

QAADRANT

Autumn 2018

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



'A very spiritually uplifting weekend'

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‘Signposts for the soul – pathways through addiction’ - Woodbrooke 2018

Our biennial conference at Woodbrooke in mid-July saw 50 Friends, professionals and QAAD trustees gather together to reflect on the experience and impact of addiction and explore pathways which can offer new hope and light into the lives of those affected. Eschewing the traditional format of keynote speakers and workshops, we used the dynamic and participatory Open Space approach, which provided everyone with the opportunity to discuss with each other those experiences and ideas which concerned and interested them the most. Initial (and understandable!) scepticism swiftly gave way to enthusiasm and energy, with twenty ‘conversations’ being initiated and run by participants. Subjects ranged from ‘Ideas on Prevention’ and ‘Addiction related to power in society and society’s attitude to suffering’, to ‘Alternatives to AA’ and ‘Does love conquer all (but tough love)?’

During the weekend there were choices of several meetings and activities, including an open AA meeting, a meeting for ‘close others’, an arts workshop, poetry and readings, viewing TED (Technology, Education and Design) talks, and an evening’s entertainment featuring magic, stand up comedy, poetry and sketches. There was also the option to spend time in Woodbrooke’s ground for quieter reflection and conversation.

We are very grateful to all those who came to this year’s conference for sharing their insights and inspirations so honestly and generously, and making the weekend a valuable experience for us all.

The following pieces have been drawn from the feedback we have received.

The long drive to Woodbrooke on a scorchingly hot day was relaxed and enjoyable – was this an omen for the weekend? And so it was. I’d been to a QAAD conference before and was looking forward to spending quality time with like-minded people and with time to relax on the terrace looking on to the beautiful gardens, walking round the grounds and enjoying the excellent three meals a day – which I didn’t have to cook!

‘Thank you for a soul-searching and enlightening conference, I gained much from it and made more wonderful F/friends - I’m so fortunate today.’

Although the conference took on a different form, with small group discussions instead of a speaker, I thought this initiative worked extremely well. The choice of groups on Saturday morning was somewhat daunting at first, but we had time to decide which ones appealed to us most.

The first group I chose considered the stigma of living with an addict. The sharing was deep and thoughtful, though sometimes painful. My second choice was on meditation as I’ve practiced it for many years in Step 11 of the Al-Anon programme, and again the contributions of others were heart-warming. My mind was buzzing by this time so I decided to skip the third group session and sat quietly in the garden lounge with my thoughts.



I chose the Close Others meeting as my afternoon group. The sharing was a good reminder that although we all came from different walks of life, were of different ages and so on, we had one vital experience in common – we had all been affected by living with loved ones who were addicts. The sharing in this group reinforced the need to reach out to others who understand.

A great weekend and thanks to all who put it together so that it ran so successfully and smoothly. *Jenny A*

Donald Rumsfeld got a lot of stick when he talked about ‘known unknowns’ and ‘unknown unknowns’, but he was spot-on. I’ve worked in the field of alcohol misuse for nine years now, but there are still plenty of things I don’t even realise I don’t know. The recent Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs (QAAD) conference at Woodbrooke was an excellent opportunity for me to find out what’s not been on my radar.

For example, sitting with ‘close others’, I learned about the dangers of co-dependency: the urge to manage the chaos and to martyr oneself to live with someone who’s gradually bringing everyone down. I listened to stories of drinkers and drug-users who were kind and principled people – people nobody wanted to lose – but who had to be let go in the end. I heard about less obvious forms of addiction or dependency, like constant overwork and the growing problem of online pornography use which, like so many such behaviours, represents a flight from the complexity of human relations.


‘I would thoroughly recommend this conference to anyone who would be interested in attending a lively and energised workshop on what can be, for all those touched by addiction, such a serious issue.’

I also learned that, for many Friends, their Local Meeting is not somewhere they feel they can speak about their own such battles, or their life caring for someone who’s struggling in this way. It’s perhaps significant that Quaker Faith and Practice has next to nothing to say about how we can support Friends with substance misuse issues. Sadly, for some Friends, QAAD events are the only places they can address in a Quaker way the troubles that loom so large in their lives. Surely, this has to change.

‘A very spiritually uplifting weekend. I do hope that this weekend can remain in the calendar. It is the only event where Quakers in recovery and those with family who are addicted can come together to share ‘our Experience Strength and Hope.’

If we dig down to our Christian roots, we can see that Christ ‘came not to call the righteous’ and gathered around him an entourage of outcasts. Even if that sort of language doesn’t resonate with us, we know that we as Quakers are called to ‘bear the burden of each other’s failings’, and also to be ‘open to new light, from whatever source it may come’. That second point may be the most important one of all. As I found out at the conference, there is plenty of ‘new light’ to be experienced in listening to the life stories of Friends on the front-line of destructive behaviours.

