

Report into developing the engagement of children and young people in the Quaker community in Aotearoa

# Engaging our Young People

*Quakers in Aotearoa New Zealand*

*Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri - The Religious Society of Friends*

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# 1. Introduction to the Project

This research report is the culmination of 'stage one' of the *Engaging Young People* project. This project was made possible by a gift from a New Zealand Friend to Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri, Quakers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The gift was given with the aim of engaging more of today's children and young people in Quaker life and learning. The project is currently titled *Engaging Young People* and has been broken down into three stages.

Stage one of the project has been concerned with finding out where we as a Quaker community currently are; capturing the 'state of the nation' regarding our engagement with young people, the life of our Meetings and children's programmes. Interviews and focus groups have been undertaken to hear from Friends first-hand of their experiences, views, and ideas regarding how we engage with children and young people. The resulting information from interviews and focus groups forms the basis for this report.

Subsequent stages of this project will focus more of the 'How?' and 'What, When and Where' in terms of resources, programmes, and support for our community.

Ultimately the *Engaging Young People* project is concerned with ways we as a Quaker community can enhance and improve our engagement with children and young people to better serve the needs of both them and their families and to include their gifts in the life of our community. If we as a community do so I believe it will lead to a richer experience of Quaker life for all ages. Our efforts would create a positive reinforcing cycle, further encouraging the participation of young people in the life of the Society.

## Objectives of the Report

This report aims to:

- Raise awareness of what our Quaker community can feel like to families and young people, both as members and newcomers.
- Provide an overview of what is currently working and not working so well in our community's engagement with children and young people.
- Highlight some examples of ways that Meetings and Worship Groups can make their environments and practices more family friendly and welcoming to young adults.
- Encourage more of our Quaker community to be excited and enthused about the opportunities to include children, families, and young people in our community.

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- Be a starting point for Worship Groups and Monthly Meetings to begin discussing and making some changes as to what kind of a community we want to be.
- Provide some ideas and examples of experiences, practices, and programmes our community could implement to enhance the experiences young people have with our community.

## Theory of Change

This report works from the theory of change that:

Supporting our young people and young families by meeting their present needs will lead to the increased engagement of young families and young people with the Religious Society of Friends.

And operates from the standpoint that:

- The low numbers of young adults and families in our Meetings are a trend that can be changed.
- The views that young people hold of our community need to be listened to and examined if we are to better support our young people.
- Supporting our young people better will benefit *all ages* in our community.

## Definitions used in this report:

- Young people: anyone below ~45 years of age
- Children: 0-12 years
- Youth: 13-17 years
- Young adults: 18-35 years
- Young families: the care units that include adults, children and/or youth.

## Acronyms

MM - Monthly Meeting(s)

WG - Worship Group(s)

MfW - Meeting for Worship

YF - Young Friends

JYF – Junior Young Friends

## 2. Summary

### Introduction to the topic

Quakers in Aotearoa New Zealand are likely aware that we have small numbers of young adults, children, and young families in our community. Some Friends feel sadness and concern at what they see as the lack of young people who take part in our Meetings for Worship and Quaker events. Some comment that it has not always been like this and that there were, for a long-time, greater numbers of young people, families, and children in our midst.

This reduced number of young people is, for some Friends, a sign that we as a community need to change something to bring more young people into engagement with our community and to enhance the relationships with younger folk that we do have.

The Religious Society of Friends has always been and will continue to be of interest to young people. It therefore needs to be a Society that serves the young as well as the old. We know that various generations can bring different perspectives. An interactive intergenerational religious community is what so many of us are seeking. The relationships between people of various ages create vibrancy in community. George Fox was 19 when he left his hometown in search of truth and spiritual meaning in religion and 23 when he began to preach publicly.<sup>1</sup> The Society of Friends arose from a generation of young people with the early followers of Fox tending to be around the age of 20-45 years.<sup>2</sup> These early beginnings of a new religious denomination were active, passionate, and characterised by visiting with one another.<sup>3</sup> Is this something that we could perhaps learn from in our community today? Looking to our roots is one way of finding inspiration for our journey of engaging young people.

