

# Education

### Bringing balance to a school

My daughter came home from a Year 8 assembly with a recruiting leaflet for the cadets. Worried, I didn't know whom to contact at first, but finally the head teacher arranged to meet.

Before we met, the school held a careers fair and invited parents to run stalls alongside other organisations, which included several military recruiters. We decided we could offer some balance.

I pulled together an exhibition on peacebuilding opportunities. With some research, we made a handout packed with examples of learning and training for peace and human rights, building skills employers really value.

The school printed them for us and 500 were taken by pupils.

Researching this prepared me for a very positive meeting. The head teacher was influenced by my argument that conflict

resolution skills support the school's priorities and Ofsted requirements.

I was invited to put suggestions to the Governors. They responded by proposing that the school sets up a student-led ethics committee to consider requests from the military and others to talk directly to students and ensure balance. They also strongly supported teaching conflict resolution. The school is now planning taking this forward and my friends and I are offering support for a whole school Peace Day!

Gill Alcock, Cheshire

### Tips for action

#### Talk to schools

Often they just won't have thought about the results of military involvement. Here are some key arguments you can make with schools:

#### Safety

If the school cares about the safety of its students, it should

make sure young people are aware of all the risks a military career involves for their physical and mental health.

## Choice

If you're a student or a parent, your view is important. The right to freedom of conscience and religion might lead you to choose not to participate in an activity you feel promotes war or violence.

## Balance

When dealing with controversial issues, schools are meant to provide a balance of perspectives. If only the military is invited to speak, only one side is heard. Connect the school with other organisations like

Veterans for Peace who can provide that different voice.

## Benefits of teaching peace

As Gill successfully argued, schools can reap enormous benefits from investing in skills like conflict resolution, building resilience and helping them meet the school's obligation to support the social and moral development of its students.

Encourage the school to sign the Inspire Peace Charter (see insert in this pack), which commits schools to promoting peace education and providing balance when discussing war, the military and armed violence.

Talk to others in the school community and beyond.



# Recruitment

## Challenging street recruitment

Leicester is targeted for recruitment, since many children are poor. We've been concerned about the frequent presence of the army on the streets for some time, 'we' including Leicester CND, Leicester Quakers and those who gather at the clocktower every Friday night for a peace vigil, inviting passersby to chalk peace messages on the pavement.

One of the motivating factors for me was seeing the army one Saturday in the city centre with weaponry. I challenged them but felt I was not achieving much. So I contacted Ambrose who had previously filmed them. We did some research with ForcesWatch, produced a leaflet and contacted Veterans for Peace.

Twelve of us were there next time. It was great having Veterans for Peace as the army can't dismiss them easily. It was



rewarding to have parents say how pleased they were to see us, some of whose children were thinking of signing up. They talked to veterans and took 'BeforeYouSignUp' cards.

We launched a charter on the reduction of the militarisation of young people and we're lobbying the council to put a minimum age on children handling weaponry on the streets.

Penny Walker,  
Leicester Against War

## Tips for action

### Monitor and share

Leicester Against War filmed and photographed the recruitment initiatives of the army on their streets, showing

young kids handling big guns and talking to recruiters. They then shared this on social media and with national organisations that challenge militarism. This on-the-ground evidence is really important and useful.

### **Get help and resources**

Leicester Against War wanted to be more prepared and effective when challenging on-street military recruitment, so they got help from Veterans for Peace and ForcesWatch. You can get support with resources, research, publicity, strategy and more.

### **Engage with the council**

Think of tangible requests for council members that counter problematic recruitment initiatives, such as the Leicester request for a minimum age on children handling weapons on the streets. Make it easy for other people to join the campaign, like the online signable Leicester charter.

'Before You Sign Up' cards are available from ForcesWatch.



Children playing on military equipment at Liverpool Armed Forces Day, 2017. Photo: John Usher

# Alternatives to cadets

Many areas of the UK are seeing cuts to youth activities and spaces for young people, while cadet units are multiplying, particularly those attached to schools. Military-themed activities should not be the only option available to young people.

Lobby your local council to increase funding for local youth groups. Emphasise that they build confidence, self-awareness and communication skills.

You can increase knowledge of, and support for, alternative activities, providing information for schools, and asking them to share it with their pupils.

