

Vibrancy in meetings programme evaluation

How local support helps
Quaker communities thrive:
learning for the future

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February 2020



Foreword

The Vibrancy in Meetings programme, 2016-19, aimed to transform the support offered to Quaker meetings and to help re-shape the way in which Woodbrooke and Britain Yearly Meeting worked. It has fully realised both objectives. We are delighted by the way in which the learning from the programme is being taken forward in the new 'Integrated Strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities'. The programme could not have succeeded without the inspiration and dedication of the local development team, the commitment of Friends in the four pilot areas, and the support of staff and committees in Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke. We are very grateful to them all, and for the opportunity to serve as members of the Steering Group which guided the programme.

This report has been ably prepared by NCVO Charities Evaluation Services, who have been skilled and sympathetic partners throughout the pilot. It contains all the main lessons from the Vibrancy programme, which we hope will be useful to all those working on successor arrangements. Along with the Case examples, it is a treasure trove of insights and encouragement.

The Steering Group has reflected in particular on those topics which we think would benefit from further investigation.

The area of paid and unpaid service is one that we hope will be explored further in the successor programme. The worship and witness of British Quakers is a result of effort and commitment by both paid and unpaid

workers. Indeed, Friends often move between these categories at different stages of their lives. The success of the new strategy for Supporting Quaker Communities will depend on harnessing the skills and experience of unpaid Friends alongside the paid local development workers.

We also hope that encouraging innovation and initiative will be at the forefront of the work of the new local development teams. Quaker processes and Quaker discipline are vital foundations, but they are a platform for building the future, not a straitjacket. The way in which Quaker communities in Britain flourish in the future will be different from the past.

Finally, we hope that the experience of the Vibrancy programme will inform and assist Woodbrooke and BYM in their future development. One of the reasons for the programme was that the two national organisations and their staff appeared insufficiently connected with each other and with Quaker communities. This disconnection has begun to change, helped in part by the programme. We hope that this vital process will continue creatively.

The opportunity to serve the Yearly Meeting through the Vibrancy programme has been exciting and enriching. The programme has been a movement of the Spirit, for all those involved. We are privileged to have made a contribution.

Roger Clarke
Clerk to the Steering Group

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1. Summary Findings

The Vibrancy in Meetings programme (Vibrancy) was a three-year pilot starting 2016. Through Vibrancy, Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Woodbrooke) hoped to learn whether having locally based paid workers helped Quaker meetings to become stronger.

The programme worked with almost all the local and area meetings in its areas, responding to needs reactively as they arose. Over half the needs brought to Vibrancy were to do with Quaker discipline or community.

Vibrancy staff delivered much of the direct support to meetings, for example: support to review existing activities; facilitating events; support for major projects; connecting Friends with others. Listening, encouraging and reassuring were also an important part of the Vibrancy offer. There was some signposting to existing support from BYM and Woodbrooke. More substantial joint working was effective where it took place but various challenges, combined with lack of time on all sides, limited how much was done.

Almost all Friends supported by Vibrancy rated it very highly. They particularly valued the skills of the Vibrancy staff team and that Vibrancy support was long term, face to face and provided locally.

Vibrancy aimed to make meetings stronger, but the evaluation also found significant outcomes for individuals. Many Friends who received help from Vibrancy felt more supported. Some felt more connected to other meetings and the wider Quaker community. Many reported new ideas; some talked of being given 'permission' to do things differently. Some role-holders reported

increased confidence, and their roles became more manageable and enjoyable.

Almost all Friends supported by Vibrancy said there had been some changes to meetings as a result. For some meetings the changes were small, and some were still embryonic, while other meetings changed significantly. Most changes for meetings were in the areas of Quaker discipline and community, where Vibrancy focused most work. Outcomes were also seen in the areas of active values, collaboration and visibility. Although the Vibrancy team reported doing relatively small amounts of work around meeting for worship, Friends still reported some changes in this area. By working on early, practical issues, Vibrancy may have affected the spiritual life of the meeting.

There were a number of significant outcomes for BYM and Woodbrooke.

- The success of the Vibrancy pilot led BYM and Woodbrooke to decide to roll out a model of **Meeting-Centred Support** based on Vibrancy over the next few years.¹
- BYM and Woodbrooke agreed to experiment with more regional working.
- BYM and Woodbrooke began working on a joint strategy for supporting Quaker communities in future, to reduce duplication and/or gaps in provision across the two organisations.

Transferring programme learning into Woodbrooke and BYM services was limited during the pilot. However, some strong instances of shared learning indicate real opportunity for future development.

1. www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/meeting-centred-support

2. Introduction

2.1 About Vibrancy

Vibrancy in Meetings (Vibrancy) was a three-year pilot programme offering support to Quaker meetings. It was provided jointly by the national body of Quakers, Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Woodbrooke) between March 2016 and December 2019. The work was funded through legacies to BYM and with resources and facilities from Woodbrooke. To deliver the programme, four part-time development workers were located in four regions in different parts of Britain, covering roughly a quarter of Quaker meetings in Britain. They were managed by a national programme coordinator.

Through Vibrancy, the two organisations hoped to learn whether having locally based paid workers would improve support provision for local Quakers and enable local Quaker meetings to be strong, connected, confident and sustainable, and to contribute to a vibrant yearly meeting.

2.2 This report

From October 2016 to March 2020 NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (NCVO CES) acted as the evaluation partner for the Vibrancy programme. The comprehensive 'main report', March 2019, which was used for deciding the future of the programme, is available [here](#).² This report summarises learning from the main report for a wider Quaker audience and other faith initiatives, and updates it with new learning and findings from 2019.

2.3 Data sources

This report draws on a range of key data sources (more detail is given in the main report).

- Vibrancy staff monitoring spreadsheets.
- Phone and face-to-face interviews with Vibrancy and other staff from BYM and Woodbrooke.
- A survey from summer 2018, primarily completed online, of 141 Friends supported by Vibrancy (50% response rate). All Vibrancy areas were represented, and responses came from 16 of 18 area meetings and 41 of 132 local meetings in Vibrancy areas.
- Fifty-three interviews with 44 Friends, carried out in three tranches throughout the pilot.
- A review of other monitoring data from BYM and Woodbrooke in late 2018. There are some limitations to the data (more detail can be found in the main report)
- All interviewees were self-selecting and suggested by staff, which may have introduced bias.
- There were some differences in the way the staff team completed monitoring spreadsheets.
- Our survey to Friends sometimes had several individual responses from a single meeting. Data on how Friends felt about Vibrancy and on outcomes for individuals was analysed by individual response. Data on outcomes for meetings was analysed by meeting. We counted each positive reporting of an outcome, even where other respondents did not report it. The reasons for not reporting are unknown: views may not be shared by all, or individual respondents may not have been aware of the support or its outcome.

2. www.woodbrooke.org.uk/learn/about/vibrancy-in-meetings

3. What Vibrancy has delivered

3.1 Work with Friends

3.1.1 Contacts

Over the pilot, from March 2016 to September 2019, the Vibrancy team worked with 80% of the 132 local meetings and all of the 18 area meetings in the four areas.

The team recorded almost 1,000 contacts during the pilot; a contact was a significant interaction with a meeting, intended to make a difference to a meeting or an individual.



About two-thirds of the contacts were with individual Friends; these were often, but not always, role-holders. The rest of Vibrancy work was with groups, for example whole local or area meetings, trustees or a planning subgroup. As the pilot progressed, the Vibrancy team did a greater variety of work within each meeting and began to work with more contacts within individual meetings.

Around 40% of the contacts were with area meetings or made at regional level. Regional

work grew during the final year of the pilot, and the team also started doing a small amount of work outside their usual areas, responding to growing interest from Friends.