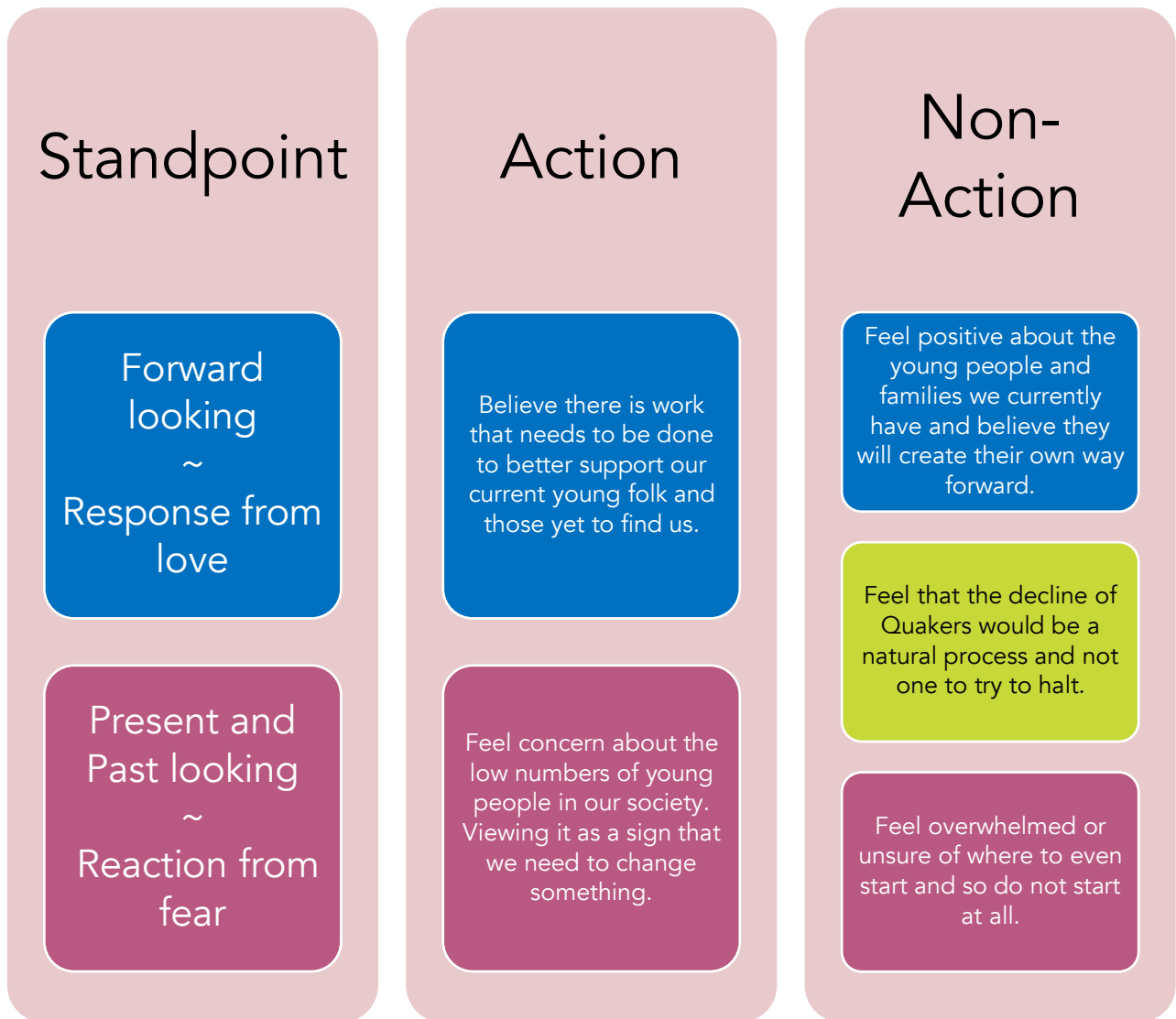
There are a range of views regarding the small numbers of young people in our society and what should be done about it. I have categorised these into Action and Non-Action. These are not always clear-cut, and some Friends might hold several views and feelings at the same time, I know I have.

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<sup>1</sup> 'George Fox'.

<sup>2</sup> 'George Fox'; 'Valiant Sixty'.

<sup>3</sup> 'Valiant Sixty'; 'George Fox'; 'Quakers'.



There are different approaches around the engagement of young people based on the place or 'standpoint' from which one's feelings and concerns arise. I think it is important that we as a community do not react out of fear but respond to concerns from a place of love.

**Action**

If one is concerned about the numbers of our Society, perhaps fearful about the future of our community and the need to ensure the survival of the Religious Society of Friends one might be led down the path of rash action or leaving our Quaker process to the side. One might be led to support the cause of engaging our young people purely from a numbers side of things - wanting to ensure that we maintain a critical mass of people to make up our society. This is not an unimportant or heartless perspective. Ensuring we have enough numbers to have a community speaks to the love and sustenance Friends currently gain from our community, but it cannot be the

sole motive. We must ask *what kind of community are we seeking to continue?* And perhaps question where our current priorities lie. If the enhanced engagement of young people is something we as a group desire, then some projects or causes we currently support may have to be put aside or laid down in order to give our young people the focus and energy they deserve.

If one is concerned about the state of our engagement with young people because of who they are as individuals and what gifts they share with our community then one might be lead down the path of enriching the action taken at a local, weekly, and individual level in order to provide fellowship, children's programmes, and different styles of worship that suit Quaker families' and young people's needs. One might be more open to being led by the desires of families and young people into the direction that they want to go.

### **Non-Action**

Some people may believe that we have a problem regarding our engagement with children and the young, but the question is: are we then willing to enter a potentially challenging state of unknown and unfamiliar to become what is needed by families and young people?

'Non-Action' can sometimes arise from a place of fear. Of believing that engaging with young people would only lead to loss and discomfort of what one knows as familiar and comfortable now. Inaction can be due to a desire to remain in a comfortable and familiar space of Quaker practice.

There were responses from younger interviewees that revealed they felt a lack of interest in their experiences and feelings from the wider Quaker community (which tends to be older than 50 years of age). We can view our current Young Friends and young families as inspiring and 'on to it'. Believing that they will save the day when it comes to improving our engagement with young people but that is not what young people want to hear. If we push young people's concerns and issues back on to the young people, then it can come across as uncaring.

## **Our communal response – Holding onto the Why**

All Friends interviewed for this research did note some areas where they believed we could improve or change our engagement with young people. It is important that we as a community follow our Quaker processes and be led by Spirit. We need to listen to that of God within each of us and listen to each other. To respond to these decades-long patterns of low numbers of young people will likely require decades-long answers and the best time to start is now.

Some people in Quakers are currently comfortable with the life of their local Meeting and Worship Group. To propose changes to how Meetings practice people can feel disruptive and uncomfortable. Sometimes our Meetings have experienced disagreement and conflict in periods of change. Conflict and disagreement are natural and can be expected. It would be a shame if change were avoided because of the fear of uncomfortable feelings arising from conflict when discussing including children more in Meeting for Worship or changing the order things are done in. It is important to remember our 'why' when we start talking about change. Honouring the gifts that young people bring to our Meetings and the love we share are what we are holding onto and what is pushing us forward.

## Methodology and Approach

This report is based on information obtained from focus groups and interviews held over the phone, Zoom, or in-person with people who were identified either through word-of-mouth and snowballing, lists of roles held with Quakers locally or nationally, or through personal connections in Quakers.

