

Hereford and Mid Wales Monthly Meeting (Quakers)

Hereford and Mid Wales Link Group Report 21st-23rd April 2006 at Ross-on-Wye FMH

Theme: Drugs and Alcohol

This was the second time that Link group had spent a weekend at Ross FMH. We enjoyed using such a spacious and historic meeting house and were made very welcome. A group of us had met beforehand with Helena Chambers of QAAD to plan the sessions and so we felt well prepared for 18 young friends (two from S. Wales and one from N. Wales) who came together for the weekend.

As an introduction to our theme, the Friday evening session was led by David Binney, who helped us to update our information about drugs, alcohol and smoking with a quiz. This led to an interesting discussion. On Saturday Helena led the two morning sessions. These were thought provoking as we discussed what we experienced in the way of drugs and alcohol and how we react to peer pressure. Did our Quakerism influence our attitudes? Together we examined the effects of addictive behaviour (mental health, health, violence, crime, social effects on families etc., environmental damage). Helena then gave us a historical background of smoking and alcohol in the Society of Friends and we learnt that Quakers have always considered the three aspects of addiction, viz. the person, the drug and society. She also pointed out that if the drug is illegal the focus of attention is on the drug, but that if the drug is legal the focus is on the **person** (i.e. weak etc.). The final exercise was based on Q.F. & P.19.01 (the incident where Fox goes drinking with some friends). We were forcibly struck how the situation Fox found himself in was very similar to those we find ourselves in today, except we thought we would deal with it in a different way! We found several Advices and Queries helpful: 1.02.40, 1.02.41, and especially 1.02.38. Huge thanks go to Helena for making these sessions so interesting and challenging. In the evening we used two activities out of a Tacade pack including a treasure hunt.

On Saturday afternoon Richard, a friend from Ross meeting, led us on a delightful walk up to Chase woods and back. The weather was perfect and the wild flowers were stunning. There was a craft activity on return and lots of games and fun. The mounds of delicious food were all prepared by Julia and our thanks go to her and also to Jane, Kate and David Thornley who all slept a night on the floor with us!

The final morning brought together 49 people in an all age Meeting for Worship. How moving it was to have so many people in what is usually a very small meeting. We shared our theme and there was moving ministry as we hung up paper shoes we had made to represent our personal journeys with drugs and alcohol. It was a joyful occasion which ended a happy and close knit Link weekend when we learnt to understand the problems of addiction and not be judgmental.

Sam Stacey said: "When I heard about the theme for Link, I thought it would be like a long PSE lesson where you're slapped in the face with information and facts and told not to do drugs and alcohol. But our discussions got so deep and interesting that it's become a valuable weekend where we not only discussed the effects of addiction, but also the reasons why people use drugs and alcohol. This makes it easier to help people."

Kate Binney
(on behalf of Link group)
02.05.06