



Voices of Peace

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The Gift of Service – Celebrating Our Volunteers

The gift of time, service, dedication, passion, skills and energy continues to give the Creators of Peace movement the power to share essential peace creation tools to individuals and communities. It has been the dedication of hundreds of volunteers over the years that has enabled us to reach the hearts and minds of those who want to see positive change, within themselves and in the communities that surround them. Over the last 30 years, the global hubs have collectively empowered over 5000 women through Peace Circles. This has been achieved because of our volunteers and their hope for a better world.

This issue celebrates these incredible acts of service with a conversation between UK National Coordinator, Miranda Shaw, and Isabella Stanley, who has been volunteering with Creators of Peace in the UK and Australia since she completed her Masters in 2020. It took place in November 2021.

An interview with Isabella Stanley and Miranda Shaw

"The Peace Circles have fundamentally changed the way I view peace and moulded a more personal definition of peace for me."
Isabella Stanley





Miranda: Hi Bella, so wonderful to be talking to you today!
When did you first get involved with Creators of Peace?

Bella: I was looking for an online volunteer opportunity or internship after my studies had finished. I wanted to be part of an organisation that represented the things that I cared about. I came across a digital communications role and that led me to find Creators of Peace. Initially I got in touch with Creators of Peace in Switzerland and through their networks I got connected to the UK team.

It was fun working out what would work for me, what would work for Creators of Peace UK and how that role could evolve. It was exactly what I needed. I learnt skills that I hadn't made space for in my life before. It prompted me to do some online courses in social media. During COVID and lockdown, I was grateful to have something to work on. CoP provided a focus for my days.

When I was quite a lot younger, I came across CoP through my mum and her connection with Jean Brown (co-author of the Peace Circles). It wasn't something I was ready to explore at that time in my life. We have created a beautiful connection and collaboration, which I'm very grateful for.

Miranda: When did you decide to do your first Peace Circle and why?

Bella: It was the last couple of months of 2020. I wanted to do a Peace Circle partly because I felt a bit strange writing about Peace Circles on social media without having had any experience of them. Another reason was my interest in development, geography, psychology, community engagement, community development, social welfare, and emotional wellbeing. They were part of the discussion topics. There was also a part of me that just wanted to see what it was all about.

Interview continued...

Join a Peace Circle

If you are interested in booking a taster or joining a Peace Circle please email creatorsofpeace.uk@iofc.org
Creators of Peace UK is a programme of Initiatives of Change UK and is an affiliate of Creators of Peace International.





Interview continued...

Miranda: Thanks. Can you share a little bit about your online experience?

Bella: I hadn't been part of anything like it before. It felt strange at first: like a first day at school or in a new job. I was an Australian living in the UK, talking with strangers from many different parts of the world. I felt dislocated but then I began to love it. Going through the gathering points, participating in breakout rooms, discussing topics and having little activities to do helped me to foster a sense of community online. Having the space and time to come together was really helpful. It also aligned with my shift towards living life online because of the pandemic. It was nice to have something regular and to see relationships forming.

Miranda: You have now finished your second peace circle and you've also given hosting support to an in-person Peace Circle. Tell me about your experiences.

Bella: The second Peace Circle was an important one for me, I was asked to be part of the support team. I participated but also cooked and served. I love cooking so it was a joy for me. People would come out of intense discussions and were then nourished by food and lighter conversation. I noticed the sense of community and connection in the break times. It is difficult to foster that feeling online.



My third Peace Circle was online. I felt a bit more connected to the woman in this Peace Circle, because they were geographically closer to me – we were all from Melbourne. When the lockdown is over, we hope to meet. I started with a lot more confidence and anticipation because I'd had such a positive experience in the first one. Experiencing an in-person Peace Circle is something that you can't fully replace, but I still gained so much from the online peace circles.





Interview continued...

Miranda: Was there anything that challenged you during the Peace Circles?

Bella: 'Challenged' may be too strong a word. There might have been concepts or gathering points that I wasn't ready to digest or think around. It was interesting to compare my first and second peace circles: the same gathering points with different women all with their own experiences and contributions. It made me realise just how much there is to explore in the topics. Over the course of the year, I changed the way I approached some things – including having a little bit more of a warmer manner when approaching some situations.

Miranda: Is there anything that surprised you?

Bella: I think the Peace Circles surprised me and it continued to surprise me especially when participants were willing to share online, it was very humbling. It's just wonderful to be a part of that rawness, vulnerability and realness. It's definitely one of the reasons why I keep involved. It's different every time. It's kind of amazing.

Miranda: Do you feel like the Peace Circles have had an impact on your life?

Bella: I think I learned something new from every peace circle. They've fundamentally changed the way I view peace and moulded a more personal definition of peace for me. You can't work towards something very effectively if you don't have a definition.

My second Peace Circle built upon the foundations of the first. I came away with a sense of this expansive peace that is not necessarily confined to one way of creating peace. Peace is about connection, first to yourself, and then with others. Also, the connection doesn't have to be positive, a connection could be disruption, friction, disagreement or chaos – that's still a form of connection and sometimes it's necessary. Peace is not simple, large, positive and glossy. It can follow a path where there is hurt, disagreement, confusion and calamity, it can be scary and necessary.

Miranda: What has it been like volunteering in different countries in-person and online?

Bella: I have loved doing Peace Circles and continue to love working on social media. Volunteering for Creators of Peace has been useful for my skills and capacity building. I have been able to explore my creativity: the role gave me space to play and explore new ways of thinking. It's been fun. I don't really consider myself to be a social media person but I believe that the platform is useful and important particularly for community building, awareness raising, and connecting. I have such gratitude and enthusiasm for my involvement with CoP and for the people that I meet.

Miranda: Is there anything else you'd like to say to conclude?

Bella: I feel good.

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