65 people contributed by sharing their thoughts and views with me from March to July 2021. People were chosen because they might have had first-hand experience of being a Quaker parent with young children, they attend Meeting for Worship as a family, they are a young person and connected to Quakers, they work with children and young people in the Quaker community, they held or hold a key role within our decision-making processes or perhaps they hold a keen interest in this topic. Achieving a diversity of age, roles, encounters, experiences, degree of connection to Quakers and location amongst interviewees was a key consideration.

Meetings that were represented in interviews/focus groups included:

- Tauranga
- New Plymouth
- Christchurch Ōtautahi and Meetings in the top of Te Wai Pounamu (Nelson, Motueka, Golden Bay, Blenheim)
- Mt Eden
- Dunedin Ōtepoti
- Palmerston North
- Kāpiti
- Whanganui
- Wellington Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Pōneke

Literature from Yearly Meetings overseas and from other churches within Aotearoa was reviewed, particularly regarding how these groups have engaged with their own younger members and the challenges and successes within that.

### 3. Where we are currently

It is likely that most Friends in Aotearoa are well-aware of the trends around young people and families in our community but not all will be. It is important to be clear about where we currently stand in order to know what is needed as we move forward into the future.

We are currently seeing the following trends or experiences within our community:

- An ageing population.
- Few young families attending or joining Quakers.
- Monthly Meetings with no young people or young families in attendance.
- Some people feel unsupported or unknown by their local Meeting or Worship Group.
- Some young Quakers and Quaker families do not engage with the community.
- Newcomer families and young people who are interested in Quakers but cannot see a place for themselves in our community and therefore do not stay.
- Most of our practical decision-making and business matters being undertaken by those who are retired. This demographic also tends to deal with health challenges and decreased mobility either in themselves or in partners.
- Our 'middle-age' adult population of around 40-65 years, are busy with full-time work, further study, parenting, and caring for elderly parents.
- Those aged around 26-40 can be juggling building a career and parenting young children. They are also likely to have tight budgets.
- Those aged 17-26 are likely to be studying full-time while typically working part-time, or vice versa. They tend to have very tight budgets.

Having all ages and stages of life represented in a community is when the ecosystem of a community can flourish. With the reduction in numbers of one area, another area has to step-up and do more work than normal, and another area might weaken and disappear. Like the whole of life, our Quaker community is interconnected. No one of us and no one demographic can stand alone for long. Better supporting our young people and providing for the needs of young families will benefit other age groups in our community.

Nāu te rourou,  
Nāku te rourou,  
Ka mākona te iwi.

Your contribution  
And my contribution  
Will provide sufficient for all.



## A table summary of some positive and negative experiences and trends within Quakers

	Positive Experiences and Trends	Not-so Positive Experiences and Trends
<b>Children's Programmes</b>	<p>Committed individuals who run children's programmes.</p> <p>Children who enjoy their sessions and develop friendships among their Meeting.</p>	<p>Some MM/WG lack an appropriate space to hold a children's programme.</p> <p>Lack of readiness for when children turn up.</p>
<b>Social life of the Meeting</b>	<p>Social events within MM to get to know who we are outside of MfW.</p>	<p>People feeling that they are unknown amongst their local Meeting, even if they attend regularly.</p>
<b>Support for Parents</b>	<p>Parents feeling love, inclusion, kindness, and friendship from their Meeting as a whole.</p>	<p>Parents feeling unsupported, e.g., lack of proactive pastoral care support.</p>
<b>Connection with Children</b>	<p>Friends reaching out and try to engage with parents and children. Even if they get it wrong sometimes, the effort is appreciated and valued.</p>	<p>Some parents see that their children are not engaged with. That people are nervous or unsure how to approach their children.</p>
<b>Newcomers</b>	<p>Effort made to personally reach out to newcomers to ask what</p>	<p>Newcomers feeling like there is no chance of culture change within a MM/WG.</p>

	they are wanting from a community.	
<b>Young Adults</b>	Some young adults, particularly those who take part in YF activities, feel that they have power to make change within our community.	Many feel that the wheels of our community and our decision-making processes will just keep turning without them.
<b>Meeting for Worship and Children</b>	Children coming in during the last 5 minutes of MfW to sit and then share with the Meeting.	Parents feeling nervous, judged, or exposed with their children in the silence of MfW.

## 3.1 Present Needs

The following needs and areas of focus were identified by interviewees as priorities when considering changes to how we as a community include children, young people, and families.

### Area of Quaker Life

### What is needed in some Meetings

<b>Children's Programmes</b>	<p>An appropriate space to hold a children's programme.</p> <p>People and resources at the ready for when children turn up out of the blue.</p> <p>Consistent helpers for children's programmes. Paying organisers should be a priority if not.</p>
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<p><b>Social life of the Meeting</b></p>	<p>Greater social depth in our Meetings and worship groups so that people can get to know each other and become people who have fun together, share struggles and joys.</p>
<p><b>Support for Parents</b></p>	<p>Support for parents and children e.g., proactive pastoral care support during illness, a new baby, offers of childcare at Quaker events, offers of transport and food.</p>
<p><b>Connection with Children</b></p>	<p>More engagement from our adults with children that attend Meetings. Adults making an effort to interact with children.</p>
<p><b>Newcomers</b></p>	<p>Creating individually specific places for newcomers in a Meeting. Letting them know they are needed and wanted for who they are.</p> <p>Giving them a sense of ownership in the life of the Meeting.</p> <p>Social events that newcomers can tap-into to get to know people in a Meeting.</p> <p>Inviting newcomers into your homes.</p>
<p><b>Young Adults</b></p>	<p>Expressing clearly to young adults how they are needed and wanted in the decision-making process of the community.</p> <p>Giving them a sense of ownership in the life of their local Meeting.</p> <p>Listening with an open heart and mind to the experiences and ideas of young people. Be willing to be changed by them.</p>

