

Evidence of Children

When I've Zoomed into Australian meetings for worship, I've often looked for evidence of children. One of my favorite moments was watching a silent room before worship began...silent not because Friends were already in worship but because the microphones were malfunctioning. As adults fussed over the technology, a child dashed into the room, then back out, then in, then out. She hopped up in a chair and scribbled in a coloring book. Seconds later, back down, across the room to tug at a grown-up's hand. Brought the grown-up to a library corner. Showed a picture book. Dashed back out of the room again. Ran in, crawled into the lap of a different grown-up. Waved to someone else. Cuddled. Then left.

Children are, like all of us, seekers. They are sometimes seekers who move at a faster pace. I love to watch children in worship spaces, especially when they feel a sense of belonging, connecting with many different people of all ages. It shows me the child feels welcome and loved.

There's other evidence of children in Australia Yearly Meeting, even without my encountering them personally. Not long ago, I was asked to post about [a paid position](#) in support of children and families. There are Backhouse Lectures about [centering children in Quaker life](#), [respecting the rights of children and young people](#), and [the role of children in a vision for social action](#). There's a [webpage](#) dedicated to committees and activities related to children. And there's a lengthy [child protection policy](#).

Actually, that policy was one of the first things I read on the AYM website. African Friends sometimes greet one another by asking, "How are the children?" It means more than a literal enquiry about the wellbeing of particular young people. It's a way of asking after the entire community, because the health of a community can be judged by the state of its youngest (and often most vulnerable) members. What I noticed about the policy—which is long and legalistic, as these things often are—was how carefully it detailed the ways it should be implemented. Having a policy stuck in a drawer is one thing; acting upon that policy is another.

When I actually met with the Child Protection Committee, they pointed me to the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#). I love these. They are ten standards, endorsed by Quakers Australia in 2021, that tend to indicate whether a community (such as a Quaker meeting) is really a safe and nurturing environment for children. These are not specifics like how many adults should be supervising a children's program. They're bigger ideals about the culture of the whole community.

Not every Quaker meeting has children literally within its four walls. But no Quaker meeting has an absence of children. There are children in each person's extended family, in the local community, across Australia and beyond. And when we act with an eye to the future, that is caring for and about the children. [Peace work](#), [earthcare](#), and right relationship with [First Nations Peoples](#) and [refugees](#) are things to which God calls us for the sake of generations to come.

I wonder what might happen if we sometimes entered worship considering the query from African Friends: "How are the children?"

*Contributed by Emily Provance
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