

YM22 Explanatory Session Report

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| AYM Committee / Working Group: Thanksgiving Fund Committee | |
| Session Clerk: Jo Jordan | Note-taker: Mary Baker |
| Number in attendance: 25 | Person submitting report: David Barry (Committee Convener) |
| Session Report: <u>Explanatory session of the TGFC: Zoom meeting on 21/5/22</u> | |
| 1 Opening with silent worship (Jo) | |
| 2 Introduction Explanatory session Overview of the session by Jo Jordan Convener: David Barry; Support IT Michael Searle; Committee: etc. Note taker: Mary Butler Clerk - Welcome - Structure of session - Review of Committee - Introduction - of committee Jo Convener - we are looking to explain our situation and hear Friends views - overwhelmed and unsupported David: the four were parachuted into the committee; running to make it work. Need to make up a framework to discern which grants to support and which not to; this is a time to explain what we have learned and faced since last October when we took over. We are in unity about so many of the issues we face, but it has been a heavier workload than we expected. There is currently a review of the Finance Committee. We are left feeling overwhelmed and unsupported. We are currently unable to discern on several of the applications. | |
| 3 History (Topsy) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Thanksgiving Fund was established in 1979, includes bequests. It is appointed by AYM. Generally, bequests are added to thanksgiving, unless otherwise stated. Quakers can apply. Applications are made to the local meeting for endorsement. If the meeting endorses, then the friend applies to the committee for a decision. Recently a large bequest was made; the committee would welcome informed guidelines from friends about what they think is important for the fund.• In Sept 2021, Standing Committee requested a report. But at that time the committee resigned, and the new committee started. SANTRM agreed to appoint a new committee to continue to the end of the 'year' (i.e., Sept).• The Finance Committee produced a report without consulting with this meeting. We requested a combined meeting with the finance committee. The Finance Committee has circulated their amended report without this consultation. The fund has felt able to make further disbursement without further consultation. We want to produce optimal results.• Earlier the committee agreed to fund projects totaling \$160K. (details given). | |
| 4 Guiding Principles (Topsy) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We wish to support Australian Friends doing good and useful things | |

- We prefer to support projects that make a lasting change and have a defined end point
- We support Australian or Australian based projects - we leave work in the international community to QSA.
- We support the teaching of fishing over the giving of fish
- We prefer to support 'essential' projects
- We require a direct involvement of an Australian Friend in the project
- We require that the disbursement of grant funds must be traceable to an end point
- We do not usually make recurrent payments
- We do not grant to support administration costs
- We do not grant to support the purchase of land or buildings (or vehicles) – this is also in line with QSA
- We don't support established charities unless Friends are directly involved in the specific project

5. The Grants we have made (David)

Presentation by Faith Coleman on her work in the Coorong. Faith Coleman "Truth, Grief and Equity":

- The reason for this approach is because I believe in equity - because inequity results in strife. In the Murray Basin the majority is owned by large corporations, not by women, Aboriginal etc;
- About 8 years ago communities said that they were gasping for air because of the south lagoon; the fisherman said that it's not how it's meant to look;
- my PhD looks at what it used to look like; being truthful about the past – there are people who remember this; within the politics – there is irrigation issues; SA draining the SE is a huge program; 2500 km of drains went into the SE; this affects the Coorong now;
- collecting individual stories; the south lagoon used to be dominated by a stonewort. The presence of this weed reminds us that it was clear water and a place for fish; water chemistry – Bill Williams showed it was dominated by Ca and N, now it is dominated by sulphur.
- It has been empowering. It is starting to tie the traditional owners' stories together with the fisherman; many of the local community have got together. They have been working to set up the Coorong Environment trust.
- Many of the problems are arguments about culture and whether people are worthwhile; whether a business is worthwhile.
- Working in unity: it is about accepting that the Coorong will never be what it was; but it can be healthy; It's a PhD supported by a range of stakeholders.

Thank you for your enthusiasm courage etc

Presentation by Dorothy Scott on Operation Hope.

Thanks for support. In thinking about Quaker support. There are four interrelated strategies. There will be a case study.