	<p>Concerted efforts to walk alongside young adults. Get to know young adults for who they are. Show love and care for their lives. Invite them into your homes.</p> <p>Ask what events they might like to see in a local Meeting and try to arrange that. Invite them to bring friends along.</p>
<p><b>Meeting for Worship and Children</b></p>	<p>Make it clear in your Meeting and building that noise from children and babies in Meeting for Worship is perfectly fine.</p> <p>Experiment with having a family-friendly worship time (where you maybe aim for quiet but accept it without) on Sunday morning in addition to or as part of your traditional Meeting for Worship. Think about incorporating breakfast or brunch in and around. Include all ages in family-friendly worship.</p>
<p><b>The Meeting House</b></p>	<p>Consideration of the needs of parents and children by making our buildings more family friendly. See page 18.</p> <p>Perhaps more welcoming and warm atmospheres in our buildings with colour, children’s art, comfy sofas or chairs and places to socialise.</p>

## 4. The Engagement of Children and Young Families

Many Friends in our Yearly Meeting would like to see more children in our Meetings and Worship Groups. The reality is that children largely only come if their parents come. This desire for more children is in a way a desire for more young families in our Quaker community. It is a desire for more young families taking part in Quaker life that many Meetings hold.

This section outlines the current and recent experiences of young families in our Quaker community. It highlights some examples of what parents' desire from a Quaker community and examples of how to make Meeting for Worship more accessible to children and parents.

Section 4.1 outlines ways of meeting the present needs of young families and children in our community.

### Young Families

The Society of Friends within Aotearoa is blessed to have several young families as part of our community. Every demographic brings a richness and treasure to our community life that no other can.

There are experiences however, within this demographic that I believe need to be acknowledged by our community if we desire to 'course-correct' so-to-speak so that more families feel listened to, included, and wanted in our community going forward.

Some interviewees felt that there is a disconnect between some Friends' ideas of the kind of community they would like to see and the responsibilities that these ideas would entail. For example, there is a perception by some parents of young children that Quakers are more concerned with having children in Meetings so that Meetings feel more 'alive' or 'vibrant'. That the appearance of children in a Meeting gives others a sense that the life of the Meeting is going well, whether or not it is.

There is a feeling amongst some young adults and parents of young children that Quakers are more interested in the *idea* of young people and children than the *reality* of young adults and children.

This is a challenging statement, I am aware. However, I am a young adult writing this and I feel hopeful about the future. There is a lot of work we could do. I hope we can accept this challenge and meet it face on.

## Busyness

Life gets busy for young families and sometimes Sunday is the only day that is free from commitments. Children can have music lessons and sports on Saturdays, and after-school activities on weekdays. Sleepovers, lunches, birthday parties and household errands often get pushed to the weekends. Parents spoke about the feeling of “We’ve got to get out the door again?!” when commitments were booked in for weekends, particularly on Sundays.

Running a children’s programme once or twice a month works quite well for some families. For these families it means that Sundays where there is no children’s programme is a Sunday off from MfW and a chance to catch-up with general life admin and errands.

Another theme that arose from interviews was that when there is only one family connected to a Meeting/WG there can be a pressure felt by families to show-up for MfW on the Sunday when children’s programme is on, as the children’s programme has been put on with them in mind. Friends who run children’s programmes in these situations manage their preparations by calling or texting the family beforehand to see if they are coming. There is no easy way around this felt pressure. The pressure would be reduced if more than one family attended but presently, it is something to just be aware of.

## Parents Desiring Intergenerational Community

Parents involved in interviews all placed high value on their children experiencing and growing up as part of an intergenerational community. This was a big push-factor for bringing their children to Quaker Meeting on a Sunday. Several shared their feelings of being disheartened at the reality of members of their Meeting not interacting or engaging with their children and being seen in their Meeting/WG only as the ‘parent’ not being known beyond that.

“People approach and say ‘I love how you bring your kids to Meeting’ but then they walk off. They don’t talk to or engage with them, so the kids are not getting that community that we wanted.”

Parent A

"They [older folk] shouldn't be embarrassed. I know they're older, I don't care. If someone wants to get to know me, I don't care about their age. I'm happy to talk to older people.

... if an older person wanted to take me under their wing I'd go happily!"

Parent B

## Children and the Sunday Meeting for Worship

As Quakers our most common expression of our religious and community life is meeting together for worship on a Sunday morning. Silence is the ground out of which our Worship and Ministry comes. As our national website says: "We simply gather in silence, usually for an hour. During that time, anyone in the meeting is free to offer 'ministry' speaking from their heart as they are prompted by the Spirit within them".<sup>4</sup>

We meet in silence, yet we do not meet for silence, we meet for worship. The silence can be challenging, particularly for children, parents, and newcomers but it can also be challenging for well-seasoned Quakers. The silence of Quaker Meetings out of which ministry comes can be particularly difficult for Quaker parents to navigate.

"I asked him what he liked about Quakers and what brought him here and he said, 'I just like the silence.' And as someone who has young kids, you know you can't meet that criteria."

Parent C

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<sup>4</sup> 'Quaker Meeting | Quakers Aotearoa'.

Research for this project revealed that parents with young children can feel exposed, nervous, and even judged (whether they are or not) in the silence of Meeting for Worship, especially when they are the only family or new to a Meeting.

