Foreword

Welcome to the 12th edition of our annual newsletter which I trust you will find positive and indeed exciting to hear of the developments of Quaker Service, even as we face a period of unprecedented global uncertainty and change.

This time last year we reported that we had lost a huge government contract to provide services for families visiting prison, services we had been providing successfully for almost 44 years. Our management board, staff and volunteers reacted very quickly to turn this situation around and invested much time in considering how we might use our experience, legacy and passion to strengthen, sustain and develop our remaining work as well as consider whether there were new ways to make a positive difference in the lives of people going through difficult times, including people in prison and their families. I am pleased to announce that one year on, we are ready to publish our new strategic plan “A history of service, a future of opportunity” for 2017-20.

Our key objectives are to consolidate and further develop our current services at Quaker Cottage with families, children and teenagers as well as our Quaker Connections volunteer befriending programme, now operating at all prison establishments in Northern Ireland. To enable our plans to take shape, we recognised that we needed to increase our capacity to deliver new and improved services. During the year we therefore recruited two new members of staff. Dave Morton joined us in March as our new Operations Manager, and Sinead Bailie in April as our Quaker Connections Development Manager. Of course, all of this requires much financial resourcing and this is a key challenge for us as we move our services forward to reach more people in need. Quaker Service is working to embrace a future of opportunities as new ways to serve those most in need are opened to us however, we cannot underestimate that in the current climate, our need for support through your prayers and financial input is greater than ever. We hope that as Friends, members and supporters you will consider carefully our need for support through your prayers and financial input is greater than ever. We hope that as Friends, members and supporters you will consider carefully our work in the weeks and months ahead.

Our Quaker Care shops have been providing unrestricted funding for almost 20 years. But in July, following a lengthy 2-year review, we decided to close the Woodstock Road retail outlet. Yet we are planning to extend Quaker Care, our social economy project, by improving our Lisburn Road shopping experience and by introducing other initiatives such as an online shop, pop-up shops, car boot sales and so on. And to help us achieve greater profits for our charitable work, we created a new Retail Development Manager post.

The economic landscape appears to change daily. We recognise that the full impact of Brexit is still very much unknown but we do know that Northern Ireland is in a unique position as the only country within the UK which will have an EU land border. We are also concerned about the possible effect of Brexit on the Peace Process and the harsh realities of the loss of European funding which had assisted in our country’s road to recovery. On the positive side, the Northern Ireland Executive is publishing a new Programme for Government underpinned by an outcomes based accountability approach. We plan to transform the way we design, deliver and evaluate our services using a similar approach.

The success of Quaker Service depends upon so many factors, and one of the most important is the relationship we have with F/friends. We have been so grateful for the support and encouragement we have received from you, particularly over this past year. And we have taken great strides in improving our links with Friends’ Meetings and in seeking feedback from all those who have an interest in our work. We want to continue developing our relationships with F/friends as serve together to meet the needs of those most forgotten and undervalued in our communities. We trust that you will be mindful of the practical service undertaken daily by our teams and will keep such work in your thoughts as we continue to overcome significant financial challenges, prejudice and political ignorance in order to serve those most in need.

Elizabeth Dickson, Chair

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MAKING LOVE VISIBLE:

Our vision is for a society where people are valued and fulfil their potential.

Our ethos is guided by Quaker beliefs and values. Quakers believe that there is a divine spark in everyone and this fundamental belief leads us to value the equal worth and unique nature of each individual.
Afterschool Programme at Quaker Cottage

“I get butterflies in my tummy when I am coming to Quaker Cottage” states a 10-year-old with a broad smile.

At Quaker Cottage, we have afterschool groups “with a difference”. On three afternoons each week, our buses leave Quaker Cottage on the side of Black Mountain, and head down into North and West Belfast to pick up the school aged children of the families who attend our family programme.

Sometimes when we call to collect the children, they can look deflated, weary, or maybe frustrated – perhaps burdened by the things that have already confronted them that day. But, when the ‘Quaker Bus’ arrives with one team greeting the children, it’s like they have had an imaginary switch turned on - their faces light up and a smile beams!

The transformation can be dramatic, and is always both heart-warming and humbling.

With the children safely aboard, all Quaker bus journeys become an adventure, packed with singing favourite songs, sharing stories and catching up with friends from the previous week. The troubles begin to subside as our two buses, filled with children, head up the bumpy mountain road to our afterschool room where fun-filled afternoons offering crafts, games, and cooking activities await. By making time to talk and listen to each child, our team members give these young children a voice, showing them that we care about each and every one of them. This is what really makes the difference – this simple but profound exercise of making love visible to those that sadly have experienced too little of it in their young lives. This is the ‘magic’ of Quaker Cottage.