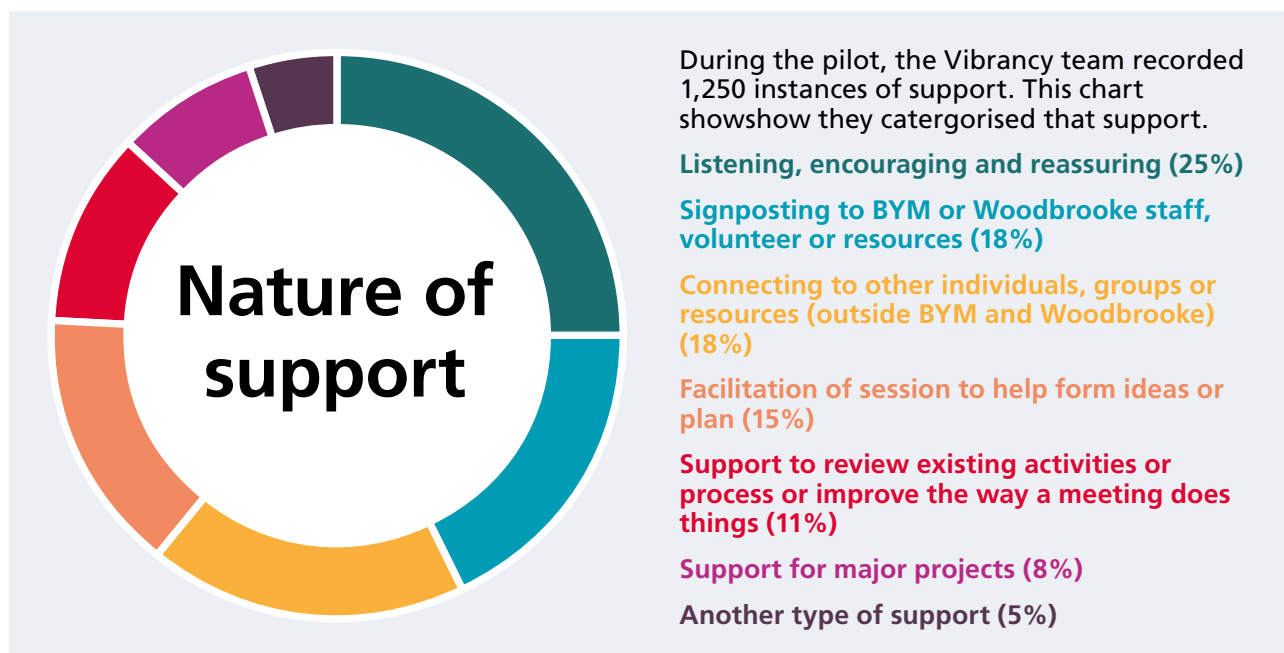
3.1.2 Why Friends sought help from Vibrancy

Most Vibrancy work was reactive, responding to Friends' needs as they arose. Friends came to Vibrancy with a range of needs. These were recorded against the areas listed in *Our Faith in the Future*.³ As the pilot progressed, the Vibrancy team noted that meetings dipped in and out of Vibrancy support and the work became deeper, in part as a reflection of the interconnected nature of Friends' issues.

About half of the 1,542 issues Friends raised with Vibrancy during the pilot period were to



3. www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future#heading-1



do with *community* (for example: making meetings accessible, finding ways to spend time together, attracting diverse members) or *Quaker discipline* (for example: using Quaker processes, handling conflict, supporting and finding role-holders, managing property or finances). The nature of the needs identified by Friends remained relatively consistent across the programme.

3.1.3 How Vibrancy worked with Friends

Type of support offered

It was initially anticipated that Vibrancy would do a lot of signposting to BYM or Woodbrooke, but as the pilot developed the Vibrancy team delivered much of the support to Friends directly. Once need was established, Vibrancy workers provided a range of support to Friends to meet those needs, including facilitating sessions to help form ideas or plans, support for major projects and signposting to BYM and Woodbrooke or others. Listening, encouraging and reassuring – usually provided alongside another form of support

During the pilot, the Vibrancy team recorded 1,250 instances of support. This chart shows how they categorised that support.

Listening, encouraging and reassuring (25%)

Signposting to BYM or Woodbrooke staff, volunteer or resources (18%)

Connecting to other individuals, groups or resources (outside BYM and Woodbrooke) (18%)

Facilitation of session to help form ideas or plan (15%)

Support to review existing activities or process or improve the way a meeting does things (11%)

Support for major projects (8%)

Another type of support (5%)

– were always an important part of the Vibrancy offer.

Over the course of the pilot, the team recorded 1,250 instances of support given to Friends to meet presenting needs. The chart above shows the types of support recorded by the team as a proportion of all support given. The amount of time spent is not shown.

Direct support to meetings

The table on the following page illustrates the varied nature of the support Vibrancy gave to meetings.

Linking Friends up with BYM and Woodbrooke

Vibrancy staff worked indirectly with central BYM and Woodbrooke staff fairly regularly, as part of their role to link Friends to central structures and to increase awareness of resources available.

This included helping Friends work with national frameworks like Our Faith in the Future, or with BYM's diversity work. In 2019, one Friend explained how their Vibrancy

What Vibrancy has delivered

Focus of support	Example
Running meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Helping to set up a group to manage conflicts. ● Support in new ways to run or structure meetings, including simpler meetings. ● Helping meetings use new technology, like Zoom, with the potential to overcome some issues of distance and travel. ● Support around buildings. (See Case example 1.) ● Facilitating a visioning process.
Individual Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting individuals to come back to, or stick with, their meetings when they had encountered difficulties. (See Case example 5.)
Roles and role-holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support with nominations and filling roles. ● Helping to find new ways to share out tasks, including shared eldership to reduce workload. (See Case example 3.) ● Support to role-holders and people leading on projects. ● Directly contributing to groups: in one area joining a group run by the area meeting for clerks, becoming a 'valuable contributing member of the group'.
Taking action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting subgroups, for example helping to raise funds for meeting activities. ● Taking part in social action.
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Suggesting strategies for engaging children and families. (See Case example 2.) ● Facilitating the idea and execution of alternative meeting times or venues.
Run events or meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support to run events, for example on sustainability and climate change. ● Facilitating meetings and events, for example on making meetings appropriate for people of all ages. ● Facilitating trustee away days for area meetings.
Connecting meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encouraging local meetings to support and learn from each other and attend each other's meetings. ● Arranging for trustees from different area meetings to meet and look at working together. ● Encouraging area meetings to look at what others were doing. ● Coordinating events at which Friends from different meetings could meet. ● Sharing examples of how meetings had managed situations or problems. ● Encouraging Friends to collaborate with Friends from other local meetings or areas – for example, when participating in social action.
Regional linking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bringing together a group of people who had done the same courses. ● Running cross-regional events, including residentials. ● Working with Friends to create connections and shared events across a region. (See Case example 6.)

What Vibrancy has delivered

worker had been ‘pointing out work being done centrally on websites, so not to reinvent the wheel’.

Another Friend interviewee explained how their Vibrancy worker ‘either has the answer or knows someone who has or asks the right questions. She can also provide the overview of what’s going on and that link to what’s happening centrally’.

Occasionally, the Vibrancy team arranged for and hosted central staff when they visited meetings. The team also arranged for some Friends to visit Friends House. In interview, some Friends noted that both of these examples of support were appreciated and helpful.

I was quite concerned that quite a number of Friends in our area meeting had no contact with Friends House and had the impression that Friends House were just telling us what to do. With [our Vibrancy worker’s] help, we arranged for a small group of Friends to go up and spend the day in Friends House talking to staff, looking at the library and the records, etc., to give them a feeling of what the wider picture looked like.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Working with BYM and Woodbrooke to support meetings

On occasion the Vibrancy team worked alongside central staff, offering support to individual meetings. For example, Vibrancy staff worked with central BYM staff to support meetings on property management and conflict.

In our 2018 interviews and survey, respondents described using support from Vibrancy, BYM and Woodbrooke. Some Friends explained how this felt to them:

I see Woodbrooke’s support as more generally role related (and excellent for

that) whereas Vibrancy is about connections within a usually more accessible area, and is much more meeting specific.

(Friend survey respondent, 2018)

There are people who function at Friends House who are weighty Friends whose presence in any context would also be welcome. They’re the people who do the underlying thinking. They can function alongside Vibrancy. Vibrancy is about keeping the wheels going round.

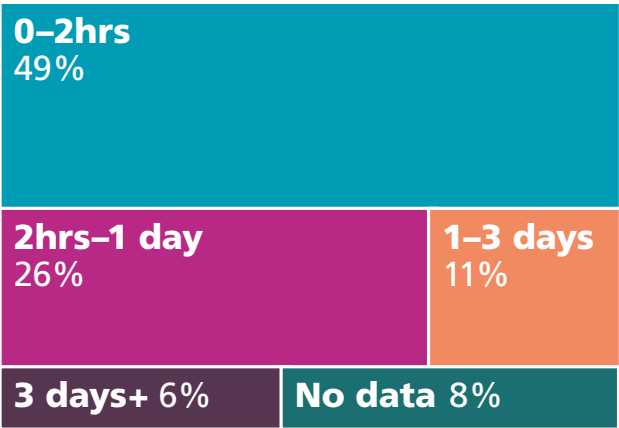
(Friend interviewee, 2018)

BYM and Woodbrooke also asked Vibrancy staff for their input to support their events and to develop resources (for example for the Simpler Meetings Project)⁴ or on internal planning. In some cases, BYM and Woodbrooke drew on the Vibrancy workers’ local knowledge, and the Vibrancy team sometimes drew on specialist knowledge from central staff.

3.1.4 Amount of support

The majority of the 970 contacts recorded during the pilot were brief, lasting up to two hours, although a significant minority were longer than a day’s worth of work (see chart below).

Much of Vibrancy support was long term. While some meetings had small amounts



4. The Simpler Meetings project (part of Quaker Life) aims to reduce the administrative burden on role-holders in area meetings to free up their time and energy. It involves a programme of support and resources primarily for role-holders in area meetings; it also aims to develop and share good practice.