- Refugees; Manus lives matters was formed by a Brigandine sister; supported by Canberra friends; aiming to keep connect and sustain hope; there are two forms of support.
- Practical (phones and top-ups; important for offshore and onshore detention; and medical). Driving lessons – so that refugees have an employment advantage; the friendship with volunteers; "not forgotten" Initiative – befriends and helps to complete application; preparing them for the Canadian interview;

- It includes 20 volunteers. There is a full-time volunteer coordinator. They have submitted 100+ applications; (more figures); and 13 arrived in Canada.
- The refugees in offshore settings (Our Afghan families), they are physically and mentally damaged; families are at serious risk of persecution; funds to support 8 families in hiding in Afghanistan; this is an immense relief to refugees; this costs \$3k approx. per month;

Observations: as a social worker

- the organic process by which Manus Lives Matters evolved from an individual's 'leading' means that it is very underfunded.
- Small groups can befriend, but they may lack the capacity to avoid burnout.
- Large NGOs are key to scaling up – but can use the 'natural helping network'.
- The notion of 'concern' are profound and fundamental to Quaker tradition; Thanksgiving Fund gives salience to this

Presentation by Rowe/Dale on Afghan Refugee Pilot Project. (allocated \$70k)

David intro: It spoke to all points of our guidelines.

This project cut across multiple groups and individuals.

- There was a degraded area in S Portugal that was abandoned. Eunice went, but they needed refugees with permaculture background. The work started long before. In Islamabad they made a video of their story; they were meeting online beforehand; they were met by reps of the federal gov't; there were 2-3 ministries involved; they are welcomed to the city of Mertola; the reps from the city council were there to greet them; the house was prepared; they went inside – and the local people prepared a meal; they kept everyone together because this is more like an Afghan compound;
- They will be learning about restoration of the land; the program was worked out – starting work immediately; so they become familiar with community; they were receiving gifts of oranges, flowers and a computer; they were invited to participate in a community even in the library; they were taken to get gear for working; they are introduced to a different approach to farming. They learn how to nurture seedlings;
- It is invaluable to debrief constantly (social worker involvement); the demands can be hard; the sw comes in once a week; this is a big cultural change for them; they are adjusting; they can put energy into learning how to participate in the work of the farm;
- It is being watched by the government – that food will be grown; also scientists and academics are involved. It is more than an ecofarm. It is about peacekeeping and about climate change.
- They eat together every day; they are not closing in on themselves; there is a cultural exchange both ways; they teach Afghan games in the community;
- Eunice was critical to this – and example of an individual having a calling and connecting with NGO.
- They have been given equal rights as Portuguese citizens.
- There are places in Spain that are interested in it.
- The funding \$200k for 8 people; economically it is a good value project; it is in the history of Quakers supporting refugees.

This was a project that was easy to support. It fitted all the guidelines.

Dilemmas faced by the Committee (Topsy)

- We struggle to understand what is meant by the term "...the concerns of the

Religious Society of Friends”

We all are concerned about a lot of things; but we have to find something that has a practical contribution. Is it a concern of a Friend, or the Society of Friends. There are big changes among friends about what this means. We have had some applications that say: “This is a group doing ‘good work’”

- The function of the Committee - rubber stamp or discernment?
Part of the application form is an endorsement from the meeting. Usually friends support –but this is not the same as an endorsement.

Training courses - free for all? Silver Wattle v MfWfL v Everything else
If there is an event organised by friends and they expect 20 people to come. If one person applies for funds, should everyone then be funded. If there is an endorsement from a meeting, it still doesn’t really help.

Land, Buildings + Vehicles

This is not a good use of money because there is no provision and commits the fund for ongoing funding in the future.

- Stipends
We don’t normally pay people to do things; we can’t guarantee to support a salary;
- Working with groups that are proselytising

Examples of applications

- First application received - The Friends School in Kampala
This is an orphanage in Africa who gave a very explicit description of starving children. But what happens next year. How do we know the money is being used as expected; we don’t have an Australian friend who is involved. So, we said no and this was hard.
- Application to pay rent for 6 months on a property in Sydney
This was from a group of activists; very little detail about what they would be doing and what the involvement of friends would be.

