



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

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Evaluation Report: EMES Young Adult Friend Intervisitation Project

In April and May 2019, FWCC-EMES invited two Young Adult Friends (YAFs) from the FWCC Section of the Americas to spend two weeks travelling amongst Friends in Europe. This project was a pilot and was funded by the FWCC-World Office Young Adult Friends Development Fund:

<http://fwcc.world/fwcc-news/yaffund>.

What is the purpose of this report?

We are sharing this version of our report publicly, as we want others to learn from our pilot project and perhaps even consider replicating it in other regions of the world. If you want to discuss anything from this report or have any questions please contact Michael Eccles, EMES Assistant Secretary, on emes@fwccemes.org.

What did we do?

This pilot project involved inviting two YAFs from the FWCC Section of the Americas to come to Europe and travel amongst Friends. Yulieed Avila (General Meeting of Friends in Mexico) and Ashley Weinacht (Northwest YM) participated in the programme. The Executive Secretary of the FWCC Section of the Americas assisted us with finding the participants and we are extremely grateful for her help.

They spent approximately 2 weeks in Europe; in Ireland, Britain and Hungary. During the visit they met with YAFs in Dublin and London (and in Russia via skype) as well as at Young Friends General Meeting in Liverpool (Yulieed only). They also met Friends of all ages at Ireland YM, at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, at Friends House in London (including the FWCC World Office) and at the EMES Annual Meeting in Budapest.

Challenges

This was very much a pilot programme and the schedule was being refined right up until the arrival of the participants in Europe. A number of events and activities that were included in the original application did not happen exactly as we had envisaged, however we don't believe that these changes affected the success of the project.

Due to some changes in the project we spent funds in a slightly different way to the plan. A few examples of significant differences include:

- Transatlantic flights were considerably higher than we budgeted for – this is because quotes were taken in autumn 2018 and flights not booked until spring 2019.
- We had originally considered that one or two European YAFs could have travelled alongside Ashley and Yulieed as elders. Although in the end we did not implement this, a number of people fulfilled this role during the visit; Irish YAFs in Dublin, they were

accompanied by individual Friends on their journey from Dublin most of the way to Birmingham, and during their time in Birmingham, a YAF spent the day with them in London and they stayed with locally based YAFs, a YAF accompanied Yulieed on her travel from Budapest to Liverpool and a YAF accompanied Yulieed on her final journey from Liverpool to London.

- Ashley and Yulieed were not able to travel to the EMEYF spring gathering in Russia. This was partly because we felt it would have been too exhausting to include this additional travelling. EMEYF also expressed concern about the sustainability of a short visit to Russia and we wanted to uphold this concern. As an alternative, a skype call was set up between Yulieed and Ashley and the spring gathering which was a brief but effective way of interacting. The visiting YAFs met 3 Friends at the EMES annual meeting who had been at the EMEYF spring gathering.

Our view is that none of these changes affected the project's objectives.

Support for the participants

Before Ashley and Yulieed travelled to Europe we met with them via Zoom to help prepare them for the visit, practically, spiritually and emotionally. During the visit we were able to debrief the visitors informally; the EMES Assistant Secretary stayed in regular touch with Yulieed and Ashley to evaluate the visit and ensure that the visitors felt supported. We also evaluated the visit via Zoom after the visitors were back home.

Here are some of the comments that Ashley and Yulieed made about the visit:

- *The entire trip was a learning experience*
- *I learned that many people grapple with similar questions, such as why God would allow evil if He is sovereign and good, how Jesus could be both fully divine and fully man*
- *I also learned that Yearly Meetings around the world are also asking similar questions. The one I heard the most often was, "How do we keep the young people in the meeting?" This caught my attention, because the same question is being asked in North American churches as well*
- *I also learned more about the different branches and traditions of Quakerism*
- *I learned that Friends still offer a valuable message to the world today through the testimony of silence, and that this silence creates a unique place for unique people to feel welcomed and safe*
- *This trip challenged me, stretched me, frustrated me, grew me, and blessed me far more than I could ever have anticipated. It was an adventure of a lifetime, and I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of it*
- *My experience was a learning process that really hope that it could be for the friends in Europe too*
- *If I am asked what message I will take home, like to my church home, is that we as Friends, must remember our role in society to become a stronger, lover community that is enthusiast in the work of social change*
- *My meeting has so much to learn from active role that Friends of this part of the world have in this topic and hearing their thoughts was inspiring*
- *I found the different conceptions of God and worship interesting. The continuous silence, people standing up and expressing doubts, fears and joys to a company of friends who would respond with their private silence*

