

YFHS 2019 Epistle

A week ago, around 80 of us arrived at Bootham School for Yorkshire Friends' Holiday School 2019. Although old friends were reunited in the opening gathering, it can be daunting for new attendees and a range of welcome games including "Human Bingo" and "Pin the Bow on Elspeth" helped to make everyone get introduced.

Our first social on Sunday evening saw us meet our Nest Groups, a source of nourishment, sustenance and laughter throughout the week. We drew each other with our non-dominant hands, and make lego models of our Nest Group, as we settled into getting to know one another.

Our theme for the week, Creative Action, underpinned all of our morning sessions. Abigail Darton led the session on Monday, challenging us to consider our reactions to different forms of art, including photographs of viruses and code, and discuss how context gives meaning. In a highly interactive session, we had a chance to talk to many more participants as we got to know one another.

On Tuesday, we welcomed Miriam Lyons to show us her documentary Love Commandos, about a charity in India that protects love couples from honor killings. The film was at times harrowing, but reminded us of the power of people to make a difference and to not give up hope.

On Wednesday we split into different groups to carry out a morning of "Creative Action." Some of us made 'Cycle Bags' for schools, some explored the theme through creative writing, and some designed banners for the Peace Vigil which took place in York on Friday afternoon in Free Time. We appreciated a chance to "do something" as well as finding out about actions, and it provided a good break in the sessions.

Thursday's session was led by Ben Slack, who talked about the Swan Song project, Ben had an idea to benefit people at the end of their lives and their relatives by helping them write a song. He told us how he made this idea grow and many of us were moved by the songs he shared and empowered to take forward our own projects. Although this session was again challenging for us, it showed us how we can celebrate life even in tragic circumstances.

On Friday, Abi Horsfield led us to consider how she has used her creativity to help people in her travels around the world doing Community Drama. She challenged us to speak our truths on our 'soap box' and commit to one small change we can each do in the year ahead. The theme seemed to fit together well this year, with a good range of sessions linked by common threads to consider.

Throughout the week our days are book-ended by Meeting for Worship in the mornings and Epilogues at the end of the evening social time. In the silence we have time to reflect, to consider both Holiday School and our lives outside it, and draw strength in what is a tiring and exhilarating week.

This year's Potted Sports focussed on a "Health and Safety" theme, which managed to be both entertaining and fully risk assessed. Free time activities like the Peace Vigil and opportunities to learn the dances are appreciated, as is the chance to just relax and catch our breaths – and to frequent the Tuck Shop. Activity Groups this year included discussion groups, sewing, film club, jigsaws, drama and dungeons and dragons – providing a chance to get to know people outside our Nest Groups and pursue our own interests.

We return to our normal lives tired but refreshed, challenged by our theme and speakers, and with friendships we will carry through the year. We have been reminded of what is important, and what we can do about it.