Question: are we being too hard, or should we be harder?

7. The Review of ToR (David)

- Despite the text of the report, the TGFC have effectively been excluded from the review process
- In the review document – there is a reference to discussions – but this has not happened. It has not been helpful to the TGFC. It seems to be by and for the Finance committee.
- The report is of a review by the Finance Committee for the Finance Committee
- Cherry-picked feedback from RM to support specific points
- Failed to acknowledge that VRM declined to discern on the draft report

Key Recommendations:

- 1) Succession management of Committees - true for all Committee not specific to TGFC
- 2) Garnishing 5% from any donation over \$100,000
Originally there was a phrase about 'costs associated'. This does not make sense and seems wrong at every level. The committee is voluntary and there are no costs.
- 3) Taking a greater % on approval by SC Other AYM funds General Funds | RMs
This creates a backdoor to take even larger amounts from TGFC.
- 4) Changing cap from 10% to \$50,000
On first reading this may not be a big deal. But it does mean that the Afghan project would not have been funded. This was being started at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis. Rowe and Dale were very grateful that we could turn it around in 8 days.
- 5) Support the purchase of property
This is contrary to the current committee.
- 6) Introduce grants as loans
It's easy to say, but who is going to do the financial tracking? Are we able to establish ourselves as a loan providing service?

8 Outstanding Reports

Recipients of past grants are asked to provide the follow up reports.

David: if you have not made a report – these are a requirement and will be followed up now.

For example, the previous committee made an approval. Half of the money was spent, and we asked for an interim report. The report was scant in detail; asked for a second report; then suspended funding till we got a better report.

9 Future (Topsy)

- Initiate a program to review past loans and ensure completion reports have been received
- Engender a broader discussion amongst Friends as to appropriate ways to disburse funds

We take seriously that we are the stewards. We are feeling unsupported and needing some encouragement.

10 Q&A (Jo)

Sieneke Martin: We trust friends to get on with what they have taken responsibility for.

Rowe Morrow: the committee has done us a service in raising these questions. The future is not going to be easy – if we struggle with this question, then we will be stronger as a society. Consider whether property might be worth considering if there was a good business plan.

Valerie Joy: Struggling with how to re-write a proposal.

David in response to Valerie: we have not discerned against it; until we get more guidance it is difficult to know; if we have concerns – or if there are aspects of the project we can support we will do this.

Julie Walpole: The request is that there will be more share and tell at yearly meeting.

Q: there is a list of questions for guidance – are those sorts of guidelines available to applicants? There was no guidance in the past;

D answer: there is text taken from the handbook; but this is very generic. What Topsy articulated is a work in progress. We are aiming for less subjectivity; we want flexibility but also need grounds on which to say 'we are not funding'. What we are hoping for from the review – and we wanted to get more guidance.

Julie: Q: when you are assessing and choosing applications to endorse. Do you work on a group or on individual applications. How do you go about making decisions?

D: Answer: every meeting we are considering up to three applications. We can spend up to 20% of the fund.

Michael Searle: thanks for an informative session. The word proselytising is contentious.

Outreach is an important thing that we ought to be doing. Where is the line of demarcation?

D answer: we had not thought about promoting friends and values. In one application there was a faith-based organisation that does proselytise.

Dorothy Scott and Alan Clayton: how wonderful to hear David and Topsy articulating the fiduciary responsibilities divested on the committee. Friends are often challenged by testimony to integrity. The clear articulation is exemplary. They have brought the wooliness to a wider audience for consideration is absolutely in the true nature of Friends.

Roger Sawkins: member of Finance Committee. We are proposing consultations. We admit there has been confusion. The 10% limit relates to the capital proportion of the fund; standing committee can have an urgent decision-making process; the committee is considering bequests that are for Quakers generally, some of these funds might be for keeping the organisation going.

Jo: thanks to all

11 Summary and close (Jo)