Sessions for children that run separately yet alongside Meeting for Worship provide a space for children to play, explore and grow hand-in-hand alongside adults who care for them. Some of the most important things for children to experience in a programme run by Friends are a sense of love and connection. Most Meetings that run a separate programme for children during MfW go to a separate building or room for their session and then re-join MfW for the last 10 or 15 minutes. This frequently ends up being the last five minutes of worship as sessions with children can easily run over time. For most who practice this, it works well. There are, however, alternative models and some Meetings in Aotearoa already practice different approaches.

## 4.1 Meeting Present Needs of Young Families

This section highlights ways that some of the present needs of young families can be met, particularly by Meetings and Worship Groups.

### Adding in family friendly alternatives to regular Worship

It is important that not just families attend family-friendly events, as the intergenerational connection is what is particularly desired by families.

- An article in *Friends Journal* May 2021, titled *When and How Are Friends Made?* detailed how Adelphi Friends Meeting includes children in their Meetings for Worship.<sup>5</sup> Their Meeting for Worship begins with the **children fully included in the first 20 minutes**. The article describes how a child wanted the Meeting to

“They turned around and glared at me and my kids and I felt like I was right back in Meeting for Worship.”

Parent D

<sup>5</sup> Sharon Stout and Robert Duncan, ‘Where and How Are Friends Made?’



sing 'Magic Penny' and so they did. After those 20 minutes, the children leave to go to their session. Meeting for Worship continues with the adults. The article is worth a read in and of itself.

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/where-and-how-are-friends-made/>

- Experiment with having a **family-friendly worship time** where you maybe aim for quiet but accept it without, in addition to or as part of your traditional Meeting for Worship. Having activities for children to play with, objects to hold, and space for children and parents to move around would make the time work better for families.
- Think about incorporating **breakfast** or **brunch** before MfW. Try a pancake breakfast for a 'messy' Meeting.
- This is not particularly child-specific but some Meetings in Aotearoa practice having tea and coffee first, before MfW. It provides a chance to share, catch-up and ease into each other's company before entering into worship together. This can be particularly helpful for newcomers as it provides a chance to explain MfW and to make a connection with Friends in the Meeting.

## Making your Meeting House Family-Friendly: 101

Providing a physical space that meets the needs of children and parents is a simple but necessary process that makes families feel understood and included in a Meeting. The following list was created after speaking with parents and is by no means exhaustive but is a great place for a Meeting to start.

Does the space your Worship Group or Meeting meets in have:

1. A separate room (that is preferably somewhat soundproof) for children's programmes.
2. Plastic cups for children, sippy cups.
3. Plates and cutlery for children.
4. Drinks and snacks for children – not just tea and coffee, i.e., hot chocolate or juice, fruit, biscuits.
5. A stool in the bathroom so children can reach the sink
6. A mini toilet seat available in the bathroom for parents to use
7. A change table in the bathroom area.

8. A highchair in the kitchen area.
9. A sign that says breastfeeding welcome and welcome in Meeting for Worship.
10. A sign that says children's noises are welcome and fine in Meeting for Worship!
11. Toys and books for children to use in Meeting for Worship as well as in the kids' room.
12. Small chairs that kids might like to use during Meeting for Worship
13. Cushions and blankets for cold, hard floors.
14. A lower table
15. Colours and pictures for children to look at on the walls, to make the Meeting House brighter and friendlier.

## A Space for Children's Programmes

Some Meetings and Worship Groups within Aotearoa currently only hire out, or have access to one room, the room in which the Meeting for Worship takes place. For these Meetings to have a regular and ongoing children's programme they will need to find access to a separate room in which they children can meet.

Some things to take into consideration when thinking about the room(s) for children's programmes:

- Accessibility i.e., ramps, adequate doorframe width, location to Meeting Room and is it easy to find? Exit signs
- Lighting
- Warmth
- Bathroom spaces and their child-friendliness
- Sinks
- Rubbish areas

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- Flooring e.g., carpeting, spill areas
- Access to the outdoors and what kind of outdoor spaces they are e.g., fenced in, near a road, sunny.

Noise-proofing is also important if the room for the children is near to the Meeting Room; both for the sake of parents and Friends in worship and for the leaders of children's programmes. Children need to have the freedom to be themselves when it comes to their children's programme. A room where children and helpers walk on eggshells for fear of noise seeping through to the next room is not conducive to a loving and joyful spirit in their session or within the community.

Once a room has been chosen, questions around childproofing, storage space, colour in the room, tables and chairs for children, books, stationery, games, craft materials, cushions and musical instruments can be pondered.



## Supporting Parents Through Children's Programmes

Parents of young children in our Quaker community expressed strong support for children's programmes run by Friends who are not parents of the children. Parents shared feelings of not wanting another thing to organise for their children. If the Meeting waits for or depends on parents to run a children's programme, it can feel like there is no commitment from the Meeting towards supporting children and parents. Having a way for parents to give input and be involved in the process of developing content for children's sessions is important, however, particularly if you want parents to be comfortable in sending their children to the sessions.

Providing parents with the opportunity to be present to Spirit, to themselves, to the community around them is a gift, and one that we as a community can offer to parents of children. Parents of young children spoke of having rare occasions of having time and space without needing to go out and be responsible for the children. Having a regular programme for children that is not dependent upon the effort and input of

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those children's parents is a gift both to parents and children. Many churches in Aotearoa are very skilled at running crèche and children's programmes because they understand the importance of providing something for families if they want families to come.



## Curricula for Children's Programmes

Form and content of programmes for children need to be agreed on by the Children's Committee with the knowledge, input, and consent of parents. Families and especially newcomer families need to know what to expect in a children's session so that children can be prepared for what to expect before joining-in and so that parents can feel content within themselves when their children go off to their programme.

There are sometimes differences in preferences between those organising the children's programme and parents' wishes as to what the time with children should be spent focusing on. Some might hold the view that it should be a time of religious instruction or conveying values, in the vein of Sunday School while others will hold that view that it should be more of a time of play, or of discovery.

