WELCOMING ALL

The Discernment of the Quakers in Criminal Justice working group looking at Quaker Meetings & safely integrating former prisoners



OPENING UP A DIALOGUE WITH MEETINGS

The Discernment of the Quakers in Criminal Justice working group looking at Quaker Meetings & safely integrating prison leavers into their worshipping communities.

Quakers in Criminal Justice is a Quaker Recognised group of Britain Yearly Meeting,

This is not definitive guidance but, as the title suggests, it has been written to encourage a dialogue within Meetings. The queries in the 'bubbles' are based on responses we have received. Feedback from the BYM Safeguarding Officer has been incorporated.

WELCOMING ALL is largely concerned with prison leavers who are still being supervised in the community by Probation and have restrictions placed on them, known as 'licence conditions', a requirement to register with the police or an 'Order' (such as a Sexual Harm Prevention Order).

Of course, people may turn up at your Meeting, or already be a part of it, who have been in prison at some point but, having no legal constraints, are not obliged to disclose this.

1

Do you mean our Meeting?

We don't have a prison near us. We are too elderly/ too small / too big / might have a child attend/ so we are not sure we could manage it.

That's a shame; will you not even consider the possibility?

2

All right then, what are the issues? If willing, what preparation should we do?

Good. <u>Firstly</u>, you need, as a Meeting, to be sure that you do really wish to Welcome All. This means creating a safe environment for everyone. Know who your Safeguarding Friend is and remember you never know who might come through the door into the room where your Meeting for Worship is being held.

Perhaps go through a 'shadow' exercise, imagining a scenario where your local Meeting was asked to consider accepting someone recently released from prison and with licence conditions in the community.

<u>Secondly</u> look up the Welcome Directory www.welcomedirectory.org.uk Would your Meeting like to join the other Quaker Meetings who have already subscribed to the

Directory? That would flag up your Meeting as one that is ready, when necessary, to consider accepting someone subject to licence conditions in your midst. Another resource is the independent church safeguarding agency thirtyone:eight https://thirtyoneeight.org

Your Area Meeting Safeguarding Coordinator (or your LM Safeguarding Rep/Link, if you have one) will offer support and guidance too. You must adhere to your AM and BYM procedures regarding this area of witness; safeguarding is a legal obligation on AM Trustees. Now you are better prepared to receive a prison leaver, whenever that might be.

3

How would we know whether someone wishing to join us had been in prison and was released into the community with licence conditions?

So, we might think of this as the third element. You have already decided to go forward in a positive way. It is probably unlikely that prison leavers would contact a Meeting themselves. When release from prison was imminent, a referral could come to you from the Quaker Prison Chaplain at the prison, or via the individual's Probation Officer / Offender Manager. Another route may come, post release, via Circles for Support & Accountability, for example. However the referral originates, the authorities will be involved whenever an individual is subject to such restrictions.

4

This is getting complicated; we may not have enough Members to support this individual.

What if a child appeared at Meeting and the person was a sex offender for instance?

So here we come to the fourth element. The Meeting should consider who could be part of a 'Receiving Group' of Friends to help in the monitoring and support of the individual with restrictions. This Receiving Group should ideally comprise a Pastoral Friend, Elder, and the AM Safeguarding Coordinator, perhaps joined by a Friend with some knowledge of the criminal justice system, such as a member of QICJ.

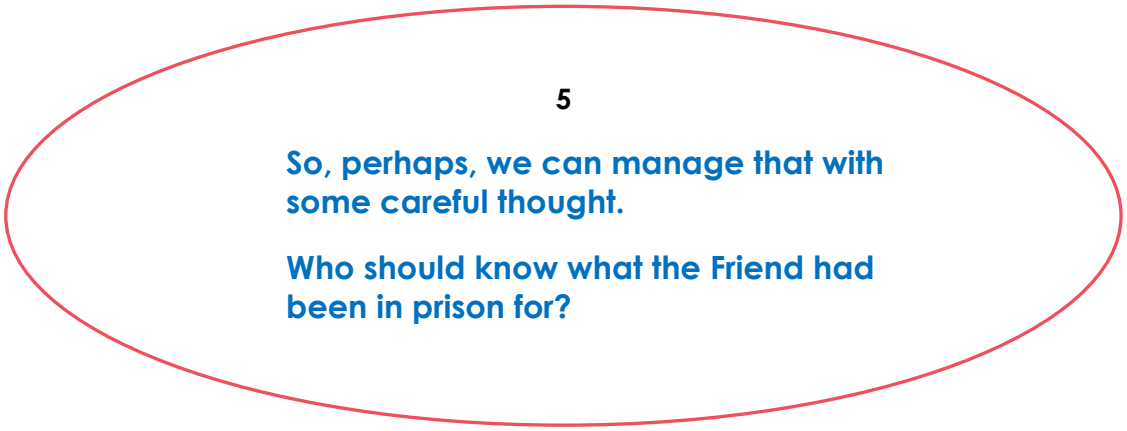
Having been informed of the restrictions, the Receiving Group should conduct a risk assessment, in close consultation with the Probation Officer/Offender Manager. This will

