



Quaker Voluntary Action

About QVA Retreats

Working Retreats

Quaker Voluntary Action has been developing a Working Retreats programme since 2005. These projects offer participants an opportunity to engage in practical voluntary work alongside spiritual reflection. They can be beneficial both for participants and the host organisation.

The Working Retreats Programme includes several projects per year. Working Retreats usually run for a week but can be anything from a weekend to a fortnight. They are held at Quaker venues in the UK and abroad as well as at other non-Quaker, usually charitable centres. Accommodation is often provided free by the host organisation, on-site where available. Some Working Retreats aim to connect people with voluntary service locally to where they live. In these cases, accommodation is not provided and the participants commute daily to the venue.

A typical group size for a Working Retreat is between 6 and 10 participants, plus one or two facilitators. Participants must be 18 years or above and have ranged in age up to 80 years.

The work carried out can include practical tasks such as general gardening, food production, interior decorating, kitchen tasks or other work specified by the host organisation. Materials and tools are provided by the hosts. All tasks are capable of being undertaken by non-specialists and are tailored to include participants with disabilities where possible. The likely level of physicality of the work is however made clear in publicity and information in advance.

A typical daily programme includes 3 hours of work, shared meals, free/social time, reflections and Meetings for Worship, both unprogrammed and structured, for example in the form of an 'Epilogue' to the day. Some retreats take place in situations where more intensive work is required and these cases the workload and timing of free time and reflection sessions are more closely governed by the needs of the host organisation.

Encounter Retreats

Some events take the form of study and encounter tours in which participants explore a topic of social concern in a specific local context. These are referred to as 'Encounter Retreats' here. Retreats may also include elements of both work and encounter.

As with Working Retreats, Encounter Retreats involve groups of between 6 and 10 participants and one or two facilitators.

Online Retreats

An 'Online Retreat' involves participants gathering via remote conferencing media (usually Zoom), being led in guided reflection on a subject of social concern. These events have elements both of connection with voluntary service and encounter, and so are related to QVA's more traditional approach. Some may involve external speakers to shed light on the particular subject of the retreat.

Online Retreats may take place during evenings or weekend daytimes, and may involve 3 or 4 sessions spaced at weekly or fortnightly intervals. The aim is to develop a similar sense of shared experience to that which characterises a retreat in person; hence, individuals are encouraged to participate in all of the sessions for each event.

QVA Online Retreats attempt to strike a balance between information and interaction, and are typically designed for between 8 and 16 participants.