That ‘new light’ wasn’t confined to the conference hall either. Taking myself off one evening in search of a quiet spot to read my book with a pint and a cigar (my own little bit of substance use), I got to pondering on the range of things we use to alter our mood. There was me, thinking I was being quite moderate and cultured. There were the other people in the pub, ranging from cheerily



sociable to stumbling intoxication. There were the red-faced lads who'd been there since mid-afternoon; the girls' night out with bottles of rosé in buckets of ice; and the first-date couple overcoming their nerves with cider. Nothing wrong with any of that in itself; but all carrying the seeds of potential pitfalls – for all of us, including me. And if Quaker Meetings are to become places where people can be honest about their drinking (or drug-taking or gambling, or whatever they're entangled in), that has to start with creating a space for honest conversations about such behaviours, free of judgement, long before they become life-destroying problems.

Andrew Misell, Cardiff Meeting

'A group of Quakers were saying that the fellowship they experienced there was far greater than they experienced in their individual Meetings, in huge part I think a reflection of how it was led, and I wish many more people could experience that level of lovingly shared experience and wisdom.'

I found the conference very helpful, as ever, and valued the way that so much of the experience and learning came from the meeting of participants. Many thanks to QAAD's Director and trustees for providing the framework and understanding within which all this could happen. I have a sense that the Woodbrooke context as a 'home' for QAAD is also very important as an accepting and nurturing environment, particularly the Quaker ethos and the continuing community. It was good to have conversations over the weekend with Friends who were not taking part in the conference but interested in our themes. There was a suggestion of QAAD meeting in more far-flung places, and I am sure this would also be right - perhaps for

smaller, regional, gatherings in alternate years, or as QAADNET events, so as to reach more Friends and spread the word in this way.

This Friend requested anonymity

'From at least two participants I heard that the QAAD conference is where their recovery program spirituality and Quaker spirituality could safely come together. They did not want to be stereotyped in their local Meeting as the member in recovery, and there is a reluctance to mention outside religious programs in recovery meetings... There is a huge resentment to 'God' from many, if not most, who land in recovery. Such resentment killed a member of our family.'



Summary of the Director's report for 2017

Each year, QAAD's Director produces a report for our trustees, summarising the work that has been completed, and suggesting a focus for the year ahead. Here is a summary of the most recent report. The full report is available on our website; if you would like a printed copy, please contact Alison Mather who will be happy to post one to you.

The work of the Director of QAAD has continued to focus on education, prevention and support activities that address the problems of alcohol, other substances, and gambling. These activities work for the public benefit within the Religious Society of Friends and also outside it.

Friends and Meetings

During recent years we have become particularly aware of the needs of Friends who are 'close others' affected by the alcohol, other drugs, or gambling problem of someone close to them. We offer these Friends individual support when requested, and provide opportunities for them to engage with each other.

At our biennial retreat at Charney Manor in October, we invited twelve interested Friends to join us for a weekend of reflection and sharing on the experience of addiction. We explored individual journeys and what nurtures and upholds us, spiritually and creatively. A key issue of concern was the response of Local Meetings when Friends disclose their own issues of substance or gambling problems, or issues within their families. It was felt that this was not always supportive, and in some cases Friends had felt a lack of understanding or willingness to discuss the issue.

Throughout the year QAAD continued to offer advice to individual Friends affected by

substance problems, including information about sources of help and confidential contact with willing and informed Friends. A Special Interest Group ('Working with Others for Change') was run and a stall held at the Groups Fair at 2017's BYM in Warwick.

Work with young Friends

QAAD is a member of the Quaker Youth Work Network which looks at different ways of responding to young Friends' needs and will continue to explore how we can best support children and young people affected by addiction issues and contribute to relevant events.

Public issues

QAAD continued to make representations on preventative and treatment measures that would work for the public benefit in terms of promoting health and well-being, particularly as regards gambling. QAAD submitted a written response to the government's consultation on stakes and prizes for gaming machines and social responsibility measures. QAAD also responded to the Welsh Assembly's call for evidence regarding the introduction of 50p Minimum Unit Price for alcohol in Wales and will monitor its introduction in Scotland over the coming year.

* News update * News update * News update *

Gambling

A joint letter was sent to Theresa May, Philip Hammond and Matt Hancock (then Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport) by QAAD and our ecumenical colleagues recently, raising concerns about a reported two-year delay in implementing the reduction of the maximum stake for Fixed Odds Betting Terminals. The letter called for swifter action to minimise further harm for gambling addicts and their families. In response, Tracy Crouch (Minister for Sport and Civil Society), confirmed that she anticipates the changes will be put before Parliament in the autumn.

