to enjoy their time together. I hope that we are offering a stimulating and enjoyable experience to the Children of the Meeting.

This is my final report as Convenor of the Children and Young Peoples' Committee, as I am putting this role down. I am both pleased and grateful that Bronwen Gray has agreed to take over, and I am confident that CYPC will be well supported by her.

Chris Holman
Convenor CYPC
January 2018