What Vibrancy has delivered

of input from Vibrancy, others had in-depth support over much of the three years of the pilot and, in effect, the support from Vibrancy never had an end point

3.1.5 What Friends think of Vibrancy

Throughout this evaluation, Friends reported being very satisfied with the support received from Vibrancy. As shown in the chart to the right, almost all (96%, n=130) of the 2018 survey respondents rated the support 'excellent' (68%) or 'good' (28%). Only a handful of respondents made negative comments about support they had received, with nobody rating it as 'very poor'.

Satisfaction was partly due to the nature of the service. Friends valued the support being long term, face to face and local. This is described in more detail in section 6.1.2.



In interview, Friends had very few suggestions about possible improvements to the support they had received from Vibrancy. A few voiced concerns about the sustainability of the role (see section 3.2.3). The few suggested improvements were minor, mainly concerning the running of specific events.

3.2 Challenges in delivery

3.2.1 Explaining the Vibrancy offer

At the start of the pilot, Vibrancy staff reported that it was not always easy to communicate the Vibrancy offer, in part because they were themselves developing the service. A small number of Friends said that they could have benefited from a little more clarity at the beginning – although it was not a major issue. While some Friends liked the term 'Vibrancy', others found it 'mystifying'.

A Friend interviewee described how important it was to them for Vibrancy workers to be able to share 'some stories about what happened and how useful it's been'. Over time the team indeed developed a valuable repository of experience that workers could draw on to share with meetings. As a result, they became more trusted by, and had increased credibility with, Friends.

3.2.2 Helping meetings move on

In some cases, the meeting did not progress or move on despite support given. Usually, the Vibrancy team reported this as being due to a lack of energy or the motivation to progress.

Sometimes, this meant that the Vibrancy worker had to stop working with the meeting for a while. The team hoped that such meetings might be able to come back for support in the future; one worker noted that with the Vibrancy roles being made

What Vibrancy has delivered

permanent due to the roll out of Vibrancy (see section 7.1.1), they planned to go back to some meetings that had not engaged.

A small concern was raised by two central staff respondents and a few Friends that Vibrancy must be careful not to create dependency in meetings by being a victim of its own success. Some Friends raised the importance of how Vibrancy was initially explained to meetings: 'An important thing to make clear from the start is that Vibrancy workers will not want to help sort things out for you. They work with you ... It's much more of an enabler.'

Vibrancy workers were aware of this issue and focused on trying to get meetings to take the lead themselves. For example, one Friend said that the Vibrancy worker 'made us realise that before we started asking anyone else for help there's a lot we could do for ourselves'.

At times, the Vibrancy workers felt it was necessary to have a more significant input for a short while, rather than trying to empower the meeting to do the work themselves from the start. In interview, a few Friends noted that, while they realised this was not sustainable in the long run, their Vibrancy worker had provided hands-on support that had got the momentum going.

A few Friends suggested it might be helpful for Vibrancy to consider when and how it might be appropriate to end support with meetings. This would include ensuring that any changes started with the Vibrancy worker could be continued by the meeting or group.

3.2.3 Workload and sustainability

All the Vibrancy workers enjoyed and valued their work, and were willing to go above and beyond on occasion. However, throughout this evaluation Vibrancy staff, central BYM

and Woodbrooke staff and some Friends expressed concerns about the Vibrancy team's workload. Workload was exacerbated by: relationships and processes being developed from scratch with a new project; the part-time nature of the roles; the need to work weekends frequently; the relatively large geographical areas covered by team members; the numbers of meetings in each area.

Heavy workloads were likely to have had negative implications for the Vibrancy workers themselves. Although we are unable to assess the extent to which this might have affected delivery or outcomes, local and central team workloads is an issue that will need consideration in the planned rollout. Support from each other, and on occasion from other Friends, was helpful in coping with workload, and the Vibrancy team members reported that they became better at managing their workloads over time. This included being more selective about the work taken on and prioritising work they felt would be most effective and productive.

3.2.4 Challenges in joint working

Where there were working relationships between Vibrancy and central BYM/ Woodbrooke staff, these were often strong; shared planning work proved a very positive way to build relationships. Some staff respondents expressed enthusiasm about the possibilities offered by joint working and wanted to do more of it in future. There was a small number of instances where crossover of work areas had been challenging to manage.

The Vibrancy pilot brought about some significant outcomes for Friends, BYM and Woodbrooke (see sections 4, 5, 7). However, a number of challenges sometimes affected joint working.

What Vibrancy has delivered

● How Vibrancy was set up.

- Some respondents said that BYM was not fully ready for Vibrancy, either operationally or culturally.
- As Vibrancy was new, it took time to become clear what the pilot work would involve, and this may have made it harder for central teams to plan for.
- The placing of the team structurally within the organisation – in the Recording Clerk's office – may have limited some possibilities for shared learning and joint working.
- **The lack of formal and informal ways to communicate** was raised by a number of respondents as a barrier to sharing learning and joint working. This may have exacerbated some lack of mutual understanding of the different teams' roles, responsibilities and working practices.
- **Lack of time** on all sides limited joint working and the development of good working relationships. Some respondents felt that Vibrancy staff necessarily had to prioritise building relationships with meetings over those with central staff. Vibrancy workers and central staff both reported frustration at not being able to access sufficient time with colleagues.
- **The nature of the pilot** limited joint working. Vibrancy worker roles were dispersed and part-time, and Vibrancy only

covered a small number of areas. The relatively short timescale of the pilot meant that some central staff were not able to involve Vibrancy staff in some things, for example events planned for after the pilot.

- **Different ways of working.** Some central BYM and Woodbrooke staff planned work in detail and over the long term in order to manage a wide remit. Vibrancy workers could be nimbler and more responsive. This created some incompatibility, even at the level of finding time to meet.
- **The effect of the planned rollout of Vibrancy.** Many staff welcomed the planned rollout of Vibrancy. However, this has involved some sensitivities for staff. On the one hand, the Vibrancy workers, who in the past occasionally felt unable to communicate the full value of their work to the wider organisation, were happy that the Vibrancy approach was being supported so strongly. On the other hand, some of the relatively small sample of central staff interviewees felt that their work had been disparaged in some way. A number felt that the meeting-centred nature of the work of central staff had not been recognised. Some respondents felt that better internal communications regarding the rollout would have been helpful.

BYM and Woodbrooke are aware of these issues and they will be considered for the next stage of meeting-centred support.

4. How individual Friends have benefited

While Vibrancy aimed to make meetings stronger and more vibrant, our evaluation also found significant outcomes for individual Friends. Sometimes, personal changes happened before more tangible outcomes for meetings. The data from this section comes from two sources:

- 53 interviews with 44 Friends, carried out 2018 to 2019
- a survey in summer 2018 of 141 Friends with whom Vibrancy had worked.⁵

The main report has a more detailed discussion of methods used.

4.1 More supported and reassured

Many Friends felt more supported as a result of Vibrancy. Almost nine in ten (89%, n=130) of our 2018 survey respondents, and 30 of 44 interviewees, said the Vibrancy worker helped them to feel supported. The trustee of an area meeting explained how the Vibrancy worker had supported the meeting on managing conflict:

She didn't give me permission to not worry about it at all, but she introduced the fact that it happens and is not quite the source of shame I thought it was, and suggested I could stand back a bit from things.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

For interviewees and survey respondents, reassurance was important. Twenty-three interviewees said they felt more able to recognise their own strengths as a result of support from their Vibrancy worker:

The first time that we met, I was quite impressed by the way that she drew

attention to the good things we were doing.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

For some Friends, that support was what was needed to get things going.

What happened to us was very simple. Really, we knew what we had to do before we asked for help. It was the encouragement and support we got in taking that step that was important.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

4.1.1 Better able to support others

Support from Vibrancy made many Friends feel more able to support others. The majority (81%, n=130) of survey respondents, and 20 of our interviewees, felt that the Vibrancy worker had helped them to better support their local or area meeting or group.

4.2 Feeling more connected

Vibrancy helped Friends feel connected to others and to something larger than themselves. In interview, 27 people said that they felt more connected to BYM, Woodbrooke or the Quaker community as a result of Vibrancy support. A Friend described how a trip arranged by her Vibrancy worker helped her to feel closer to her Quakerism: 'I got a real sense of seriousness and belonging to what the Quakers are ... It was a really good thing to do to help me feel part of the community.'

In interview, 16 people said they felt more connected to other Friends or meetings, including giving examples of Vibrancy helping to 'heal some of the difficulties' between Friends, and people gaining new friendships

5. Note that there is some overlap between those interviewed and those completing the survey. Survey data therefore included responses from some of those interviewed.

How individual Friends have benefited

across meetings. Friends also reported that Vibrancy had helped them 'to feel part of a bigger group' of people. One Friend from an area meeting supported by Vibrancy commented:

[I was] feeling more that I don't have to solve it all on my own ... It's helped me look wider than just our area meeting in terms of how other people organise things ... Vibrancy teaches you you're not alone with these difficulties.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

4.3 New ideas

Over three-quarters (79%, n=129) of survey respondents said the Vibrancy worker had helped their meeting or group to generate ideas about its future direction. In interview, 16 people also said they felt they had gained new ideas from their Vibrancy worker.

