

Case example 2

Clerk of Bolton local meeting

Appealing to children and young people

The Vibrancy worker for the North West (Wendy) worked with the clerk of Bolton local meeting, providing support in two ways: for the meeting as a whole and for the clerk as a role-holder to support her own meeting.

The meeting was struggling with how best to appeal to children and young people. Three children were part of the meeting, but they came infrequently. With both parents working and weekends a time for family, 'having to come to meeting on a Sunday is not always an easy thing to do'.

Wendy suggested various strategies that the meeting could use to engage children, and the meeting tried out quite a few of the ideas; for example:

We decided we'd invite the children to come on the third Sunday meeting for worship each month as it's followed by a shared lunch, so it was easier to get them to come to that. She also suggested we use the time with the children not just to stay in the meeting house but also to go outside, and in general to be more relaxed.

One challenge they found was that some of the adults understandably wanted to stay in the meeting and experience worship themselves, rather than go out to be with the children. Wendy encouraged them to do more all-age worship, so that 'it's all more integrated'. The children started coming to the meeting for much longer periods, to help them feel more involved in the meeting.

The change was a slow process, particularly as the children did not come every month. Over the summer it was also hard to get all the children together. However, the clerk did feel that 'it's been working'. Her granddaughter was one of the children associated with the meeting and she had heard that at school 'she told the teachers that she was a Quaker. That's how she was identifying, which is new.'

The clerk also took some action herself to appeal to young people. Inspired by a Vibrancy event she attended at Swarthmoor Hall, she decided that she needed to learn more about websites and social media.



I'm in my 70s and I'm not wanting to be involved in social media, but I do understand that is the way young people find information. I'm in the process of speaking to one of our wardens' children who uses social media a lot ... about how we create a website more focused on young people.

Wendy also supported the clerk individually and as a member of the nominations committee. Wendy had a unique viewpoint as she was always active in the area meeting as a Quaker herself and knew people in the local meetings within it.

It was interesting to get her take on who might be able to take on service in areas where I hadn't seen them. It was about seeing the bigger picture ... She would suggest people who I might never have thought of.

Wendy's position of being 'someone I know personally, but who's not of the meeting' had been helpful to the clerk if she needed to 'talk things over' or 'be pointed in the direction of where help might be available'.

After discussions, including this wider perspective on people's gifts, the meeting 'had new people taking up roles within Bolton'. The meeting had tried a clerking team in the past, which did not work out. But they now had more time, and a supported process, to consider people's gifts and were going to try having a new clerking team.

This time it's less of an emergency

appointment. I've thought more about it and sat with it more before I suggested names to the rest of the committee.

The biggest personal change for the clerk was in how the process of discernment unfolded:

Wendy has helped me see the whole thing as a process of trusting what we are as Quakers – trusting that the right names would be given to me if I waited on a leading.

Wendy gave the clerk and groups at the meeting the support to follow their feeling that:

This is what we are as Quakers, this is what we believe and this is how we work ... We don't have to employ business methods because that's not what we are.

Finding the sweet spot between trusting, holding Quaker traditions close and also being flexible and trying new things was at the heart of the work of this local meeting with Vibrancy:

While Wendy has said on the one hand to 'trust the process', I know that doesn't mean to say we always have to do things at the same time or on the same day, for example. She's given us the freedom to think outside of the box and do things that Quakers, or at least Bolton Quakers, haven't done before.



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