Quaker Cottage Teenage Project – More than a label

Recently, the young people engaged in the Quaker Cottage Teenage Programme worked in partnership with three other organisations on an amazing project titled, ‘I am more than a label’.

This Arts project, launched on the 17th November 2016 in the Ulster University, was aimed at tackling prejudice, racism and sectarianism through the use of photographs and videos in small group-work sessions. It engaged a wide range of participants from various faiths and communities: young people from Quaker Service, young refugees and asylum seekers from Homeplus, LGBT teenagers from Cara Friend and female ex-prisoners from Niacro as well as ethnic minorities who have been victims of hate crime all took part.

Each group met with a refugee and asylum seeker group from Homeplus over a 4 week period. During this time they watched a number of videos and had discussions aimed at tackling prejudice, racism and hate crime.

Participants sat together sharing food in a relaxed, safe and supportive environment encouraging conversations to take place. Some participants talked openly about their culture, for example, one young man told us a story about how he could hold his breath under water for more than 7 minutes while trying to catch fish for his local village. Various stories were shared and common interests and connections were established. It was highlighted to the group how easy it is to automatically develop stereotypes about others, without knowing anything about the individual. The project looked at the various labels given to us by society, family, friends or even ourselves, highlighting how they are most often used to separate people and highlight our differences, not reinforce what we have in common.

Ten years later, the group re-established itself as a Forum in recognition that restorative processes were no longer limited to the criminal justice sector, but were increasingly and successfully being used in education, social care, the family and the wider community to address conflict, build understanding and strengthen relationships with young and old alike.

Today, the Forum is a group of well over 30 people representing 20 plus different agencies across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors as well as the judiciary in Northern Ireland. Our aim is to promote learning mainly through events and research.

As plans develop for an all-Ireland third Restorative Connections conference, we are delighted that through our collaborative work, more people from across Ireland, from all walks of life and in all parts of society are considering restorative practice, not only as a philosophy, but having many practical means of restoring and preventing broken relationships.

Quotes from participants, who were involved in the project

“I used to think that the refugees and asylum seekers were coming over here and taking our jobs and our houses. I thought why can they not stay in their own country? But having had this opportunity to meet with them and hear what they have been through, they’re a lot worse off than we are. It’s made me change my opinions.” Dana (19) West Belfast.

“The video made me realise that I sometimes use labels without even realising it. I loved it, I’m going to say that to everyone now, I am not a label.” Exhibition attendee
Quaker Care

The last few months for our social enterprise Quaker Care, have been a mix of challenge and excitement! Our Woodstock Road outlet closed after a comprehensive review of performance and subsequently, we had to say goodbye to several volunteers and staff who had been an integral part of the Quaker Care team for many years. As part of this period of change, our longstanding Retail Manager, Eileen, moved on to pastures new leaving us without that charismatic and colourful person who was on hand to answer all the questions, solve all the problems and who, given half a chance, could sell ice to an Eskimo! On top of these changes, the staff and volunteers at Quaker Care have struggled with alterations on the shop floor, changes in the sort room layout, and an ever-growing mountain of donations.

Despite all of that change and challenge the volunteer team have pulled together with renewed energy and vision and as a result, Quaker Care has had some of its' best months in years with income increasing month by month. Our volunteers, both old and new, have continued to work incredibly hard to go through all of the donations we receive and provide excellent service to our customers. The mountain of donations we struggle with is the best problem a charity shop could have, and we are blessed to receive so many high-quality items from the community that support us.

Looking towards Christmas and the year ahead there will be struggles and challenges aplenty, but we have the community, customers, and volunteers we need to continue to build on our recent success. We are especially excited to be undertaking recruitment for a new Retail Development Manager whom we hope to appoint to the New Year. This key role will allow Quaker Care to expand its reach and impact, providing much needed income for the charity, as well as unique work and volunteer opportunities for those who may otherwise not have them.

Quaker Connections

In April of this year we were thrilled to appoint Sinead Bailie to the post of Quaker Connections Development Manager. Despite the challenging months preceding this appointment, the Board of Quaker Service took the decision to extend the post to 30 hours per week to enable the project to expand across all the prison sites in Northern Ireland. A report by Nottingham Trent University and Ulster University highlighted the value of this work. Drawing on the voices of participants, the report clearly demonstrates the significance of the Project in listening, assisting and advising. It reflects the calibre and dedication of the Project Manager and the befrienders; the positive impact on the prisoners; the importance of support for the work from the Prison Service and the need for the Project to be sustained and developed. (Evaluation of Quaker Connections’ Befriending Project p.51).