A number of Friends noted that their worker had helped them think differently and question how they did things, or had suggested alternative ways forward. The workers' external view and ability to share approaches taken by other Quakers had sometimes helped with this:

She has a good way of saying, 'I'm from the outside, this is what I see.' ... She said that [my approach to a process] could take a lot of time. Looking from the outside, she was suggesting we were making it too complicated ... Someone from the edges, who is still committed, can see when things are getting more complicated than they need to be.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

Several Friends appreciated that the Vibrancy worker had let their own or their meetings' ideas emerge and had not imposed their own view on what they should do next.

For some, Vibrancy gave them permission to try new things. One local meeting member described the experience of trying out new ways of clerking after support from Vibrancy in 2019:

It's allowed me to continue my worship in the group and my participation in the group and feel more comfortable doing things in the way we're doing ... I felt I was going against my Quakerism by doing things differently, but through the process with [the Vibrancy worker] I've realised it is more flexible than I anticipated ... I've felt happier doing things that I didn't imagine beforehand would be acceptable to Quakers.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

4.4 Improving the experience of role-holders

4.4.1 Increased confidence in their roles

Some role-holders felt their confidence had increased as a result of Vibrancy support. One interviewee reported: 'There's no question about that. [The Vibrancy worker's] support has increased my confidence in clerking. I never felt alone once we'd had contact.' Another explained how the Vibrancy worker had supported them to do something different with their meeting:

It gives a legitimacy to the things we're trying to do. For example, if we were thinking of doing more experiential stuff ... if I as clerk tried to do that without [Vibrancy] support, some members of the meeting would say they didn't like the touchy-feely stuff. The fact that [the Vibrancy worker] was there and supported us helped a great deal ... Her support makes clerks and convenors who want to move in that direction more able to try.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

How individual Friends have benefited

4.4.2 Roles becoming more manageable

In interview, nine role-holders said that they felt their role had become more sustainable or manageable as a result of Vibrancy support and, in some cases, this had freed them up to get involved in new activities. One Friend explained in 2018: 'My role has become easier because the workload has reduced. That works out as being more enjoyable.'

In one local meeting, the Vibrancy worker worked closely with the treasurer and helped to set up new groups and systems as part of a major project on property. The combination of the individual support and the new systems had a positive impact on the treasurer's feelings of 'isolation' and personal 'responsibility' and on the ongoing manageability of the role. (See Case example 1.)

4.4.3 Enjoying their role more

We interviewed 16 role-holders in late 2018. Of these, 10 explained that Vibrancy support had helped them enjoy their role more; a further four said that in some way they felt better about their role. Seven interviewees also said their role was more enjoyable or they felt less lonely in it. For some respondents, improvements were about making their role easier:

It has cut down on the frustration of not knowing where to look for information. The quick linkups are very useful. For example, I was looking at our joint area meeting with Wirral and Chester. When they came to us, we had no suggestions of a speaker ... I was able to email and say, 'Remind me, who should I get in touch with and how?'

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

4.5 New energy or spiritual sustenance

In interview, seven people said that support from Vibrancy had given them new energy in their Quaker life; three said Vibrancy had given them spiritual sustenance, with one commenting that they felt 'enriched and widened'.

A few Friends told us that support from their Vibrancy worker had helped them stay within, or return to, their local meeting (see Case example 5). One explained how a residential event organised by Vibrancy had helped them make a decision to rejoin their local meeting, although some Friends had never gone back: 'It helped me to make the decision. I realised I really couldn't live without it.'

4.6 Relationship with BYM and Woodbrooke

4.6.1 Understanding of BYM and Woodbrooke among Friends

From all our interviews with Friends across the three years of the pilot, around two-thirds reported some improved understanding of BYM and Woodbrooke, or a better relationship with the two organisations, as a result of Vibrancy.

She had at her fingertips who to approach for things or what might be helpful ... Very often you do feel as though Friends House is 'down there' and our little problems are not worthy of consideration. She's probably helped me to understand that Friends House is our servant rather than our master.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

She works closely with BYM and Woodbrooke and is friends on Facebook with everyone in Friends House. That

How individual Friends have benefited

connects us to Quakers locally and nationally. She has a clear overview of what's going on for meetings in the South East. It helps us to feel we're not just [a] local meeting, but part of something bigger. She's a positive connecting influence.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

For the remaining third of our interviewees, this either was not relevant to the nature of the work Vibrancy did with them, or these Friends already had a good understanding of the organisations.

4.6.2 Friends' engagement with BYM and Woodbrooke

Vibrancy encouraged people to access central support from BYM and Woodbrooke. Survey respondents told us that they had often accessed BYM and Woodbrooke support for help with their meeting. They reported that Vibrancy had prompted this in around a third of instances; a similar finding was found in interviews.

Some interviewees (representing two area meetings, three local meetings and one representing both) told us that contact with Vibrancy had *not* changed how much their meeting accessed other information or support from BYM and Woodbrooke. Some reported already having a good relationship or understanding. On the other hand, one

interviewee said that members of their meeting still felt that 'Friends House has absolutely nothing to do with them'.

Despite Friends' comments, according to 2018 central monitoring data, there was no good evidence of an overall increase in the use of resources, for example training events or printed materials, by Friends in Vibrancy areas.⁶ This could be because:

- it would take longer for such changes to become apparent if they did occur
- Vibrancy workers were engaging in more active development work than had originally been envisaged, which might have caused less of a demand for central resources than anticipated
- BYM and Woodbrooke might have prioritised their support to non-Vibrancy areas, in order to spread resources more widely
- central monitoring data was not strong enough to show change at this level.

We found no strong evidence that Vibrancy work had affected things like donations⁷ or active engagement in central roles. There is some evidence that, in a few cases, by making appropriate connections or recommendations, Vibrancy staff contributed to people taking up national roles.

6. No strong evidence was found when we looked at donations data in late 2018. Due to issues with the data available, combined with limited capacity, we did not repeat this in 2019. This could be looked at again in future.

7. As above.

5. Benefits for meetings

In our 2018 survey and our 53 interviews with 44 Friends throughout the pilot, almost all Friends said that support from Vibrancy had improved things for their meeting. Sometimes, it was too early to know what would happen as a result of Vibrancy support, or changes were very small. Other meetings had changed significantly as a result of Vibrancy.

From the survey data, we report below on the number of meetings which had experienced an outcome in an area for which they had received Vibrancy support, against the total number of meetings receiving Vibrancy support on the same topic. Outcomes for meetings were reported by individuals – we do not know whether everyone in the meeting shared that view.

While the survey data provides an indication of change taking place in the intended outcome areas, we have analysed the qualitative data thematically to better explore the nature and extent of change in the sample interviewed.

We used **Our Faith in the Future** themes to look for changes, and this section reports first on topics where most changes were found. Vibrancy staff offered most support to meetings on community and Quaker discipline and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of changes were in these areas, so we focus on these findings here. Our **main report** contains more detailed data on more outcomes and more detail on our methods of assessing them.

5.1 Quaker discipline

Vibrancy hoped to make changes to *Quaker discipline* in meetings, including: improving support for people in or considering roles; more resilient meetings; better use of Quaker

structures, traditions and processes; better management of the meeting and its assets.

In our survey, respondents from all of the area meetings and almost all (21 of 26) of the local meetings who had received Vibrancy support in this area reported that their meeting had experienced at least one Quaker discipline outcome (a change or a planned change).

5.1.1 Stronger meetings

Some meetings became stronger as a result of Vibrancy. In interview, six interviewees reported that their meeting was more resilient as a result of Vibrancy support.

Understanding and using Quaker processes

Eight interviewees reported that their meeting was better at using Quaker structures, traditions and processes as a result of Vibrancy support. One Friend explained the worker's encouragement:

It's been about her saying ... 'This is what we are as Quakers, this is what we believe and this is how we work, and you must trust the process.'

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Some survey respondents described changes that had happened for their meetings.

- A local meeting noted that attending the 'Patterns and Examples' event for role-holders (jointly run by BYM and Woodbrooke), and receiving follow-up guidance from a Vibrancy worker, had 'transformed' their meeting for business.
- Following help from a Vibrancy worker, a local meeting was able to ensure that right ordering was followed in business meetings.

Benefits for meetings

Use of new technologies

A number of Friends told us how their Vibrancy worker had supported them with new technologies. These have real potential to help meetings mitigate problems with travel and geography by supporting remote meeting.

Supporting me to have a go at a Zoom [a platform for video, audio conferencing and chat] meeting has made a difference to me. I was really hesitant to do that, and she gave me personal tuition, making me feel more confident about having a go at new technologies.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

At first there was a certain amount of resistance. But we've done some more experiments. The newly formed sustainability group intends to do some of their meetings by Zoom and the property group intend to do some by Zoom. We've done some planning for area meetings through Zoom.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Doing things differently

A few Friends and Vibrancy staff described situations where support from Vibrancy was helping meetings to do things differently, often encouraging them to look at how things were organised in other meetings.

