

Epistle of Junior Gathering, 2021

To all Friends everywhere,

From 14th to 21st August 2021, 38 young people and 15 staff gathered together for a week to explore the theme of “Caring for ourselves and others”.

It's a Quaker event and everyone, whether familiar with Quakers or not, enjoyed finding peace and reflecting when we met for worship every morning. To help us focus, we sometimes had things to fiddle with such as playdough, cat's cradle, friendship bracelets, and paper doves to write our worries on before releasing them.

After meeting for worship, we went to our chosen activities such as tie dye, debating, creative writing and listening, arts and crafts, outside sports and musical options.

Speakers from both outside and inside the event helped us to explore our theme of caring for ourselves and others. Some covered familiar topics such as mental health that many of us had discussed at school and others spoke of their personal experience, for example of meditation which gave everyone tips on how to be centred. It also included one of our staff who talked about her work as a doctor in Accident & Emergency and how the Covid lockdown had affected her, her job and the NHS. During these sessions we had activities and discussions led by the speakers.

For lots of us it was our first time at Junior Gathering, and our daily meetings in small basegroups were an important space for us to really get to know each other and have fun.

In the afternoon and evening every day we had various light-hearted sessions. Some of the highlights were: trash fashion (where we made colourful hats out of oddments of different materials, wore face paint and paraded down the catwalk) and marble runs made in groups from scrap cardboard (which were then judged against various criteria).

Lots of us enjoyed dancing at the “Under the sea” themed disco. And we also got insights into the lives of our amazing staff members in “Lifelines”.

At the end of each day during epilogue we had singing and music from staff, guided meditations, the light display in the middle of the room, and the freedom of sitting or lying on the floor. We also valued the darkness, even if it made some people sleepy.

The event happened shortly after release from most Covid lockdown restrictions, and it was weird at first but we soon got used to it. It was lovely to see and be close to people in a non-academic space. During lockdown, almost no-one had slept outside their own home. It was difficult to adjust to, but we gradually made the Gathering our home.

Overall Junior Gathering was a welcoming and accepting safe space where everyone could be themselves. It was a great chance to meet new people and be away from home. Next time we'd like more time to shower and relax and socialise before bed!

As we come to the end of our week, we reflect on the friendships we've made and the fun we've had. We look forward to returning to Junior Gathering in 2022, hoping to explore the theme "Respecting all life, identities and opinions".

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2021

Isabel P and Jojo J, clerks

Max H and Queenie K, elders