## Woodcraft Folk, Scouts and Guides

These national organisations provide an array of exciting activities for children and teenagers, such as kayaking, learning survival skills, photography, first aid, computer programming, learning about body confidence, and leading camps. The Woodcraft Folk helps to develop children's awareness of society and world issues.

[www.woodcraft.org.uk](http://www.woodcraft.org.uk)

<http://scouts.org.uk>

<https://guides.girlguiding.org.uk>



## **St John's Ambulance Cadets**

10- to 17-year-olds can volunteer by providing first aid cover at public events. They learn leadership and public speaking skills, and have residential camps and first aid competitions. [www.sja.org.uk/sja/young-people/cadets.aspx](http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/young-people/cadets.aspx)

## **Local Youth Action projects**

These give young people spaces and resources to work out what matters to them and take meaningful action, building them and their community.

## **Local conservation groups and animal shelters**

Many conservation organisations, groups and initiatives engage young people in outdoors work. Local animal shelters also often take on young volunteers.

## **Peace education**

Peace education equips children and young people with the skills and understanding to be peacemakers. Excellent peace education is delivered by organisations such as Quakers, the Peace Education Network, the Peer Mediation Network and the Peaceful Schools Movement. Get your local schools involved!

## **A 17-year-old's experience**

"I would not be able to complete A level PE without joining the Combined Cadet Force. As a Sergeant, I hand the guns to the kids of 13 and 14 and even put the bullets into their bullet holders – even though it feels wrong."

She says that most of cadets and the trainers put on their 'Army heads' as soon as they put on their uniforms. The trainers, all ex-military, shout and bark out orders, calling the young ones "scum bags" etc. So do the sixth-formers who earn their stripes. The children shoot ten rounds at a time at human cut-outs.

She says that extra-curricular activities should be rolled out across the country and be available to all schools and pupils, including the subsidised residential courses, but not run or funded by the armed forces. "No drills! No guns!"

Photo (overleaf): Children dancing at the Woodcraft Folk London Region 90th Anniversary Pageant: © 2017 Woodcraft Folk.

# Challenging Armed Forces Day

Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum sent an open letter to the local council protesting its support of Armed Forces Day and the use of a picture of a toddler in military gear to advertise it.

The letter was also sent to local councillors and the local paper. It highlighted the terrible effects of war, the inappropriateness of presenting it as entertainment, and the dangers of the recruiting messages at the event. It also raised concerns that the North Wales Armed Forces Day Ambassador (a young veteran) recommended that under-18s should sign up for the forces.

On the day of the event, the group carried banners, placards and leaflets encouraging alternative perspectives on war.

By creating public debate in the lead up to the day, activists helped to inform both the public

and the council. One parent said, “It was good to see the true side of war being represented”.

## Other ideas

- Challenge your council if it hosts armed forces recruitment events or allows them in a public space.
- Find out what your council and local organisations are doing as part of the Armed Forces Covenant. Should this be challenged?
- Hold a peace-inspired event as an alternative to Armed Forces Day.



Photo: Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum



## Making a Week for Peace in Nottingham

The year after 2013's Armed Forces Day event in Nottingham, local Quakers asked the local council to hold a day to reflect on peace and reconciliation. The council responded that, while they wouldn't organise the day, they would support it.

Like-minded local groups offered to organise events and the day became a Week for Peace around the UN International Day of Peace on 21 September.

Across the city there were exhibitions, church bells peeling, school groups participating, talks, films, a peace fair and a live



broadcast from the Peace One Day Celebration concert in the Democratic Republic of Congo!

## State your objections!

- The council should not be facilitating recruitment activities that present a sanitised and unrealistic view of the military.
- Military vehicles and weapons help to target children for military marketing messages.
- Packaging Armed Forces Day as family entertainment obscures the terrible effects of war. It is not appropriate to recognise the sacrifices involved this way.
- Flying the Armed Forces Day flag over the town hall for up to a week sends out a militaristic message.
- Scarce public funds could be put to better use.
- Funding and support should also be given to peace events.
- The council organises public displays of support for the armed forces but not for other public services.



