

## **Junior Holidays 2023**

### **Report to Quakers in Yorkshire, January 2024**

#### **Nell Bank, June 2023**

35 children aged 7 to 15, 2 teenaged volunteers, 6 adult volunteers and 1 staff member travelled to the Nell Bank Centre in Ilkley on 9 – 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The theme for the weekend was ‘looking after one another’.

The sun shone – and shone. We all lived adventurously by going for a ‘short’ walk which turned out rather longer than anticipated. We chose not to include organised activities provided by Nell Bank staff in our programme. The DiY weekend worked well, and we made the most of ice-cream, playing with water, the fabulous playground and outdoor games. For those who preferred creativity to running around there was endless crafting to do – with expert support from one of our volunteers. No Junior Holiday can reasonably avoid a game or two of Mafia, and there was a talent night too, expertly compared by one of the children.

The volunteers looked after each other with endless coffee and cake, appreciating each other’s talents and working as a team, ably assisted by the teenagers. The children helped each other settle – and the age differences seemed to support that connection. Several of our children were new to Junior Holiday; others were old timers. All took part in the daily epilogues and the Sunday Meeting for Worship, held outdoors and supported by birdsong.

Our group of children included those who were active in their Meetings as well as those who were new to Quakers. We have learnt about the importance of explaining why we do what we do as Quakers to help children new to our traditions to understand and feel included and involved.

#### **Barmoor, October 2023**

18 children, 2 teenage helpers, 4 volunteers and one staff member travelled to Barmoor for a weekend of togetherness under the theme of “Living Adventurously”.

On the first evening after dinner, we went for a short walk in the dark, where we paused, looked at the stars and listened carefully to sounds in the night and where they came from. We considered both our own travel and the travel of things in nature. The Epilogue gave us a chance to consider times when we were adventurous and how we might be adventurous in the coming day.

Our walk the following day explored the beautiful north Yorkshire moors, though we’d learnt to make it short! We were chased by warm rain and got soaked but it didn’t stop us getting ice cream from the village. Barmoor gives lovely opportunities to explore indoors and offers cosy spaces for reading, chatting, preparing for the talent show as well as a chance to run off all the cake in the garden. The talent show included jokes and riddles, magic tricks and amazingly fast Rubiks cube solving. After our show we had an Epilogue with our duvets where we thought more about adventure. People shared ministry about adventuring together, helping each other and the adventures we can find in books. By Sunday we had got to know each other better and we had a relaxed morning crafting, preparing Cozy Glows booklets and enjoying Meeting for Worship, letting quietness and peace wash over us.

## **Plans for upcoming Junior Holidays**

We have decided to change our venue from Nell Bank to Curly Hill Scout Camp in Ilkley for our holiday in June 2024. We will be able to explore new spaces, arrange our own activities (something Nell Bank are no longer able to offer us) and some of us might even camp! The space is big, so we will be able to welcome as many children as want to come, whilst keeping costs low.

Barmoor is a favourite, and offers that homely, quirky Quaker space like no other. The problem though is its size – our October holiday last year filled up very quickly and some children missed out. We've booked it again for autumn 2024 but we are considering how best to provide a Barmoor holiday for the younger age group whilst supporting our older children to transition into Holiday School, possibly via an additional short holiday at the top of the Junior Holiday age range at some point in the year.

## **Reflections**

2023 has been the year when Junior Holiday has had to adapt to the gap left by Bronwen, who has stepped down as the chair of the committee. Bronwen has been a fabulously supportive, organised and capable chair over many years and lots of children have benefitted from her hard work behind the scenes in making the holidays happen. Since Bronwen stepped away from active involvement in the committee, the remaining volunteers have divvied up many of the tasks she previously undertook between them. Several of us are 'old hands' in running the holidays themselves and continue to volunteer to do so because we enjoy it - Junior Holidays are generally exhausting but full of joy. It helps that we have a good skills mix over the weekend and have very much benefitted from Jo Baynham's expertise and guidance.

More of an issue perhaps is a sense that our current volunteers are more enthusiastic about organising and running the holidays than they are about more generic 'committee duties'. I think we are still in post – Bronwen transition.

We have been heartened by the numbers of children wanting to come to Junior Holidays after the enforced break of the pandemic. The challenge now is to keep those children involved in Quaker activities as they grow and move out of the Junior Holiday demographic.

Regarding finances, because of the numbers on the holiday and the very low running costs, Nell Bank made a surplus of around £1,000. Barmoor broke even, whilst subsidising a child to attend for the first time. It is difficult to imagine how we could reduce costs further – our volunteers give their time for free, activities are generally free, food is cooked from scratch and we avoid expensive ingredients. We cannot assume that this surplus will continue, and Junior Holiday may well need to be subsidised by QiY from time to time. Our surplus this year enabled us to subsidise several 'graduates' of Junior Holiday to access Holiday School in the summer.

Our challenges continue to include ensuring inclusivity – balancing budgets with accessibility for families. Decisions around setting costs are sometimes more of an art than a science and balanced budgets very much depend on the number of children attending. We may continue to need QiY to underwrite or subsidise our weekends in the future.

We are also keen to encourage children with additional needs and diverse backgrounds to attend our holidays, though this needs to be carefully considered alongside our volunteer skill set and capacity and ensuring the safety of the group of children as a whole. Thoughts from our wider Quaker community around this would be welcome.

Becca Gilmour, on behalf of Junior Holiday volunteers

Huddersfield Meeting