Sinead brings a wealth of fresh skills, experience and warmth to this key role and, as you will see, has already made some brilliant strides forward as this work expands. Following a rebranding of the promotional materials, there has been an increase in referrals at Maghaberry, particularly from people with severe mental health issues and dementia. Our volunteers are also now involved in providing support to the most vulnerable prisoners within the Donard Centre, a therapeutic and learning hub housed inside the prison.

Magilligan are developing ‘Men’s Sheds’ and would like Quaker Service to be involved in this initiative which sees inmates, staff and volunteers working together to co-producing activities. Due to the current economic situation there are no funds available for externally delivered programmes and therefore the existing skills the men in prison have are being utilised; this approach has resulted in them leading guitar and art classes and teaching computer skills to their peers.

In Magilligan Prison there are also plans for inmates to grow their own food. This has led to a developing partnership between Quaker Service and Growing Together, a UK wide charity that supports communities to be sustainable in growing their own food. Quaker Service will provide volunteers to support their growing endeavours and to teach the men how to cook their own food.

We have been assisting individuals and families in need since 1969 and hope to do so for many years to come. A small percentage of your residual estate in the future would be of significant benefit in securing the continuation of our work. Please ask us for a copy of the Will to Give website at www.willtogive.org. T: 028 90201444 E: info@quakerservice.com
A CHAPTER IN MY LIFE – Anne, Quaker Service Volunteer

I came to Quaker Service nearly 5 years ago now. I came a broken person with no confidence and no feeling of self-worth or value, because soon before I came to Quaker Service I had turned my back on a life of drugs. For 14 years, I had continually taken heroin and smoked crack cocaine. This lifestyle, of living to use drugs and using drugs to live, left me a stumbling wreck. It took the ‘me’ from inside me. Having grown up in a comfortable and well off home, my daily life now centred on raising enough money to get my drugs and that was it, that was all I cared about. I didn’t care for myself or for my family. On top of my addictions and unbeknownst to me at the time, I was also suffering from bipolar disorder. The mood swings I suffered as a result were bad enough, let alone withdrawals from illegal drugs on top.

In 2011 I decided enough was enough and that I was going to move to Northern Ireland and try and get clean. I left Aberdeen with a suitcase and walked out on my flat, I was desperate to start again.

I decided to try volunteering but I was refused many placements due to my background of theft and drug use. Finally, I was offered a volunteering position at the Quaker Care charity shop, that was nearly 5 years ago. I came into the shop with no confidence or self-esteem. But through the support and kindness shown to me by the Quakers over the last 5 years, my confidence is steadily growing. What I like about working for Quaker Service is that I have a role: I am a shop assistant. I take pride in this and take pride in my cleaning duties. When at Quaker Service I am not just a drug addict or person with mental health problems, I am a valued human being and a member of the Quaker team. I can’t tell you what this means to me. I feel very lucky to have somewhere as special as this, working in the shop to raise money to do special things for people in need.

I do not know that much about Quakerism, but I do know they believe in diversity and equality and not judging people. Through my experience with Quaker Service I find this to be true - I have never felt judged here, instead I have been treated with open mindedness, honesty and a non-judgmental attitude. Through my interaction with the Quakers I’ve grown in many aspects of my life like confidence and self-esteem. I feel accepted at Quaker Service for just being me, which I really appreciate but, most of all I feel as if I am a welcome member of the Quaker team. Because of this I am already looking forward to what’s in store at work next week.

My friends at Quaker Service value me for what I do, but it’s more than that, the Quakers value me for me just being me.

Quaker Cottage Family Programme
Women’s Groups

As part of Quaker Cottage Family Programme our work with adults is focused on small groups of mothers representing eight families per group. We take a holistic approach in tackling a raft of issues faced by our families, each of whom are struggling and in need of extra support during difficult periods in their lives and in their parenting journey.

Through our work at Quaker Cottage we aim to support, value and empower women, by promoting a positive self-image, developing greater self-esteem, and helping to resolve or reduce the difficulties experienced as part of family life. Many of our participants have little or no extended family support and find the help and advice offered through our family support programme invaluable. One important outcome of the group sessions is the peer support and friendships that develop among participants, and the positive relationships with staff, our childcare team and volunteers who are involved in working with the whole family through our Preschool, Afterschool and Teenage Programmes. Many participants of the programme tell us that taking part in group sessions has helped to increase their confidence and self-esteem. One woman recently shared that as her time on the programme is coming to an end she has been encouraged to consider other community based activities and to make a return to education to enhance her employability skills. She told us that ‘coming to Quakers’ has given me the confidence to do other things to improve my family circumstances and job prospects.”

The relationships are built on respect and trust. They are highly valued and play an important role in supporting and strengthening those families most in need. Recently one woman spoke of her experience within the group setting, telling us that in times of real struggle “I don’t have much support from my own family, but at least I have my ‘Quaker’ family.”