One meeting introduced midweek evening worship to try to encourage people who couldn't get there on a Sunday; another was searching for a new town-centre venue to hold their meetings in. Another explained how the Vibrancy worker had helped them find ways to do things differently within meetings.

She did help us to see there were a number of ways in which we could address the fact that the Quaker business method can be quite slow, for example

what we did with the minuting of meetings ... The item on the agenda is written down as one of the minute options ... then you have the discussion and the clerk will read the minute they have and adjust it in the light of the situation. So we write the options out beforehand. The clerks can then slot in what people have said and amend things, rather than look for the inspiration all in one go.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Managing conflict

Vibrancy workers reported that conflict was a common issue for meetings, and they supported a number of meetings in dealing with conflicts, sometimes alongside staff from BYM. In our survey, 14 of 29 meetings told us they had become better at handling conflict as a result of Vibrancy.

A survey respondent from a local meeting reported feeling 'far more Quakerly and confident that our actions were spirit-led and as inclusive as they could have been' following support from a Vibrancy worker around a conflict.

A Friend from a local meeting described how their Vibrancy worker had worked with the meeting over a number of sessions to help them deal with conflict. The Friend reported that, as a result, conflicts were aired and healing was taking place.

People were listened to and heard. There was clarity. We've come forward slowly. We've been through some great lows. Some friends have left the meeting – and some have returned. We are now in a happier, more stable, stronger and healthier place. We are keen to uphold each other and move on.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Benefits for meetings

One Friend told us that their Vibrancy worker had encouraged them to review the role of elders in their meeting to enable them to better handle conflict:

We've appreciated the role of elders more – how they need to be more visible and active in their roles. They traditionally just shake hands at the end of the meeting but there's also the question of their role in maintaining discipline in the meeting. Making sure that people give space and listen between contributions and avoid hurtful things – we had let that part of the role slip a bit and we're focusing on it more now.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

5.1.2 Role-holders

Support for role-holders

As a result of Vibrancy, some meetings were able to support role-holders better. Sixteen of 27 meetings in our survey, and 13 interviewees, said that Vibrancy had helped them provide more and/or better support for people in, or considering, roles. Several meetings that we spoke to were looking at ways to support their clerks better in their role, with Vibrancy support. One in particular noted that they had set up a support group for the area meeting clerk which 'helped the area meeting clerk to look at efficient ways of working'.

Some meetings were finding new ways to get tasks done. In Wrexham, Reigate and Blackburn, the Vibrancy worker helped meetings develop new ways of sharing tasks. Case example 3 explains how:

- Wrexham is using a system of shared tasks at times when the meeting comes together
- Reigate has developed a shared clerking arrangement
- Blackburn has split the treasurer role.

Finding role-holders

Of meetings in our survey that had received Quaker discipline support, almost all reported that filling roles was still difficult. However, 15 of 38 meetings in our survey, and seven interviewees, told us that their meeting had found more people to take roles, as a result of Vibrancy support. Sometimes these were a more diverse range of people. One Friend explained: 'We've been able to engage several people in roles in Quakerism where they probably wouldn't have been before.' Six also told us that Vibrancy helped them better acknowledge and use Friends' gifts in the meeting.

5.1.3 Managing property

The Vibrancy team supported a number of meetings in managing property, often in conjunction with a BYM property support worker; this was a bigger part of their work than had been anticipated. Six interviewees reported that their meeting was more confident in managing property as a result of Vibrancy support.

In a very significant piece of work, described in Case example 1, a local meeting received in-depth, long-term support from their Vibrancy worker to improve the day-to-day management of their meeting house and work on plans for development of the property.

5.2 Community

Vibrancy hoped to bring about a range of *community* changes for meetings. In our survey, respondents from all the area meetings and almost all (24 of 26) of the local meetings which had received Vibrancy support in this area reported that their meeting had experienced at least one community outcome (a change or a planned change).

Benefits for meetings

5.2.1 Getting more people engaged in meetings

As a result of Vibrancy, some Friends tried new ways to increase engagement in their meetings and to engage a more diverse group of people, although many continued to struggle with this.

In our survey, 9 of 30 meetings said they had introduced a change to make their meeting more accessible to newcomers; 17 of 31 said they had introduced new ways for existing Friends and newcomers to engage with them, such as worship opportunities or social events.

A survey response from a local meeting described how they had changed the location of their 'satellite' meeting and increased its frequency, leading to engagement with Friends and attenders who, the respondent felt, would not have come to the main meeting.

In interviews, 12 Friends told us that their meeting had developed a greater range of ways to meet and engage with the Quaker community as a result of Vibrancy support. A Friend from an area meeting that had introduced a new pattern of meetings, setting aside three of nine meetings per year to be carried out without business, explained how the new pattern permitted wider discussion:

We've called them 'being Quaker, living Quaker' days – about just having time to talk about and learn about specific issues. For instance, the recent one was hearing back from Friends who'd gone to Yearly Meeting, looking at privilege and the climate crisis and inclusion.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

Spending more time together

- In interview, seven Friends told us there was more fellowship and fun in their meeting as a result of Vibrancy support. In our survey, 17 of 39 meetings said that they were now spending more time together outside of meeting for worship. Some provided examples, such as a local meeting that had arranged lunches and social activities with others in their meeting, and an area meeting whose Vibrancy worker had supported other meetings to develop worship groups.

Membership and attender levels

It was hoped that stronger meetings might in turn increase first attender and membership levels. For many Friends, it was too early to tell whether changes made to increase access would have an effect, and there was no evidence of it from central BYM monitoring data analysed in late 2018. However, our survey data had some evidence of limited change.

- Two area meetings and four local meetings said that more children and young people were now connected to their meeting.
- Four area meetings and six local meetings said that their average attendance had increased.

In interview, seven Friends reported that people were more engaged with the meeting – usually attending more often – as a result of Vibrancy support.

We have attracted some new people to the meeting recently. I think our more positive outlook has helped us to make them feel welcome. But it's too early to know whether they will come into the meeting permanently.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Benefits for meetings

5.2.2 Diversity

The Vibrancy team reported that meetings were struggling with diversity, and they had worked with some meetings to try to address this, with evidence of some early outcomes. Sometimes this was about raising awareness:

The Vibrancy worker designed an exercise for us on inclusion and diversity and this helped us see how we were an exclusive community.

(Friend survey respondent, 2018)

In our survey, a small number of meetings reported that they had experienced greater diversity among the people involved in their meeting or group (for example, of gender, ethnicity or disability) as a result of other changes they had introduced. This was not reported by interviewees.

Children and young people

Survey respondents from 8 of 24 meetings reported making changes to improve their provision for children and young people. Examples of these changes included:

- a local meeting had moved their children's meeting to a location with better facilities
- an area meeting had run its first all-age activity involving six children; inspiration for this had come from BYM's Engaging Families conference, with the encouragement and support of the Vibrancy worker
- a meeting held specific events with activities at lunchtime which had brought in children who did not usually attend children's meetings
- a meeting had organised childcare for Sunday worship:

[The Vibrancy worker] has made people, those without young children, more aware of the need to be engaged and

responsible for children in the meeting. She's got a good group of eight to 12 people who signed up to say they're happy to have a DBS check and give some commitment to looking after children on a Sunday.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Six interviewees told us that as a result of Vibrancy support, there was a greater involvement of children, young people and young adults.

Case example 2 describes in detail the changes made by Bolton local meeting to try to make the meeting more appealing to children and young people.

5.3 Meeting for worship

Vibrancy did less work that directly supported *meeting for worship*, as the team generally focused on helping meetings with practical issues.

Some survey respondents did report positive changes in meeting for worship as a result of Vibrancy support, for example:

- taking more responsibility for wider and deeper personal and spiritual nurture
- a deeper quality of ministry at meetings
- feeling more enriched from their meeting for worship.

However, this was the area with the least change reported in interviews. None of the 44 people interviewed said that there was a deeper quality of ministry in their meeting as a result of Vibrancy support. Only five said that people in the meeting were taking more responsibility for their spiritual nurture, and only one felt that people in the meeting were more enriched by meeting for worship.

Friends did describe some other changes that had occurred as a result of Vibrancy that

Benefits for meetings

might form the starting point for later, deeper outcomes in meeting for worship.

- A local meeting had started a new group for Friends to 'share their spiritual lives'.
- An area meeting felt their Vibrancy worker had helped them generate ideas about how they could make the meeting work better spiritually.
- An area meeting had set up dedicated area meetings for worship.
- A local meeting respondent had found communication with their Vibrancy worker about spiritual topics useful in clarifying their understanding. This had given them 'a firmer basis' for their faith and increased their confidence in talking to others.

One Friend explained how practical support had helped support meeting for worship. Their local Vibrancy worker had clerked a meeting for them, which resulted in a decision to sell a meeting house. The interviewee explained: 'It could have been a difficult meeting, but it wasn't. It revived the area meeting and the spiritual life of the meeting.'

