

Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs Conference 13 – 15 July 2018 –

Signposts for the soul: Pathways through addiction

On Friday evening after dinner, we all met up for an introduction to the conference programme followed by a brief, quiet and relaxing epilogue.

Saturday morning began with a half hour meeting for worship following which we took part in a session called 'Open Space' which began with us being asked to suggest subjects for group discussions on the subject of 'Signposts for the soul – Which way now, How can we use our experiences to illuminate our future pathways?'. We were then each asked to choose three discussion groups to attend during the session. The discussion topics were as follow:

- How to overcome the stigma of addiction in a closed-minded culture
- What part does meditation play in recovery?
- The subconscious – How do we access it, how do we use it? *
- What do you do when all avenues of support and help have been exhausted?
- Decriminalisation of drugs such as cannabis
- Difficulties in relationships between the addicted person, their adult offspring and children
- Does love conquer all (but tough love)?
- Substitution in addiction *
- The increasing and hidden problem of porn addiction
- Holding in the light (people in addiction)
- Digital addiction
- What are the turning points?
- How can we influence Government's policies in our areas of concern? *
- Spiritual condition
- Ideas on prevention
- The drama triangle
- What you resist persists (Jung)
- Alternatives to AA
- The role of consumerism with addiction
- Addiction related to power in society and society's attitude to suffering

Each group produced a set of 'Headlines of our conversation' outlining the discussion held and 'Possible future paths' suggestions of actions to be taken to address issues raised.

I took part in the sessions *d and found that all three provided thought provoking and valuable opportunities for listening to other participants' views and to share my views and my experiences of alcoholism and of recovery where these could be of use to the conversations.

After this energetic and energising session we broke for lunch followed by a period of free time. We then once again broke into groups and attended one of the following activities:

- An Open Fellowship (AA) Meeting
- A Meeting for Close Others (AI Anon)
- An Art Workshop on Guided Imagery

I attended the Open Fellowship Meeting where a fellow alcoholic and I shared our experiences of addiction and recovery including the influence of the 12 step programme. This was followed by responses from the rest of the group, ending with the serenity prayer.

After dinner there was the following choice of activities:

- Light entertainment provided by members of the facilitation team and attendees
- Reading and Reflection - Inspirational texts and poetry
- Attendance and discussion on a number of TED Talks (Technology, Education, Design) which were U tube clips on the following subjects:

1 My Stroke of Insight – Jill Bolte Taylor - An account of an experience of stroke that gives insight, in a simple way, to the way our brain works

https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight

Topics for discussion - What impressed us most about this talk, what are the implications for understanding, accessing and developing spiritual experience – life beyond thinking?

2 Hardwiring Happiness - Dr Rick Hanson – An account of taking control of ‘how you are’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpuDyGgleh0>

Topics for discussion – What is one message from this talk, Does this have any relevance for developing resilience, could it contribute to avoiding or changing addictive experience.

Unfortunately we did not have time for the other two clips but I include them for information:

3 After watching this, your brain will not be the same – Dr Lara Boyd - Introducing the concept of neuroplasticity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNHBMFCzznE>

Topics for discussion – What can you use from this talk, does it have any implication for responding to our concerns?

4 Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma – Compassion fatigue and how it affects us

Topic for discussion – What application does this talk have for you?

This session was followed once again by a brief epilogue to end the day.

On the last morning, after breakfast, we met as a large group to review and reflect on the weekend. Feedback from the group was very positive especially about the success of the Open Space session. I would concur with what seemed to be the consensus, that the conference had been enriched through the attendance of individuals with a wide range of knowledge and experiences but with common goals and interests. I would thoroughly recommend this conference to anyone who would be interested in attending a lively and energised workshop on what can be, for all those touched by addiction, such a serious issue.

Maggie Coxon

13 August 2018.