# Challenging media bias on militarisation

In 2016, a number of listeners heard what they felt was a one-sided piece on the BBC Today Programme about the introduction of cadets in state schools. They contacted the BBC to question the uncritical depiction of militarism and found themselves on the radio too.

## Tips for action

### Make a response

“The idea of promoting military activities in schools and further normalising war and the arms industry seduces young minds into thinking war is an acceptable part of our culture. I wrote to the Radio 4 Feedback programme objecting to the Radio 4 Today Programme’s unbalanced reporting of cadet forces being introduced into schools.”

Sarah Sheard,  
West Yorkshire

## Get informed

“When the BBC’s Feedback programme emailed me asking to speak to me, I thought they would interview me, so I did some more research on the Quaker website. There I found an even more horrifying picture: that the Ministry of Defence has spent £45 million on working with the Department of Education – with no public discussion! I’ve told lots of people about this.”

Ann James,  
Warwick

## Be prepared for not all your messages to get across

“I was ready to talk to the BBC’s Feedback programme about all my concerns, and the fact that the UK is the only country in Europe to recruit child soldiers, but when they rang they only wanted me to read out my email! The BBC ducked the issue

by saying the piece was only about junior journalism, not the content.”

Ann James

### **Get your main message out in the first sentence**

“I was frustrated that they cut me off after my first sentence! When I heard what I said, I felt I could have expressed myself better.”

Lucy Pollard,  
Suffolk

### **Getting the issue aired can have surprising results**

“There was one wonderful ray of hope at the end of the item about cadet forces: the boy who was acting as reporter said that he had always wanted to join the army, but that after this experience he wanted to be a journalist. It lifted the heart.”

Lucy Pollard

“It created a debate and discussion point with my three (young adult) children who are all opposed to military cadets being introduced into state schools, where children will be wearing military uniforms and marching with rifles.”

Sarah Sheard

### **Other opportunities for building your media profile**

Make sure your local group or project has a presence on social media. Post regularly on Facebook and Twitter to build up your followers.

Write to your local paper or local news websites.

Respond to local events such as Armed Forces Day or military activities in schools.

“I emailed Feedback and got a phone call asking me to record my email.”

Lucy Pollard

# White poppies for Remembrance

Many Quaker meetings have sought to find a way to respectfully express their opposition to war around Remembrance. Stevenage Quakers struggled to find a way to make a response that would unify the group, not wishing to cause controversy or suggest that conscience was exclusive to those who objected to war.

With the centenary of the Military Service Act in 2016, the Quaker meeting decided to try again.

## Tips for action Making a formal request

“We wrote to the mayor, asking to be included in the Remembrance Service and giving our reasons. He said that he’d discuss it with the local branch of the British Legion. He wrote back afterwards offering us a choice: either to lay a red poppy wreath with a peace message



during the ceremony, or a white poppy wreath after the final salute.”

After discussion the group decided to lay a wreath of white and red poppies during the service.

## Building a constructive dialogue with the organisers

The group was invited to a meeting. “When our Friend attended this meeting, he was

met by the mayor and, not one but three Legion committee members. His initial feeling of intimidation quickly dissolved as they were very welcoming and inclusive. As soon as he offered the white and red poppies option, and let them know that Veterans for Peace lay such a wreath each year at the Cenotaph, they agreed."

### **Be prepared to compromise**

A message was agreed with the mayor and local Royal British Legion: In memory of all who have suffered in all wars. The use of the word 'victims' had been rejected, a small concession for being able to take part in the service.

### **Explain the significance of the white poppy**

The red and white poppies were bought and made into a wreath by a local florist. On the day, a small group from Stevenage Quakers joined the service.

"We sent the local press a short report, thanking the mayor and British Legion for including us, and saying what we had done and why. We also included a photo."

### **Change takes time**

While the white poppy's part in the service was not included in the coverage of the local paper, the group felt that they had established good relations with the local council and Royal British Legion officers. They had also introduced for the florist and the wider public a variation on Remembrance wreaths. A sense of mutual respect was established: "Days later, we checked, and it was still there!"

### **Other ideas**

Wear a white poppy!

Help sell white poppies in your community or send them to those who represent you, explaining why it is important to you.

Request that your school give students the option to buy white poppies and send them teaching materials about Remembrance.

Write to your local paper about the importance of a message of peace at Remembrance.