The changes reported in meeting for worship may be in part an indirect result of Vibrancy work on practical issues, although cause and effect here needs more investigation.

5.4 Active values

Support around *active values* was not requested from Vibrancy workers as often as support on community or Quaker discipline. However, in our survey, respondents from all the area meetings and from nine of 14 local meetings who had received Vibrancy support in this area said their meeting had experienced at least one active values

outcome (a change or a planned change). This may be in part because active values outcomes included more confidence or skills to take action on issues, as well as more action being taken.

As a result of Vibrancy, some meetings had become better able to take action on issues of importance to them. For example, eight of 17 meetings in our survey, and five interviewees, reported more action taken on social issues.

A Vibrancy worker linked with people across the locality interested in commemorating conscientious objectors. This included working with someone who had written a book on the topic (see Case example 6). A member of the same meeting explained that, as a result:

An annual pilgrimage along the conscientious objectors' road has been agreed. With [the Vibrancy worker's] encouragement [the attender who had written a book about it] also managed to get a small memorial put in place and we're planning to hold an annual meeting for worship there. It's something that has rippled out ... At that time, he wasn't greatly involved with Friends and it is wonderful he has since become a member.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Survey respondents gave examples of the social action they had engaged in, with Vibrancy support.

- Four meetings had worked closely with other local groups to support refugee families.
- Two meetings reported taking action against fracking.

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- An area meeting reported more active engagement with peace programmes.
- A local meeting had developed plans for a 'faith in action' morning to exchange news.
- An area meeting asked local meetings to produce sustainability plans.

5.5 Collaboration

In our survey, respondents from all 12 area meetings and 12 of 14 local meetings who had received Vibrancy support in this area said their meeting had experienced at least one collaboration outcome (a change or a planned change). Anticipated collaboration outcomes included more confidence and openness within meetings towards collaboration, as well as more collaboration projects being undertaken.

As a result of Vibrancy, some meetings collaborated more, both with other Quakers and with non-Quaker groups or organisations. For example, seven Friends interviewees, and 14 of 19 meetings in our survey, reported more shared projects with other meetings or organisations.

Through [the Vibrancy worker] I've been making links with other local meetings. At area meeting last Saturday, when we were talking about nominations, one of the things I said was: 'Why don't local meeting clerks once or twice a year meet up and talk about issues in their local meeting?' I suggested we could talk about what's made clerking more comfortable, little tricks people have to help us along. Lots of people thought that's a good idea and why didn't we think of that before! So we'll be doing more collaboration in future.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

A significant collaborative project involved creating regional connections across area meetings in the South West is described in Case example 6. The Vibrancy worker in this case supported two area meetings to reform a regional committee and run joint events.

5.6 Visibility

In our survey, respondents from six of seven area meetings and 13 of 16 local meetings who had received Vibrancy support in this area said their meeting had experienced at least one visibility outcome (a change or a planned change). Anticipated visibility outcomes included more confidence in expressing Quaker beliefs and views externally, more outreach and more local visibility.

As a result of Vibrancy, a few meetings reported becoming more visible outside the Quaker community. For example, five interviewees, and 8 of 17 meetings in our survey, told us their meeting was undertaking more outreach activities.

The few visibility projects described to us by Friends remained in early stages of development. However, some showed promise, as the two following cases demonstrate:

I've been meeting up with [the Vibrancy worker] at area meeting. We've been thinking, with another Friend from [another local] meeting, about how we might hold meetings for attenders and enquirers – either as a day or a residential, to give an opportunity for learning about the Quaker way and sharing what we can with people who are interested. It would be quite basic and simple to bring in a lovely sense of the fellowship that is possible ... We've been creating a plan

Benefits for meetings

together and offering ourselves to facilitate the day ... Sometimes outreach is one of the hardest things.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

A refugee support organisation took on some office space in the meeting house until offered alternative space by their funder. We are also hosting a community refugee support group. It is my hope that Syrian refugees will see the meeting house as a resource but, also because of the prayer space, other Muslim groups will use and get to know the meeting house. This we feel is a very positive move. The Vibrancy worker was very helpful in getting us to think about who was available in the town and making approaches to those people.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

6. What affects change in meetings

Our evaluation found a range of factors that influenced change. The skills and accessibility of the Vibrancy workers, and their personal faith, were important. The nature of Vibrancy – long term, face to face and local – were all important to Friends. Barriers to change included lack of time or energy in meetings, and the small numbers of people involved.

6.1 Enablers to change in meetings

6.1.1 The Vibrancy workers

Skills

Survey respondents really valued the skills of the Vibrancy development workers. For example, all 2018 survey respondents rated the worker as approachable, and the majority said the worker was knowledgeable and had met their needs. A 2019 Friend interviewee said of her Vibrancy worker: 'She's got so many skills. It's a joy working with her.'

Several respondents appreciated the workers' ability to listen effectively to Friends and understand the issues, with some commenting that the workers had been sensitive and patient while doing so. Listening was seen as the prerequisite to understanding needs and providing effective support, leading to solutions. One 2018 survey respondent explained: '[The Vibrancy worker] has a remarkable skill in hearing what people are trying to say and clarifying their purpose and effectiveness.' A 2019 interviewee said they 'liked the way she listened to us and was able to focus in on what she felt. She was not telling us but leading us to possibilities'.

Many respondents commented on the workers' character traits, variously noting that they were respectful, understanding, enthusiastic, confident, positive and approachable. They appreciated that the

workers were well informed, gave useful and constructive information, guidance and suggestions, brought focus to a meeting's ideas or activities or had prepared well before having contact with them. Friends also valued workers' creative approaches, for example representing things diagrammatically or providing creative exercises at events.

In interview, some Friends noted the need for Vibrancy workers to be resilient in their roles and to be willing to take risks. A member of the Vibrancy team agreed it was important for them to go outside their comfort zone and that the 'best work may be where you feel least certainty'.

Accessibility

Respondents commented that the workers were accessible and responsive to their questions or requests for support and were always 'willing to help':

I'm based on the Isle of Man. It's relatively cut off, but she's been prepared to come over and talk to us and help us as a local meeting as well. She crossed 70 miles of sea to see us.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

Ability to connect people

Vibrancy workers connected Friends across meetings and areas. Being connected was a strong factor in satisfaction with Vibrancy.

It has absolutely been helpful because she knows people in the area, so I can ask her, as I did, what the local resources are and who's got the skills in our area.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

She's enabled us to look at things from a wider context, saying, 'You are not the only area meeting which is considering the need to make changes in their structures and the way they work; here's some

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examples of what they done elsewhere.' She's put us in touch with other people elsewhere in the country ... This has all been very helpful. It's very useful when you're looking at your own area meeting and its problems to have them put into the context that the same concerns and issues are happening elsewhere. It's reassuring that it's not just something to do with us.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

Being a Quaker

It was a matter of debate throughout the programme as to whether Vibrancy staff needed to be Quakers. The Vibrancy team felt this to be an essential aspect of their role, while recognising that there might be recruitment difficulties. They suggested:

It's about credibility but you also call on your own spiritual experience every time you visit a meeting and that's discernible to Friends.

(Vibrancy interviewee, 2019)

I don't know how you would be able to truly be alongside the groups we are trying to listen to and help without a personal experience of the Quaker way ... Interestingly, one of the first questions people ask you in the role is which meeting you go to. I think that it would be much more difficult to make any progress in the task if you said none. Friends need to know that you understand them before they will start sharing.

(Vibrancy interviewee, 2019)

When asked, most Friends interviewed felt that it was important for Vibrancy staff to be Quakers themselves. It was also clear that many Friends valued their in-depth knowledge of meetings and of local Quaker structures and resources; this would be hard for a non-Quaker to provide:

I felt she was really grounded in knowledge about the Society of Friends. She had a real depth, she was living her life properly as a Quaker, she wasn't just speaking it. What she gave me was a sense that there was something in me that was relevant and I could give something in myself when I was feeling doubtful about things.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

When we venture into the intricacies of Quaker processes we need someone who knows it to the infinite degree, who can see the differences where some might say, 'Does it really matter?' But to us it does. When you're looking at the way Quakers should operate, some of it is written up and there's guidance for it, but some of it is open to interpretation and an overarching ethos of being Quaker. ... [The Vibrancy worker is] a dyed-in-the-wool Quaker and I think that makes a difference. ... [It] gives you a reference point which you can trust. That reference point understands right ordering and the overarching ethos of being a Quaker and what it is all about. She reinforces that in every contact and what we talk about and the support we get.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

A staff member at central BYM reflected that they valued the presence of their non-Quaker colleagues within BYM, as 'they notice things that Quakers do not'. However, they also recognised that there might be an issue of credibility with non-Quakers doing the face-to-face work with meetings.

