

# Give Peace a Year Group

Report to Area Meeting - February 2017, one year on.

I am delighted to be reporting back to area meeting following a year of successful meetings of the Give Peace a Year group.

We set out with the aim of bringing more peace into our day to day lives in our words, thoughts and deeds and hoped that the group would provide the space to give that consideration. We started on the 11th February 2016 and it's been quite a year in the world. We've been glad to be together 'giving peace a year' during this year of upheaval in many ways.

Having spent the last few meetings reflecting on the experience, we've decided that we enjoyed it so much we're going to do it again.

A year of words, thoughts and deeds in our lives, that felt violent to us, brought to be given a dose of our collective attention.

Sometimes looking for ideas of how to change things, other times it's empathy we're in need of, feeling shocked to find violence right there in our seemingly peaceful selves.

The most effective thing, as far as peacemaking goes, and most appreciated, has been having the space to think. A space where it feels safe to bring anything, even things that are distinctly not our best moment, and being heard without judgement. That, rather than ideas or suggestions for what to do, has been what brought us most peace.

We've worked directly on specific examples of violence, in conflict at work, in business, conflict between family members, as well as the violence we hadn't realised we'd been subjecting *ourselves* to. Always committed to finding a nonviolent, peaceful way to do things, no fighting for peace.

Quotes from group members describe a little of what the group has done for them

"I always go home feeling more peaceful. I sleep better."

"My awareness of where violence creeps in has been enlarged, made it more concrete."

"I now pause, giving a name to what's happening, and can better own my part in it."

"I like the chance to share and listen to others experiences and then reflect on those in the days following."

"It's quite challenging but also satisfying."

"It's an opportunity to understand and connect with myself more deeply and to learn from the sharing and experiences of others."

"It has helped me develop more quietness and stillness in me and to reflect more on how I am in different relationships."

"It gives me a sense of validation, inner security and connection simply because it's there and I'm a part of it."

"Something powerful, authentic, true happens. We shed stuff. It feels safe, allowing me to become more present, not so reactive, to have more strengths."

"I've come to trust myself. After 25 years."

And on the format and way of managing the meeting.

"I like the way the meeting is managed, ensuring space for each member to speak and ensuring a quality of listening."

"I like the opportunity to express what's on my mind without comment or advice unless I would like it, just to be listened to if that's what I want."

"I really value the feeling of safety so that I have the opportunity to open up about difficult or embarrassing stuff without feeling judged."

"I like the space to be present to each other."

"I like the convivial feel and atmosphere, no pressure to be overly worthy."

"I like the small numbers, allows everyone to be heard."

"it feels like a healthy and harmonious group."

## My own observations

People have talked during meetings about how they've behaved differently in situations since coming to the group.

I've noticed that it's not only in situations and instances they've brought to the group to work on directly. They've behaved differently in situations where no direct attention at all has been given, in the group or out of it, to how they and others behave there.

This, about light, from David Spangler of the Lorian Association for incarnational spirituality, rings true about what has *perhaps* happened for group members.

"Light does not attack or contest.

Light evokes itself within a system. It's not so much that we send light to someone or someplace, as it is that we evoke through resonance their own Light or the light of that situation to emerge and to make itself known.

Light operates by changing the environment.

If I step into a dark room and switch on the light, the light doesn't start fighting the darkness and forcing it to retreat.

The light simply is, and where it is, darkness cannot also be. Light alters the environment whether we're talking about physical light or sacred Light.

In a strict sense there can be no warriors of Light. Rather there are light bearers, those who can bring into and evoke from a situation, potential for sacredness in expression."

Extending this kindness towards ourselves, the space to be heard without judgement has been especially appreciated, and resulted in a growing presence of peace within us... it awakening...coming more to life.

As the presence of peace has, without our being particularly conscious of it, grown within us, things have changed in our environment. Several situations that had historically been way less than fun than is good for our health, and where sniping back and forth was the pattern, surprisingly, didn't pan out the way they had in the past. The habitual retort just wasn't there, or it was spotted making its way out but dissolved before making it out into words.

These were instances where we hadn't worked on the situation at all nor brought them to the group, and without our doing anything, it has been more peaceful.

It seems that, in these instances, we are *being* peace. Being peace bearers.

No-one's looking for a sainthood or polishing their halo... it's in small, human, day to day life situations we've found the increased presence of peace, and there are many, many situations where things aren't peaceful yet at all.

And, that the presence of peace *has* grown in any way, as we have given peace a year, we are happy. And are declaring that, worth the time we devoted to giving peace a year.

## Reporting in a more factual manner

We have had 25 in person meetings, fortnightly on Thursdays, between 7.30 - 9.00pm

Between 2 and 7 people attended each meeting.

I have written 25 blog posts following each meeting with a selection of peace seeking examples from the meeting.

An additional 20 hours coaching and training in nonviolent communication given.

The **grant** has gone towards petrol, parking, paper, printer ink and writing instruction but with the bulk contributing towards and allowing me the time to run the group without charge for participants.

Estimated time in preparing for and running each meeting - 3 hours

Writing and posting the blog post - 3 hours

6 hours x 25 meetings = 150 hours

Future funding. This one off grant has been very much appreciated in allowing this new group to get off the ground. Any advice about alternative grants or funding that might be available towards keeping the group running free of charge for participants to Give Peace another Year would be most welcome.

## Online potential

As we began, I imagined that members of the in person group might also bring examples online and discuss them in the comments of the blog posts, and that from there an online group might grow.

I pictured people who weren't able to come to the in person meeting on a given week could still get support via the virtual group.

And that an online group of people unable to come to in person meetings at all, for mobility or geographic or other reasons might form.

Neither of these things has happened. In review, comments have varied from

"No I don't read the blog posts."

"I only use the website to check the dates of meetings."

"I have read some of them and they've been helpful but it's not the key part for me."

Since the group don't derive great benefit from the blog posts and no online group presence has developed I'm undecided but reflecting on whether there's any merit in continuing with them as we continue into Giving Peace another Year.