

Junior Gathering Epistle 2017

On 19th August 2017, 58 young Quakers aged 11-14 and 20 volunteer staff met for a week at Leighton Park School to explore the theme 'Gender Equality', enjoy being part of a community and have fun!

Visiting speakers and staff organised a range of thought provoking sessions during the week to encourage us to consider the inequalities in our world and the strength of us as individuals.

We started the week by creating a 'Web of Identity', a large outdoor structure made of yarn wrapped around a circle of poles, each one representing a personal quality (E.g. 'I am strong', 'I like football', 'I cry at sad movies'). Each participant created their own path within the structure and these paths came together to form a beautiful 'dreamcatcher' like pattern that represented all of us as a community.

A series of games and workshops helped us learn more about the gender stereotypes that exist within society and we enjoyed inverting traditional gender roles in drama performances of well known fairy tales, reworked to reflect the modern day.

On Tuesday we welcomed Sisters Uncut, an intersectional feminist direct action group who demonstrated the importance of funding domestic abuse services and providing a safe space for victims and on Thursday we learnt more about Gender Equality when we welcomed two transgender speakers who shared their personal experiences and stories about growing up in a gendered world.

Our daily Base Group meetings enabled us to meet with the speakers in smaller groups, ask questions and discuss these issues in more detail.

Our annual trip to Oxford allowed us to meet up with old friends from previous Junior Gatherings and after a joint meeting for worship with Senior Conference, we were set loose on the city.

We had a lot of fun in our daily activity sessions, which ranged from ultimate frisbee and swimming, to disco ball making, mindful colouring and creative writing. There was something for everyone and we enjoyed being able to try something new every day. Evening sessions with the whole group were energy filled, with a barn dance, DIY wacky races and Base Group challenge which included egg parachuting and trying to make Keith laugh!

We appreciated the facilities provided by Leighton Park School and the friendliness shown by the school staff and ended the week with a moving outdoor Meeting for Worship under the stars.

During the week, through our worship and activities together, we became a more inclusive Quaker community. We return home determined to listen, to allow other's lives to speak, be better able to challenge gender inequality when we see it and to support those working to promote a more equal society.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering Clerks: Rozzie and Coll