Membership of the local worshipping community

In some cases, the Vibrancy worker was a member of the local or area meeting with which they were working. Some Friends saw this as an important enabler for change, as the Vibrancy worker really understood

What affects change in meetings

the local situation. One Friend from a local meeting explained that their Vibrancy worker was already involved with the area meeting prior to working with Vibrancy:

The fact she was a member of the meeting meant that she initially started with a detailed knowledge and understanding of the problems that we had ... she could hit the ground running.
(Friend interviewee, 2019)

For others, having a well-informed outsider was really important. One Friend described how the Vibrancy worker had supported a visioning process for the local meeting.

The fact that she wasn't part of our daily activity was helpful. She came with no baggage or views. Our views amongst ourselves are well known. [The Vibrancy worker] steered us through. She had some prepared actions. She included everyone and facilitated in a calm way people felt was fair. People like myself, who can speak too often and vociferously, were kept in line. People who were feeling timid or felt what they had to say wasn't valid enough were drawn out. It needed someone from outside.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

The internal and external views brought by Vibrancy workers were appreciated, and Friends recognised the advantages brought by different starting points – being part of the worshipping community or not – with workers using these constructively.

6.1.2 The nature of Vibrancy

The three key factors about Vibrancy support that were important to Friends who received support from the programme were that the support provided should be:

- long term
- face to face, as well as online or by phone
- from someone based locally.

Long-term support

Most evaluation respondents considered long-term support by the same Vibrancy worker to be essential for building trust and relationships. It also allowed the worker to gain a deep knowledge of the meetings and their needs. The largest proportion of 2018 survey respondents chose ongoing support as their top priority in terms of Vibrancy features (29 people, 33%) and interviewees echoed this.

I think maybe they can do some making changes with one-off support. But someone who has the knowledge of who's coming up in different areas with time, resources, gifts to share and who's monitoring what's happening at Woodbrooke and Friends House is really invaluable.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

Face-to-face support

Having a worker providing face-to-face as well as phone or online support was also important to survey respondents and interviewees, as well as to staff members.

The resources are out there for anyone to access already but with one individual bringing the human element, building up a relationship with the group and bringing a wider vision that is invaluable.

(Friend survey respondent, 2018)

Support provided locally

Vibrancy's local presence marked it out as different, and having the worker based locally and understanding the locality was a high priority for survey respondents and all 18 Friends interviewed in 2018.

What affects change in meetings

For us it's been essential that [the Vibrancy worker has] been based regionally because she's come to meetings, she's been on the spot. We can say: 'Come to us for 9am and have a meeting with us.' We feel that she's part of our community.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

In Cornwall we aren't a multicultural area and it's quite a conservative society. That might be difficult for someone working in London to deal with. With the advice on immigration for example, it isn't a visible issue for people in the South West. It's not that people don't care, but they're not aware of the extent of the issues. Having someone understand the local economic climate, fishing industry, level of unemployment and transport difficulties is important.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

6.1.3 Coordinated support

In our 2018 interviews and survey, respondents described using support from Vibrancy, BYM and Woodbrooke, and said that all three contributed significantly to outcomes. This suggests that the three sources of support could and should be complementary; it may be that, when acting together, they are more than the sum of their parts.

6.2 Barriers to change

Friends and Vibrancy workers identified a number of barriers to change in meetings.

- Lack of energy or motivation within the meeting or motivation not being shared across the meeting. (See Case example 4.)
- A small number of Friends being actively involved, and tiredness among those Friends with responsibility if work was not shared.
- Conflict within a meeting and/or resistance to change from some Friends.
- Not all Friends might want to involve children in a meeting, if they felt it would reduce quality of adult worship.
- Transport and geographical issues, especially in large or rural areas, compounded by lack of funds for travel limiting engagement.
- Time challenges, especially for role-holders.
- The age of Friends within a meeting.

Some of these barriers were ones that Vibrancy workers could address or affect through support. but others provided the real context in which they were working. These are likely to be present in the rollout of the Vibrancy approach in the future and to continue to present challenges.

Vibrancy brought a number of significant changes to BYM and Woodbrooke.

7. Benefits for BYM and Woodbrooke

7.1 New ways of supporting meetings

7.1.1 Rolling out a version of Vibrancy

The success of the Vibrancy pilot led BYM and Woodbrooke to decide to roll out a model of **Meeting-Centred Support** based on Vibrancy. BYM and Woodbrooke trustees agreed to place a local development worker within reach of every Quaker community in Britain within the next five years.⁸

7.1.2 Working regionally

As a number of other BYM projects have done, Vibrancy demonstrated the positive potential of regional support. This has led BYM and Woodbrooke trustees to agree to create a pilot hub as a base for other BYM and Woodbrooke staff outside London and Birmingham. A member of staff at BYM reported that:

Vibrancy has told us that we can and should be delivering support to meetings locally rather than from one big head office in London. For me personally, Vibrancy has confirmed that this is the right approach and that's a massive step forward.

(BYM central staff member, 2019)

In our 2019 interviews, some Friends commented on how pleased they were with both the rollout of Vibrancy and more regional working.

I feel the way forward with Friends nationally is decentralisation. I am thrilled Vibrancy has put that on the map. If we're

going to be flexible to meet the challenges facing us in years ahead it's crucial.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

The Vibrancy programme was an experiment and I take my Quaker hat off to whoever devised it because I think it could be the saving or making of BYM ... It's where BYM needs to channel resources in future. In my view, Vibrancy is the best thing that centralised work has undertaken in my personal history ... I also love the Yearly Meeting gathering, but in a local sense, Vibrancy is the best work.

(Friend interviewee, 2019)

7.1.3 New ways to communicate with meetings

A respondent from each of Woodbrooke and BYM explained that Vibrancy had affected their organisation's approach to communications. Vibrancy, alongside other work, helped BYM understand that having separate communications teams for internal and external audiences was unhelpful. In 2019 BYM decided to merge its internal and external communications teams, to create a less siloed approach. At Woodbrooke, new ways of communicating with meetings were being considered:

What I don't think we've got right is how we reflect that back to Quakers around the country. We send everything to everyone and what Vibrancy could tell us is that some areas are concerned about different things ... This is the kind of input we need to help us develop a programme that will meet the needs of Friends and target our communications to different areas.

(Woodbrooke staff member, 2019)

8. www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/meeting-centred-support

7.2 A more joined-up approach

Staff from Vibrancy, BYM central teams and Woodbrooke met regularly during much of 2019 to develop a joint strategy for support for meetings, as a direct result of the learning from Vibrancy. A few respondents felt that there had previously been some duplication of support across BYM and Woodbrooke and were hopeful that this new joined-up approach might begin to address this. A member of staff at Woodbrooke commented that:

Vibrancy has been brilliant as a catalyst for change, particularly at a strategic level. We now need to move forward with further change. It won't be easy. It's been a worthwhile investment for Woodbrooke ... If we hadn't done the Vibrancy pilot we'd still be talking about the theory and writing papers. We wouldn't have got such clear evidence that it was the right way to go.

(Woodbrooke staff member, 2019)

Two Woodbrooke respondents in 2019 noted that this new way of working was less about the two organisations, and more about meetings and their needs. One explained:

A person in a Quaker meeting doesn't really care whether the support is delivered by us, Quaker Life or Vibrancy. So, the idea is that we can deal with all of the internal 'Whose hat is this?' ourselves and the meeting doesn't have to care whose budget it's coming out of. If you're a meeting in dire straits you don't care who's coming, as long as somebody is coming.

(Woodbrooke staff member, 2019)

7.3 Sharing learning

It had been hoped that Vibrancy would

bring learning from Friends to BYM and Woodbrooke, or enable Friends to share their experiences directly. This did not happen to any great extent, at least in part due to the small-scale nature of the pilot. However, there were early examples of this happening effectively.

7.3.1 Vibrancy bringing local learning to central teams

In a few cases, central staff consulted Vibrancy team members as part of working on a particular topic, for example conflict, safeguarding and simpler meetings. Where this happened, central staff reported finding it very helpful.

We've been reviewing our work on safeguarding. We wanted to know what safeguarding was going on in the local meetings, so we asked two Vibrancy workers. We realise it's just a particular view from a particular area, but what we got was an immensely helpful, very rich, detailed view from two areas. The input of Vibrancy helped shape our work on this ... They had knowledge and understanding we simply did not have.

(BYM central staff member, 2019)

For the Simpler Meetings Project, part of the project manager's role was to identify and share many ways that meetings can do things differently, and to produce a list of the different ways meetings can work; the Vibrancy team helped with this. This work is a concrete example of where Vibrancy workers were able to help meetings share good practice and stories with BYM and Woodbrooke.

I have found it very fruitful to talk with each of the Vibrancy workers as my thinking has gone along. They have contributed ideas; I can bounce ideas back and forth. They have fed things into

Benefits for BYM and Woodbrooke

my work. Some of my work can be quite theoretical, and I want examples of how people do stuff. So now the Vibrancy team are sending me examples of how meetings are doing things. It's making it more rich and turning theoretical into practical.

(BYM central staff member, 2019)

When Vibrancy workers were able to share a broad overview of learning from their area, this was appreciated on both sides, by central staff as well as by Vibrancy workers.