- *This trip also made me know more about Quaker history*
- *I appreciated that there was time in the schedule to breath and see the information and process that we were through*
- *The people that accompanied us were very enthusiastic and kind*
- *We had a time of joy and sharing with the youth, getting to know not only the places but their life, faith and testimony*
- *Ashley has one of the most beautiful minds and hearts that I met in those past days. She always had something good to share and always showed the leadership that runs in her veins at every action. Meeting her was certainly a highlight*

Benefits for everyone

Many people benefited from this trip, not least Yulieed and Ashley themselves. In Dublin, London and Liverpool (and via skype with EMEYF in Russia) they spent time with local YAFs; getting to know them, learning what is important for young adults in different places and getting to know each other at a deep level. Ashley and Yulieed led programmed worship one evening at the EMES annual meeting which was a profoundly deep experience for many Friends. They both showed leadership skills in the leading of this worship and Ashley showed a natural talent for giving prepared ministry.

The original aims of the project, along with comments are listed below:

- To give the visiting YAFs a better understanding of EMES and European Quakerism
Comment: Ashley in particular talked learning about unprogrammed Friends and the issues that concern them as a real highlight of the trip. Yulieed already had some experience of FWCC and meeting Friends from other traditions and this trip enabled her to build on that knowledge.
- To enrich the gatherings and events attended by the travelling YAFs
Comment: Ashley and Yulieed undoubtedly enriched the gatherings they visited through their presence and by sharing with Friends on an individual level. They lead programmed worship at the EMES annual meeting which was a deep moment for many Friends present.
- To enrich the spiritual development of the visiting YAFs and Friends in EMES
Comment: Both Ashley and Yulieed talked of the value of getting to know each other during the visit. It was important that they travelled as a pair, supporting each other and playing to each other's strengths at times.
- Networking with other YAFs and young people
Comment: In Dublin, Russia via skype, London, Budapest and Liverpool the visiting YAFs met with local YAFs having the opportunity for mutual sharing and 'comparing of notes'. They both talked about common concerns in Friends' meetings and churches on different continents about how to keep YAFs involved with the church.
- Mutual learning
Comment: Almost everything they did involved mutual learning at some level; whether through leading programmed worship in Budapest or chatting with YAFs in Dublin or London, or meeting with Quaker staff at Woodbrooke and Friends House.
- A sense of accompaniment between the YAF visitors and those working alongside them; which could include an EMEYF elder, EMES staff member and other Friends

Comment: This was achieved with a variety of different Friends during the different stages of the visit.

- A written report from the visitors, their travelling elder and EMES staff which will be publicly available in order to help others carry out similar programmes of work

Comment: This is that report!

In terms of numbers of people who benefited from the visit, they met with around 60 Friends in Ireland, a few at Woodbrooke, around 10 Young Adult Friends in London, around 50 Friends at the EMES annual meeting and Yulieed met with around 80 YAFs at YFGM. These people included staff from Woodbrooke and Britain YM (at Friends House).

Both visitors were glad to have had the opportunity to visit Woodbrooke – they particularly enjoyed the time spent with the librarian looking at historic Quaker books.

One thing we really pushed Yulieed and Ashley on, was whether the length of the trip was too short, or too long. They both felt that 2 weeks was about the right length of time. Our view at EMES was that it wasn't quite long enough to include everything that we wanted to cover, but perhaps it is not reasonable to ask people to give up more than 2 weeks of their time for a pilot project like this.

Administrative time on arrangements was budgeted within the programme; it was necessary to keep a close eye on how the complex itinerary was working by the EMES Assistant Secretary during the visit.

Conclusion

This was a pilot programme put together with a fairly short time-frame. The EMES Executive Committee feels that it was very much a success. Ashley and Yulieed both felt very positive about the visit and about what they had learned about Quakers in Europe. We felt that they had brought a lot to the gatherings they had taken part in and raised the profile of FWCC, EMES and the YAFDF to Friends they met.

We hope that the seeds sown will lead to more interactions between young Friends worldwide, recognising that this may take time.

We would like to thank the FWCC World Office for the support given with this project.