It is important to be clear with newcomer families when they come as to what happens in a session. Sitting down with newcomers provides an opportunity to see how their needs and wishes could be met. This will not always be possible, but it is an important step to undertake, nonetheless. It also gives newcomers a sense of ownership and belonging to the community, that their opinions are valued.

## Support for Meetings and Worship Groups

There was a range of responses from Meetings and Worship Groups as to what they would find of use in developing their engagement with children. Some particularly wanted practical, ready-to-use types of curricula and activities – particularly those Meetings and groups who currently have no children's programme or committee.

Others, typically already with established children's programmes, felt that the content of sessions was a less-difficult aspect of supporting families and children, and that there were many resources out there if one wanted to find them. Meeting the needs of those who would like more support in finding and producing content for children's programmes is something that this project could assist in.

One avenue that could be explored in supporting Meetings to support families is the creation of ready-made resource packages that Meetings and Worship Groups could use. This might be particularly helpful for Meeting/WG with no children currently attending who want to be ready for when families turn up to Meeting for Worship.

There are several places online that provide resources that can be printed, copied, or modified from. See *Annex I* for a list of resources and inspiration for working with children, youth and creating all-age activities.

## Plays

Having a Christmas play with the children in your Meeting is one way of having children become more involved in a children's programme. Adults create a play with script, characters, and fun stories giving each child has a role, specially made for them. Plays are special projects for children and helpers to work on. Having a commitment and a special role to play ensures that children return as they need to practice their lines and stage directions. It is a great way of building community as a play requires an audience. It brings together a Meeting to celebrate the achievements and efforts of the children and their helpers. What better way for a Meeting to get together and celebrate a Christmas play than with a Christmas-related party? Some Meetings in Aotearoa have used Christmas plays with their children to great success.

## Friendship for Parents, not Committees

It is wonderful to be grateful that parents come to Meeting, but those spoken to during interviews shared that what they really need is practical support and friendship from their Meeting not just adoration from afar. What would not suit families is for Meetings to create another thing for families to do, i.e., another activity to organise or another committee to take part in.

Some parents felt strongly that asking parents of young children to be on committees should be avoided. Striking the balance between involvement and burdens is tricky to do but perhaps Meetings could remember that parents of young children are in one of life's busiest stages, if not *the* busiest, and to add to parents' to-do lists can be felt as burden.

## Sunday Programmes with Youth

Programmes with those aged 13-17 are an opportunity for teenagers to feel seen, to feel recognised. Developing supportive and almost 'mentoring' relationships with teenagers when they come to MfW should be the goal. Being a teenager is a tricky and complicated time. What this age-group could really do with is knowing that they are needed and wanted in our Quaker community and that there is a place for their unique and true selves.

A couple of our Meetings take the opportunity of the Sunday Meeting for Worship to go to a local café with their youth or a separate room to the children's programme. Some invite other members of the Meeting to join-in alongside the usual organisers and this provides an opportunity for teenagers to get to know who the members of their Meeting are beyond the familiar face.

Some Meetings use time with their teenagers to talk about Quaker history and key figures from our past and present.

Depending on the capacities and competencies of those running the sessions the time could be used to broach those bigger, meaningful questions that might be on the minds of our teens. What young people spoke about when they shared what Quakers had meant to them growing up, was that it provided a space separate from school, from parents, from those things that took up most of their life and provided a chance to connect with people over things that really mattered to them, the deeper, bigger questions on their hearts. Our Quaker community can provide a chance for teens to get a sense of who they are and to share that self with others without some of the pressures and worries that can occur in a school environment or parental relationship.

## 5. The Life of a Quaker Meeting

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*It was said of the early Christians, 'Behold, how they love one another'. Could this equally be said of us? Or are our meetings places where newcomers may not always be welcomed, where people feel alone? What happens to those who are part of our meetings? Are their lives changed? Do they care more? Love more? What do we know of one another's lives outside of the meeting? Of one another's spiritual journeys? Do we seek to share joys and humour as well as sorrows, or are we perhaps too near the 'sober-sides' images of popular belief? Surely the nurturing of relationships and the response to their breakdown will arise from the willingness of each of us to enter with imagination and love into one another's lives. If we truly know one another then we are likely to be sensitively aware of one another's needs. Often it is just being alongside someone; listening; a gentle touch when words cannot be found. Our extreme busyness, and the pressure and tension of modern life, make it at once more necessary and at the same time more difficult that our meetings should become living and loving communities.*

*June Ellis, 1986*

Our Meetings and Worship Groups are, to a certain extent, independent communities within our national community. The life of these local communities has great influence on the life of our national community as they are the rivers that feed into our national body. We are not a community because we all believe the same things, but we are a community because we choose each week to turn up and to seek that of God together, to share in each other's joys and sorrows, to offer help and support, to love, and to challenge. We help each other to belong by loving each other.

Through research for this report, it was revealed that many Friends feel unknown in their local Meeting even if they have been attending regularly for several years. Many interviewees felt that their local Meeting could add-in more ways for members and attenders to connect socially outside of the tea and coffee time after Meeting for Worship.

### Newcomers

There are newcomers and seekers who know a bit about Quakers and what they have heard, experienced, read or seen intrigues them – it excites them. They turn up to a Quaker Meeting and see no one who looks like them and perhaps feel that this is not the community that they were looking for. They might feel that as a newcomer it would be impossible to change the community in any way and so do not stay and the culture of the Meeting does not change.

Newcomer families can feel put-off from joining a Quaker Meeting if they feel that they have no chance of changing the culture of the Meeting to one that suits their needs and what they are seeking from a religious community.