7.3.2 A better understanding of need

There are some examples in which Vibrancy staff enhanced the central organisation's understanding of need, illustrating what might happen with a larger programme and sufficient capacity.

Uncovering need over time

A number of respondents in the Vibrancy team noted how the first need expressed by a meeting might not be the one they actually needed to work on. For example, one worker was supporting a meeting on property, but it became clear that to make decisions on property the meeting first needed to do some work on eldership. The longer-term, personal nature of the Vibrancy relationship was able to facilitate this slow uncovering of need.

Identifying common need

In some cases Vibrancy workers identified common areas of interest across meetings and stimulated that interest, sometimes prior to input from BYM or Woodbrooke. A BYM staff member noted that Vibrancy staff were able to identify people interested in a particular support, sometimes encouraging some 'unusual suspects' to attend events – people who would not have come had

the Vibrancy worker not already built local relationships and stimulated interest.

Highlighting the varying levels of need

Several central staff respondents reflected that input from Vibrancy had helped them better understand the varying needs of meetings across the country.

It was a wake-up call for me because I'm trying to get people to respond to the climate crisis and I learnt that [some meetings are] just trying to keep the doors open. So there's no point in me targeting them to do anything other than look after themselves and do some spiritual nurture.

(Woodbrooke staff member, 2019)

I've enjoyed seeing Vibrancy workers using local cultural values to shift things. For example, in one part of the country you might focus on residential and food, or other parts on marching up a hill against fracking. This has been helpful to BYM because as a bunch of staff based in London we are likely to see things as London-centric ... It's a subtle thing, but there is the beginning of a deeper understanding at BYM that geography matters and place matters in the support a meeting needs.

(BYM central staff member, 2019)

Some respondents reflected surprise that the need for Quaker basics was found even among people who had been Quakers for a long time.

We've been assuming local and area meetings' basic capacity ... in terms of spiritual groundedness and community, and we've been offering to add to that through our support, but the Vibrancy staff are telling us that we need to start from that first place and build those basics.

(BYM central staff member, 2018)

Prioritising learning

For future iterations of Vibrancy, it might be helpful for the Meeting-Centred Support programme to re-imagine the role of development worker. Rather than being there only to support meetings, it might be argued that the workers are there for two purposes: to support meetings and to gather learning for BYM and Woodbrooke as a whole. If a greater emphasis – and a corresponding percentage of worker time – were put on gathering and sharing learning, this might more effectively bring learning to the whole of BYM and Woodbrooke.

7.4 More effective direct support to meetings

7.4.1 Direct effect on service provision

It was initially hoped that Vibrancy would help make services more innovative, diverse and geographically flexible. This did not happen to any great extent during the pilot. A number of respondents noted that it was unrealistic and/or perhaps too early to have expected Vibrancy, in its pilot form, to have affected this to any great extent. We did, however, identify a number of individual cases where Vibrancy had had an effect. For example, Vibrancy had some effect on resource development at BYM and on Woodbrooke's training.

Central staff sometimes supported the work of the Vibrancy team, for example eldership or property management. Sometimes this was through providing resources or advice and sometimes through more involved joint working and delivery.

7.4.2 Wraparound support to maximise outcomes

Through offering support before or after work done by Woodbrooke or BYM, Vibrancy

staff had the potential to enhance outcomes. There was some early evidence that this was happening.

Preparing meetings for support

There is evidence that for some events, prior contact with the Vibrancy worker may have led to clearer expectations on the part of participants, who were also more prepared for the support they were going to receive. A Vibrancy worker explained:

I spend a lot of time making things easier for [Friends] because that's what you have to do to make it work, otherwise you are just throwing something towards them and hoping they catch it.

(Vibrancy interviewee, 2018)

Vibrancy sometimes also worked with BYM and Woodbrooke prior to those central staff delivering support to Friends, to make sure support was locally relevant. Friends also explained that Vibrancy made their interactions with BYM and Woodbrooke more accessible and effective:

For example, the Being Friends Together material. Without [the Vibrancy worker's] influence I'd have found it impenetrable. There's a lot of material there, it's not easy to access and find your way through.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

[The Woodbrooke Patterns and Examples event for role-holders] was brilliant. Keep doing them! Having the Vibrancy worker was helpful to me as a sounding board for me to get the most out of the event leading to me taking the right information back ... [It] has transformed our meeting for worship for business.

(Friend survey respondent, 2018)

Keeping momentum after support

After BYM or Woodbrooke events or training courses, Vibrancy staff sometimes supported Friends to use email groups to stay in touch

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with, and support, other participants in their region, and to share contacts and learning. A few Friends mentioned positively a support group set up by one Vibrancy worker for those in her region who had been on the Equipping for Ministry course at Woodbrooke.

One Vibrancy worker noted the importance of being able to follow up with Friends after centrally provided support, as BYM or Woodbrooke would not be able to provide this. Vibrancy workers were able to build on trusted relationships to provide this periodic checking in and long-term support. In interviews, a Friend noted the reduced impact when an excellent workshop had not been followed up. By contrast, longer-term contact was seen as important for achieving outcomes.

She's been proactive enough to contact us to see how things are going. Her interest is a big part of the support we've had.

(Friend interviewee, 2018)

8. Learning

When Vibrancy began in 2016, BYM and Woodbrooke hoped that this three-year pilot in a small number of areas would demonstrate whether Quaker meetings could be strengthened by having locally based, paid workers. It was also hoped that Vibrancy would encourage two-way learning and joint working between central and local staff, and across the two organisations, bringing positive benefits to BYM and Woodbrooke, enabling them to better serve the wider Quaker community.

Survey and interview findings showed that positive outcomes were achieved for individual Friends and for meetings, with almost all Friends rating the support as excellent. The evaluation provided sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of the model for BYM and Woodbrooke to commit to more regional working, and to roll out a model of meeting-centred support over the next few years.

8.1 What worked

Vibrancy provided support in a wide range of ways, including running events, connecting to others, helping to generate new ideas and supporting individual Friends. Just feeling supported proved to be of importance for Friends, making it easier for role-holders to be re-invigorated in their roles and for some people to stay within meetings. The ability of Vibrancy workers to bring both their local knowledge and their wider perspective was greatly valued by Friends, and connecting to others became a bigger part of the Vibrancy work than originally planned. The Vibrancy workers also helped Friends better understand central BYM and Woodbrooke.

The workers' Quaker faith was felt to be important in supporting both individual Friends and meetings; there proved to be a

surprising level of need around the basics of Quakerism, meetings and processes. The team was also highly skilled, something Friends held to be crucial. Also vital to achieving change was the local, face-to-face and long-term nature of the support.

Most change in meetings was found in the areas of Quaker discipline and community. For example, with Vibrancy support, meetings found new and better ways to run meetings or manage property. Some were finding better ways to engage more people, including children, in their meeting.

The three years of the pilot was not long enough to achieve much change in some hoped-for outcomes, such as more attenders or members, although there were some small successes in this. Further research might also be needed to evidence whether work on practical outcomes – such as buildings or the pattern of meetings – might in the long term improve the spiritual life of the worshipping community; there was some indicative evidence of this.

8.2 Challenges

There were some challenges for the Vibrancy workers and therefore to the aim of developing more vibrant meetings. The lack of time, energy and money within meetings, too few people being actively involved and conflict or resistance to change are all issues that future iterations of meeting-centred support will need to wrestle with.

More practical issues for the team members themselves concerned their part-time working, the number and spread of meetings in their area, and their flexibility in addressing the needs of meetings, which contributed to high workloads. Significant learning was generated, and captured through the

evaluation, around the most effective ways to engage with local meetings and to integrate regional staff with central structures. Lessons will need to be learnt from this.

8.3 Going forward

The Vibrancy team was more independent of central BYM and Woodbrooke than had originally been planned, giving more direct, in-depth support with meetings. In interviews, Friends acknowledged the different strengths of support from both national and local staff; the success of joint working between Vibrancy and BYM/Woodbrooke to support meetings, where it took place, indicated the potential for a more joined-up approach in the future.

There was learning about the need to be flexible while maintaining a balance between doing for meetings and doing with them. Although the limited team capacity and a wish not to create dependency focused Vibrancy workers on a facilitative role, sometimes a more hands-on approach was needed to move things forward.

There were elements in the success of the pilot that might be at risk in future locally based support work over a larger scale, such as the group working, support across the team and knowledge-sharing enabled by a small team. The design of the rollout will need to bear this in mind.

For future local and regional working, thought also needs to be given to cross-team communication and different ways of working, familiar issues often problematic in central–local relationships. The Vibrancy pilot involved a significant cultural change for BYM and Woodbrooke, and practical issues, such as lack of time, made it more difficult to address them.

Importantly, the Vibrancy team was not able to share as much learning with central teams as had been hoped. Future iterations of Vibrancy might helpfully reimagine the role of development worker in terms of two interlinked purposes: to support meetings and to gather learning for BYM and Woodbrooke as a whole, with sufficient worker time and structural support for these built in from the start.

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