

Case example 5

North West

Sustaining engagement with local meetings

At least two individuals at different meetings in the North West reported how their Vibrancy development worker, Wendy, had acted as a personal support; when they were feeling despondent, she had been instrumental in their coming back to, or sticking with, their meetings.

Wendy came into my life, and into other people's lives, when we were spiritually feeling very, very low. There was some trouble and a few of us had actually left the meeting.

Although Vibrancy exists to support meetings as a whole, an important role that has emerged through the pilot has been in supporting individual Friends within those meetings, sometimes bringing their energy and passions back to the meeting:

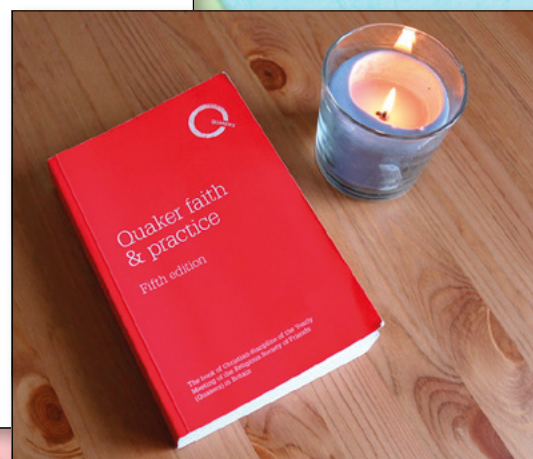
I thought Vibrancy was about meetings. But for me the issue wasn't really about the meeting it was about me feeling that, having been a Quaker all my life, I was absolutely at sea ... I was thinking about someone rescuing me when I was drowning.

We were full of energy and wanted to help our local and area meeting and hit a brick wall. We received some nasty comments and misunderstanding of what we were trying to do. We stopped going to Quaker meetings. We were in the spiritual desert for years and we didn't come back until two years ago.

After hearing from one local meeting that some Friends had stopped attending, Wendy got in touch with those individuals and asked if she could visit them.

Wendy came here and talked to me for quite a long time. She became a friend. Whenever she was passing she would come and see me. She gave me a terrific amount of support spiritually. She almost saved my spiritual life.

Wendy's support to individual Friends who had left the meeting, or were considering it, consisted of three main things: listening, upholding and encouraging.



The first thing she did was literally just listen. That might sound a bit ridiculous. But if you're feeling very upset and feeling you have worked terrifically hard for something and given a lot then it's important that someone will just listen to what happened.

We teetered on the brink of thinking we'd made a bad decision coming back. But talking to Wendy and getting her encouragement to stick with it has helped us to stay on ... She helped us to know that we shouldn't walk away again, that we should stay and be part of the change.

For one person Wendy's role became akin to that of an elder or overseer, with her own small local meeting unable to provide that role:

I didn't feel I had anybody like an elder or overseer who was looking after me. Wendy took over that role. Although she wasn't in my area I knew that I could contact her at any time ... I've [been unwell] and Wendy was the only person who knew about it.

Wendy was seen by some as a 'wise counsellor' and, when one individual needed guidance around something that was happening at her local meeting, she emailed Wendy:

She emailed me back and said, 'Read Quaker Faith and Practice'. I thought, 'Oh, come on Wendy, I always read Quaker Faith and Practice, don't talk daft,' and I did sit down properly and read it again. That 'Be still and cool' – George Fox's section – I suddenly found it helped and she had given me the right advice.

Both individuals attended regional events organised by Wendy, where they gathered new ideas and felt inspired. One said:

It was a turning point for me. That weekend I was at a crossroads as to whether I went back to meeting or I didn't. It helped me to make the decision.

They have both either been encouraged to stay with, or rejoin, their local meetings:

She's helped me to stick at it and stay with it. From a personal, spiritual point of view that's really very important.

I have rejoined because of Wendy and now I host a study group and help with opening a meeting ... Some of my friends have never gone back. Wendy has always said that she would meet them too and make herself available if they ever wanted to talk to her.



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