## Engaging our Young People

Turning up to a Quaker Meeting where there is no one that looks like you can feel off-putting. Whether that be no other families, no other young people, no people of colour for example, it can feel like 'this is not the group for me'.

Having families already in your Meeting is a key pull-factor in getting newcomer families to stay. However, several Meetings in Aotearoa currently have no families attending. This is a key area to address if Meetings want more families as part of their community – breaking the downward spiral of having no families attending in order to start the upward spiral of attracting families. The main way that we as a Quaker community have power in changing the direction of this spiral is to change what we as local group do. There are a few avenues to creating change.

A question I think we should ask ourselves is what are we asking families to be a part of? It is great to want families to join but are we ready for them?

## Young Adults

Young adults tend to move regularly due to moving for work, study, or for housing. It is hard to turn up to a new Meeting and face the hard work of building relationships with strangers, particularly if one thinks one might be moving again in a year or six months' time. Some young adults and newcomers felt that there were no adequate opportunities provided by their local Quaker Meeting to develop social connections and meet members of the Meeting.

There have been positive experiences however, when a young adult has moved to a new city perhaps and members of the local Meeting have been made aware of this and have reached out to the young adult to invite them round for meals. Some Meetings have invited all the young adults on their radar to meals so that they can get to know one another and get to know some members of the local Meeting. Young adults tend to be flatting or could be living in sub-par accommodation, being invited around to someone's home for a meal is a delight.

It is important that we think of newcomers in this situation as well and make an effort to welcome them into our homes. It is too easy in our Meetings to attend Meeting for Worship, have tea and coffee, and remain strangers to each other. It is about fostering a sense of belonging amongst all in our communities, a sense of whānau.



## 5.1 Meeting Present Needs

### The Social Life

Embed social events in your Meeting's or Worship Group's calendar. What many people are looking for from a religious or spiritual community is a community that knows each other beyond Meeting for Worship and beyond the chat over tea and coffee afterwards. To know one another in that which is eternal but also the everyday and the ordinary

We cannot separate out 'community-building' within the Society of Friends and concern around the inclusion of young families and young people in our community. They are inherently linked and intertwined; one reinforces the other. Having social events where Friends, attenders and newcomers can get to know who we each are outside of Quakers enriches the spiritual life of a Meeting. Creating opportunities to work alongside each other, have fun, share food, and play games is vital to building a loving community.

It is important that when all-age events and activities are put on, that a range of ages attend. All-age and family-friendly events will not create intergenerational connection if only young families attend. The potential of these events to build connection between groups who might not normally interact is stunted when we remain in our comfortable isolation from other age-groups.

### Going away together as a Meeting

Friends spoke positively to the idea of whole-Meeting camps or family camps where everyone in the Meeting is invited to go away together for a night, sometimes two. Our national Quaker camp, Summer Gathering, is a fantastic opportunity to socialise within our Quaker community but not everyone can make it each year. Going away together as a Meeting strengthens the relationships that people have and is a fantastic community-builder. Leaving one's comfort zone is a brave thing to do and it can lead to enormous reward in finding deeper connection and friendship with those whom one meets for worship with each week. Accessibility for older folk and young families is a key concern in choosing a venue for a camp.

Having 'family' cabins, spending time in one location (and a physically accessible location at that) and providing transport or carpooling is an easy way of getting around accessibility issues for older and younger members.

## Things to consider in creating social events for your Meeting:

Aim to provide a welcoming, relaxed, and warm space for people who turn up – family-friendly events, a children’s programme, and a child-proof building are good places to start in meeting the needs of young families. Having events in the evenings tends to suit young adults and providing food and drink is always a good idea.

Many Quakers can keep in mind that older folk tend to not drive at night or in wet or icy weather. It is also important to remember that:

- Between 8am and 6pm on weekdays those who work full-time tend to be unavailable.
- Young adults who work full-time and university students are typically most available in the evenings but sometimes university students are free during the day.
- Children under 6 can have bedtimes around 7-8pm.
- Children tend to have extracurriculars after school, anywhere from 3-7pm typically.
- Saturdays, particularly the mornings, are usually taken up with children’s extracurriculars.

### Accessibility:

- Can you get there by bus easily? Cycle lanes?
- Is it wheelchair and pram friendly?
- Are there adequate toilet and changing facilities?
- Adequate parking for families and older folk? Have you made car-pooling an easy option?
- Is the event free or cheap? Can you make it free?
- If it is not very accessible, how can you make it more accessible?

### Can you?

- Be brave and invite people/families in your networks along, perhaps widening your networks to do so.
- Advertise, let people know who we are, where we are and what we offer.
- Provide a community service, outreach.

## 6. National Quaker Events

National events in our Yearly Meeting are a fantastic way for young people and families to live out their Quaker life and experience the richness of our community life. These include:

- Junior Young Friends' (JYF) Camp
  - Six-night camp for youth (age 13-17). Held during school holidays. Location varies each year. Adult and Young Friend helpers run the camp.
- Young Friends' (YF) Camp
  - Six-night camp for young adults (approx. age 17 to ~35). Typically held around March-May. Location varies. Run by Young Friends.
- Work Weekends at the Settlement
  - Three-night weekend gathering for fellowship and work at the Quaker Settlement in Whanganui. Held at various times throughout the year. Some have a specific focus on families.
- Summer Gathering
  - All-age gathering in December for five nights around New Year's Eve with a relaxed and family-friendly feel. SG changes location each year. It is typically held at a large private campground or lodge.
  - The timing can be difficult if families have family members who are not Quakers and prioritise spending time with them.
  - If the location is far from home for a family, then they might not go due to the cost of travel or the time spent travelling being prohibitive.

Yearly Meeting is another national event and historically has had less participation from children, families and young adults compared to the other events which are less-business focused, more relaxed affairs, and accommodating to families.

