

Junior Gathering Epistle 2024

To all Friends everywhere,

From the 20th to the 26th of August 2024, 40 young people and 15 staff gathered at Leighton Park School, Reading for a week of exploration and reflection on the theme “Gender Equality”.

External speakers helped us to better understand and discuss our themes through interactive sessions, workshops, and talks. In Joe Holtaway’s session we spoke about gender stereotypes and inequality in the workplace. We also had Sarah Cosgriff who talked about identity and intersectionality - the crossroads of how we identify ourselves and how this impacts our experiences. Thomas Penny spoke to us about having difficult conversations, being empathetic, and remembering that both we and our views have the possibility of being wrong - “Think it possible that you may be mistaken” (Advices and Queries 17). Cassie Gates and James Brydon-Dickenson spoke to us about their experiences as trans people and shed light on the joys and difficulties of being a trans person.

Each day we started and ended with Meeting for Worship and held a moment of silence during meals. We enjoyed having engaging items to interact with in the morning, such as play dough and leaves. In the evening, it was nice to wind down after a long day, often with some music and candles.

To have an opportunity to get to know each other more, we were able to choose from some activities led by staff each morning, for example: swimming and various other sports, crafts, Chillin’ ‘n’ Spillin’, meditation, board games and creating a Junior Gathering Newspaper. In the afternoon and evening we did group activities such as an ‘escape room’, the disco and Ents – short for entertainments. Along with this, we had a construction activity which was a great opportunity to work as a team and listen to each other’s ideas. There was also Lifelines, where two staff told us about their life experiences and their highs and lows. It helped us to get to know these staff more and see different perspectives on growing up.

For the first time in many years our sister event, Senior Conference (for 15- to 18-year-olds), was held on the same campus as us. This was appreciated by everyone because people who had siblings or friends who had moved onto Senior Conference could talk to them. On Friday, we had a day out in Oxford which began with a Meeting for Worship with them at Oxford Meeting House. We then went out in individual groups of our picking to explore Oxford.

One of the unique things about Junior Gathering is that people make friends of all ages, which young people don’t usually do in school. It is also nice to connect with other young Quakers as many of us come from areas where there aren’t many of them. Something that again helps us to develop our connections and meet old and

new friends is our Base Groups, which are small 'homegroups'. Here we played games, spoke about how we were feeling, and discussed the speaker sessions in more detail.

What the week has highlighted to us is the need to accept others and allow them to be the people they are.

In our Meeting for Worship for Business, it was discerned that the theme for Junior Gathering 2025 would be on the theme of global problems, particularly focusing on conflict and climate change. We also hope that Meetings for Worship and Epilogues in 2025 can explore different ways Quakers worship around the world. The 2025 JG disco theme is Sports.

Overall, Junior Gathering is a really positive and accepting event where everyone feels welcome.

Signed in and on behalf of Junior Gathering 2024,

Laurie W & Harriet CS

Nell C & Maddie M

Clerks

Elders