Drugs

Medical use of cannabis, UK: In July, the government announced a relaxation of laws governing access to cannabis-derived medicines after a number of high-profile cases involving children denied

access to cannabis oil to control seizures. The government's official drug advisers and the Chief Medical Officer for England separately concluded there was evidence of therapeutic benefit for some conditions. Doctors may be able to prescribe these medicines for thousands of people with drug-resistant conditions by the autumn.

Legalisation of cannabis, Canada:

In July, Canada's parliament passed a law legalising the recreational use of marijuana nationwide (medical use has been legal since 2001). It is likely that, by mid-September, Canadians will be able to buy cannabis oil and cannabis grown by licensed producers at various retail locations, order the drug online from federally licensed producers, and grow up to four plants at home. The minimum legal age to buy and consume the drug will be 18 (some provinces have set it at 19).

Have you heard about QAADNET meetings?

QAADNET meetings are facilitated by QAAD for Friends who have a personal or professional interest in substance use or gambling. They can focus on a specific topic or concern, or provide a more general opportunity to talk about addiction and its impact.

QAADNET meetings offer a forum for exchange, learning, support and action and are held locally. They can be arranged for Local or Area Meetings.

If you would be interested to discuss holding

a QAADNET meeting in your area, please contact QAAD's Director, Alison Mather.





Alcohol Labelling: Message on a Bottle

It is not always easy to read or fully understand the information printed on alcohol labels. Tiny print, variable levels of detail, tucked away amidst descriptions of flavour and vineyards, information designed to inform customers about the number of units of alcohol per bottle and possible health impacts can be easily missed. Even if noticed, it can leave people struggling to calculate their overall consumption or make informed decisions about potential risk. Many admit to finding the whole subject of alcohol units confusing and unhelpful.

Bristol University's Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group (TARG) hosted a public event recently about its current research into alcohol labelling. This two-year project, funded jointly by Alcohol Research UK and the Medical Research Council, aims to investigate what should be included on labels, what they should look like, who needs to know the information, and what alternatives could be more helpful.

Focus groups involving about 1500 people with a range of drinking behaviour assessed their understanding of risks and whether they felt motivated to change how much they drank in the light of the health information available. Few participants were aware of (or understood) the significance of alcohol units, or realised that alcohol misuse is directly linked to eight different cancers. Over half disagreed that reducing the amount they drank would improve their health. The study recommends that what is needed is a 'cultural shift', with labelling just one of several methods of promoting health

messages, including information on beer mats and glasses, and the use of 'smart' technology via apps on people's mobile phones. Sir Ian Gilmour (Alcohol Health Alliance) and Professor Marcus Munafò (TARG) were members of an expert panel which discussed labelling and alcohol-related health risks. Asked what a 'safe' number of units might be, Sir Ian confirmed that the government's recommended 14 unit weekly limit represents a 1:100 risk of dying from an alcohol-related cause. Referring specifically to labelling, he suggested it is helpful to look at what the industry resists: large print and located on the front of bottles. However, rather than blame the industry alone – they have a transparent profit agenda – he felt government decisions were also responsible.

Dr Tim Williams (Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health NHS Trust) stressed that cost (including a minimum unit price), combined with effective labelling, would have the strongest impact on people's choices. He referred to the major increases in cigarette pricing and the introduction of graphic images on packaging. Lack of progress is believed to be due largely to the power of the drinks industry's lobbying.

The panel also confirmed that the inclusion of calorific or nutritional information on drinks labels is not a current legal requirement, despite evidence to suggest that young people in particular respond well to messages about health and fitness. However, there is some concern that this could have unintentional consequences if it leads to some people skipping food in order to continue drinking.



Have you looked at
the QAAD website
recently?

www.qaad.org

Please visit it for information about QAAD, news of events for Friends, and details of our public issues work.

We would like to hear from you

If you would like to respond to something you have read in this issue, or would like to contribute an article of your own - or a letter – about a personal experience, something you have read which has given you food for thought, or perhaps a local initiative tackling addiction which has caught your attention, QAAD would be pleased to hear from you. We only use writers’ names with their permission. Please contact Alison:
alison@qaad.org t: 0117 924 6981 PO Box 3344, Bristol BS6 9NT

Addiction is a massive problem, but QAAD makes a difference. QAAD continues to make contributions in the policy field, offers mutual support and advocacy, provides opportunities for networking, represents Friends’ concerns, and works with other faith-based groups, for example on gambling.

Financial support from individuals, Meetings, and Trusts enables us to continue with our work.

Please make cheques/charity vouchers payable to QAAD, and send to: **Ron Barden, Treasurer, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 6JQ.** A Donation by cash or cheque can be enhanced by 25p for each £ if you can Gift Aid it. Please complete the form below and return it with your donation.

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