### 6.1 Meeting Present Needs

#### JYF Coordinator Role

JYF Coordinator supports Local Arrangements Committee to organise the JYF camp. As of July 2021, the role of Coordinator is vacant. It has traditionally been associated with the annual JYF Camp but could possibly encompass a broader role perhaps as a result of discussions and direction envisioned by this project on Engaging Young People.

## Financial Support to Attend

Our current model of financial assistance works if one is comfortable asking for money, if one knows who to ask, if one knows that money is available and if one feels worthy of asking. Finances cannot be a barrier to participation in the decision-making processes of our community nor can it be a barrier to participation in our social and spiritual life. Equity needs to be a key consideration. Meetings and Committees with oversight over financial support should consider active participation in financial support, this is particularly the case for Meetings that have young people and families on their books when time comes around to register for national events.

Some young families and young adults spoke to said that finances were at times a barrier to participation. Several families frequently would not attend Summer Gathering because of the cost in travelling to the venue. Young adults spoke of finances preventing attendance or of it being the deciding factor if one was on the fence in deciding to attend an event.

Discussions around proactive financial support for families and young people would be a great place to start. Inclusion of the voices of families and young people is necessary if it is to meet their needs.

## 7. Next Steps and Conclusion

### Resource Development

Supporting Meetings and Worship Groups to be ready for when children turn up to Meeting for Worship might take the form of creating resource packs that include all materials and guidance needed to run a session with children during Meeting for Worship time. These could include activities around engagement with nature, physical games and play, storytelling, musical activities, Quaker stories, and craft activities. This is one avenue that this Engaging Young People Project could potentially support.

### Possible Seminar or Discussion Event

Running a seminar possibly at the Quaker Settlement or a forum for discussion amongst our community that addresses some of the content of this report or the Engaging Young People project would provide the opportunity to come together and share with one another our own experiences, views, and ideas for moving forward. Meeting in-person is ideal and conducive to creating new visions and ideas what our community could do to support our young people.

### Action from Meetings and Worship Groups

- *How does your Meeting support the parents of young children?*
- *Do the parents in your Meeting feel valued and known as individuals beyond being known as the ones who bring their kids along?*
- *How are you showing your love and care for the parents of children and teens in your meeting?*
- *What is your Meeting House like from a child's height? What could get in their way or cause hurt? What could go in instead?*
- *How are newcomers and young adults welcomed into your group? Do they feel they have a place in your community?*

### Financial Assistance

- *Is your Meeting or perhaps a Yearly Meeting committee (for example QEF/CYPSC/QLSDC) willing and able to pay those who organise and run children's and youth's programmes in Meetings and Worship Groups?*
- *How can we as a Yearly Meeting realise financial equity for all and the full engagement of all our members?*

### Involvement from the Broader Community

An improved engagement with young people will not arise from the efforts of only those currently care about these concerns but will arise from the efforts involving more of our wider community – including those who might not currently be concerned about our engagement with young people.

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*The spiritual welfare of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and its members take a warm personal interest in one another's welfare. The pastoral work of the Society is specially committed to the overseers, but our members generally should not allow themselves to feel that they are relieved from responsibility. [...]*

1925

I am hopeful about the future of the Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa. I believe it will require us to adjust our sails slightly if we are to change direction. I find change difficult personally, but it can be exciting, and I am choosing to look to the opportunities we have in front of us.

I hope that Meetings and Worship Groups consider the information contained in this report in the light of our Inner Guide. Perhaps this will lead some to adjust or change their present approaches or practices. I do not think that tweaking or changing our practices will be easy because if it were we would probably be starting down that path already. I believe it will be worth it though. If we are to be a Society for *all* Friends, then we will need to include all people as much as possible in our future planning and present-day decision making.

*If Spirit leads your Meeting to change to better serve the needs of families and young people, are you willing to feel uncomfortable and yet still follow?*

## Annex I Further Resources

### Working with Children

- Quaker Religious Education Collaborative (including Christel Jorgenson)  
<https://quakerrecollaborative.org/>
- Journeys in the Spirit for children aged 5-12, Britain Yearly Meeting  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/resources-children/journeys-child>
- Resources for children's programmes, Britain Yearly Meeting  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/resources-children>
- Faith and Play  
<https://quakerfaithandplay.org/>
- Resources for Children, Friends General Conference  
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/services/resources-children>
- First Day School Tool Kit, Friends General Conference  
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/first-day-school-tool-kit>
- Quaker Activity Pages for Children, Friends General Conference  
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/quaker-childrens-activities-pages>
- Yearly Meeting in Australia  
<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Children>
- QuakerSpeak YouTube Channel: How Do Quakers Support Children's Spirituality?  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtF\\_fDCkfjc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtF_fDCkfjc)

### Working with Teenagers / Youth

- Resources for work with young people aged 11-18, Britain Yearly Meeting  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/resources-young-people>
- Working with Middle and High School Friends: What Are the Developmental Differences?, Friends General Conference  
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/working-middle-and-high-school-friends-what-are-developmental-differences>

### Children and Meeting for Worship

- Friends Journal Article: Where and How Are Friends Made  
<https://www.friendsjournal.org/where-and-how-are-friends-made/> and see Annex II Bibliography.
- Four Reasons for Your Meeting to Become More Welcoming for Children, Friends General Conference

Engaging our Young People

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/resource/welcome-children-to-meeting>

Engaging Young People

- Britain Yearly Meeting Engaging Young People study:  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/engaging-young-adult-friends-report-16.08.22>

Intergenerational Connection

- Resources for use with all ages  
<https://www.quaker.org.uk/children-and-young-people/work-quaker-setting/resources-all-age>
- Building Intergenerational Community, Friends General Conference  
<https://www.fgcquaker.org/services/building-intergenerational-community-0>

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