

## **Starting a Youth Group**

When starting a youth group attention should be given to a number of issues in order to ensure that the youth work is both professional and safe, has adequate support, and is attractive to young people. Outlined here are 7 broad areas that need to be addressed each containing recommendations that will help ensure that the work is both effective and of a high quality.

- Leaders
- Communication
- Premises
- Safety
- Finance
- Activities
- Building Community

### **I. Leaders:**

#### **(i) Recruitment**

- As effective youth work centres around the building of responsible and meaningful relationships with young people, committed leaders who are prepared to invest time in the work are crucial. Think creatively about those that can be involved. In particular look for those who care about the needs of young people.
- There should be a minimum of two leaders involved in the work with the recommended ratio of leaders to young people being 1:8. For groups that contain a mix of genders there should be at least one male leader and one female leader present.
- Refer to '*Children First*' for guidelines on how to recruit leaders in accordance with the Diocesan child protection policy. If you are unsure about any issue concerning child protection then you should contact the Inter-diocesan Child Protection Adviser, Su Foster who can be contacted on 01704 540516, (0784 951 7351 out of hours and emergency use) or by e-mail [sufoster@fsmail.net](mailto:sufoster@fsmail.net). Alternatively you can contact the Diocesan Youth Officer on 0161 828 1435.
- All leaders and volunteers should have an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure before working with young people or children.

#### **(ii) Volunteer contracts**

- In order that leaders are aware of what is expected of them, volunteer contracts should be issued. This will benefit both the church and the individual leader. A Pro Forma can be found in '*Children First*'. (Form C.P.4)

### **(iii) Aims & Objectives.**

- It is a good idea to spend some time reflecting on why you want to work with young people and what you want to achieve. This needn't be too formal or inflexible, but will ensure that you as leaders are all working to a similar agenda. The Diocesan Youth Officer can assist you in this process.

### **(iv) Training**

- It is essential that leaders receive initial training when working with young people. This will not only give leaders added confidence, but will also benefit the young people you are aiming to work with. Child protection training should form part of this introduction to youth work. Training is provided by the Diocese on most aspects of youth work. Contact the Diocesan Youth Officer for details of the training available.
- In addition, training should be provided at regular intervals for youth leaders. It is recommended that leaders attend at least one training event per year. The Diocese has an extensive portfolio of training available (see the Youth: training section of [www.manchester.anglican.org](http://www.manchester.anglican.org))

### **(v) Planning**

- It is a good idea for leaders to get together at regular intervals to plan and pray. This will ensure that the work is well organised and will help with team building. These times will be helpful in encouraging one another and sharing the good things that are happening.
- Regular reflection and discussion within your team about the format and content of the work you do, and its impact on young people is crucial in ensuring its continued development and improvement.
- It will be useful if leaders are aware of each other's gifts and what they feel confident, and not so confident, in doing.

### **(vi) Recognition**

- When starting to work with young people it is important to inform the rest of the church of what will be happening. This could be done in the context of a service or at a specially organised meeting.
- Many churches have found it helpful to commission their leaders during a service.
- If possible, gather together a group to regularly pray for the work and the young people.

## **2. Communication**

### **(i) Church**

- In addition to informing the church of the youth work being set up, ensure that regular reports are given to PCC about what is happening in the group. Negotiate such a slot with your PCC secretary when starting to work with young people.

### **(ii) Young People**

- Ensure that young people are aware of the group and when it will be meeting. If appropriate, design some attractive literature to give out. For added effect get a young person to design it for you.
- It is important to obtain contact details of the young people that come along to your group so that you can communicate with them regularly, such information will also be required in case of emergencies (see sections 4i)

### **(iii) Parents**

- Find ways of keeping parents fully informed of youth group activities. Send out newsletters or postcards; perhaps hold a meeting every now and again to ensure that lines of communication are healthy.

### **(iv) Other Churches**

- Inform other churches in the area that you are setting up a group. They may want to send young people to your group if they have no youth work of their own or hold an occasional joint meeting with you if they themselves already have a youth group. It's also worthwhile informing the local youth service of your group.

## **3. Premises**

- Aim to find premises that are appropriate for the needs of your group. It will be useful if the space can be designated solely for the purposes of youth work so that the young people can have a sense of ownership and can put their own mark on it.
- Soft furnishings and creative lighting can add to the ambience of a venue. See the section on '**Safe Place**' (pgs 13-15 of **Security & Growth**) before opening up the premises to young people.

## **4. Safety**

### **(i) Child Protection**

- A policy will need to be set up before starting the youth group – refer to *Children First* for guidelines. If the parish doesn't have a child protection co-ordinator then one will need to be appointed.

- In addition to holding an Enhanced CRB disclosure, all youth leaders should have received child protection training. Training can be supplied by The Diocese of Manchester. Contact Su Foster (Child Protection Officer) on (01704) 540516.
- Keep up to date records of the contact details and emergency/ medical information for all young people you work with. Make sure you have them with you during any meetings you run and keep them secure at all other times.

#### **(ii) Risk Assessment**

- A risk assessment should be undertaken on the premises that are to be used for work with young people. Additionally, risk assessments should be completed for all activities provided for young people. *See the section on 'Safe Place' (pgs 13-15 of Security & Growth) before opening up the premises to young people.*
- A government handbook on risk assessment is available at: [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf)

#### **(iii) Insurance**

- Ensure that the church's insurance covers the work with young people and that you have obtained a list of any excluded activities. All youth group activities need to be approved by the insurance company and the PCC.

#### **(iv) First Aid**

- A First Aid kit will need to be held on the premises and it is good practice for at least 2 leaders to receive first aid training. All accidents should be recorded in an accident book.

#### **(v) Fire**

- Ensure that there are adequate fire exits on the premises to be used and an appropriate number of fire extinguishers. If you have any soft furnishings in the building it will be important to contact a fire safety officer for further advice.
- Agree an emergency fire procedure and communicate this at regular intervals to both young people and leaders.
- You should always know which young people are in the building so it is important to keep a register.

### **5. Finance**

- Agree a budget for the youth work with the PCC that will enable the aims of the group to be met. You may incur specific start up costs that will need to be budgeted for.

- It will be important to keep receipts for any monies spent. An account specifically designated for youth work can be a helpful way to keep track of finances.

## **6. Activities**

- Have a brainstorming session exploring the type of activities that will engage the young people who you are working with.
- Consult with young people about the activities that they would like to do. Maybe some of them could construct a diary of events. The more ownership young people have of the group, the more effective it is likely to be.
- Ensure that you have plenty of resources that will help you achieve the aims of the group. It may well be useful to visit the resources centre at Church House in Manchester, where books and videos etc can be borrowed free of charge. (See the Youth: new resources section of [www.manchester.anglican.org](http://www.manchester.anglican.org))
- Think about the appropriateness of resources in relation to your specific situation before using them. You may, for example, find it more appropriate to modify a resource instead of following pre-written programme material word by word.

## **7. Building Community**

- One of the key aims of the group should be to build healthy and meaningful relationships with young people. Invest time at the beginning getting to know them, listening to them and finding out what interests them.
- Encourage group involvement in decision making wherever possible. Encourage young people's creativity and value their ideas.
- Make fun activities a priority. These will help young people relax and will aid relationship building.
- Consider taking the group on a residential within the first year. Such trips almost always deepen relationships in a group. A list of residential centres and Guidelines to planning a residential can be found on our website.

**If you require help or advice in your work with young people do not hesitate to contact: the Diocesan Youth Officer on 0161 828 1435.**