determine which Meetings and events the individual can attend, plus what boundaries may be necessary. BYM strongly advises contacting the safeguarding agency 'thirtyone:eight' for assistance in this process; they are very experienced and have appropriate resources and templates to share. A contract will then be drawn up between the authorities, the Receiving Group on behalf of the Meeting, and the prison leaver.

BYM can supply a template for a contract. Check with your Safeguarding Coordinator who may already have a copy. This contract would include such eventualities as the possible attendance of Children and Young People at Meeting, where appropriate.

It should be noted that there may be occasions where safeguarding concerns outweigh the will to welcome a former prisoner and the risk they pose cannot be mitigated. If attendance cannot be safely managed, the individual should be clearly informed of that fact and the reason why.

One Friend from the Receiving Group should look to maintain a closer relationship with the prison leaver to whom this level of protection applies. Furthermore, it might be detailed in the contract, that attendance at Meeting may only occur when a member of the Receiving Group is able to be present.



This should only be the Receiving Group and your AM Safeguarding team. The prison leaver's welfare and support is as important as that of any Member of our worshipping community.

Knowledge being spread of someone's past offending behaviour can result in social isolation, and ostracization, with the real possibility of recall to prison. It may be that the offence was a long time in the past and the individual has learned to deal with any potential triggers of offending behaviour. The Receiving Group will have been entrusted with looking after the Meeting's interests (as in all appointments).

It is worth stressing that safeguarding processes will be in place in all Meetings; this may help alleviate the anxieties of Friends who, unbeknown to us, have been victims of abuse/crime. The practice of these policies should also help inform new Members of the Meeting that they are worshipping in a safe community regardless of who is in their midst.

6

There is another consideration.

What if the contract with the Meeting appears to have been breached?

This is something which needs to be thought about in advance, probably when the contract is drawn up. However, if a prison leaver with licence (or other) restrictions is carefully supported by the Receiving Group then it should be evident if, and when, boundaries are beginning to blur. The individual should be reminded of the agreed boundaries through that Group. Bear in mind that sex offending, for example, is a very complex issue, and potential offenders can be manipulative in their relationships.

If there are breaches, then the Meeting's Safeguarding Friend should facilitate a meeting with the individual and his/her Offender Manager. Such a violation could result in adapting the contract, exclusion from the Meeting, or in recall to prison by the relevant authorities. There may also be situations arising which are out of the Friend's control. For instance, if a Member of the Meeting becomes unhappy with the Meeting's policy of 'Welcoming All'.

7

We have decided we wish to include former prisoners into our worshipping community. What should we do next?

Think of joining the Welcome Directory. Then it will be known that your Meeting is prepared to consider a person with past offending attending your Meeting.

Let your Area Meeting Safeguarding Friend know that you, as a Meeting, have made the decision to consider such attendance should the circumstances arise.

Decide on who will be in your Receiving Group. Then you are ready for the initial enquiry which could lead to necessary work on drawing up a contract between the Meeting and the authorities. Nominate a particular member of the Receiving Group as the contact Friend.

BYM, the Welcome Directory, and 'thirtyone:eight' all provide training on Safeguarding and welcoming prison leavers. See contacts list at the end of this document.

8

Having worked through all this we have discerned, reluctantly, that it is not something we can do.

Let's think creatively here then. What ways could you include this Friend in your worshipping community? Via zoom is one possibility or maybe via a satellite Meeting between the Friend and a few selected Members of the Meeting at a time outside usual Meeting for Worship. How can that challenge provide fresh opportunities for the Meeting? These special arrangements would equally be subject to any existing contract.

9. And, finally:

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'How can we make the Meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another.

As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our Meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness.'

PLEASE CONTACT QICJ WITH ANY QUERIES: email qicjclerk@gmail.com details of how to join QICJ can be found on our website https://www.qicj.org

Further resources can be found from:-

BYM Safeguarding Officer: Safe@Quaker.org.uk

Welcome Directory www.welcomedirectory.org.uk

The independent church safeguarding agency 'thirtyone:eight' https://thirtyoneeight.org/