



Shining light – a summary

Stewart Cutler

In December 2009 Linwood Parish Church decided that this was an opportune moment to review the work with young people to help them learn lessons from the past and to develop a clear picture of where they are at present and to consider their plans for the future. This report is the result of that process and the beginning of another.

The work of the Parish Project Worker has brought huge benefits to the community of Linwood, and in particular its young people.

Connections with community organisations, especially the local schools, have allowed Linwood Parish Church to make contact with, and meet the needs of, a huge number of young people.

Within the church After8, a regular group for teenagers, provides a safe space, educational opportunities, faith development and pastoral support to a group of around 20 young people.

Areas of concern identified in this report should not undermine the clear benefits of the youth work. The quality of the youth work is obviously high and of great benefit to those involved.

The issues identified are almost entirely organisational, financial and structural.

Unclear management structures, a lack of long term strategic planning, uncertain funding and communication difficulties were the recurring themes of this research.

This report will detail the thoughts of stakeholders from Linwood Parish Church, schools, Community Learning and Development, Parents and Supporters as well as the Minister and the Parish Project Worker and Young People themselves.

It will identify areas of good practice and areas which offer opportunities for improvement and suggest possible ways forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stewart Cutler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Stewart Cutler

1 WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

1.1 Church Based Activities

Linwood Parish Church is in many ways typical in that the attendance of teenagers on Sunday mornings has reduced over time.

One response to this was Do-nut Time, a time during the Sunday morning service where teenagers could leave to have a time of teaching and discussion in a manner more appropriate for their needs. Do-nut time ceased when it stopped being viable because of falling attendance. There were also issues about an appropriate space within the church building.

Two regular youth groups have operated, Pulse8 for young people in P6-S2 (Sunday evening) and After8, for young people in S3-S6+ (Tuesday evening).

Pulse8 met on a Sunday evening in the church. Initially around 80 young people attended and this levelled out at around 40 young people each week. Activities included crafts and games. Pulse8 ceased at the summer of 2008.

After8 was launched in January 2004 as a follow on group for young people who were now too old for Pulse8. This group still functions with around 20 members.

Many of the older members were originally members of Pulse8 and all of the other members have joined through friendships with members. After8 does not advertise or actively recruit members. There is a deliberate policy of operating a group of this size to allow good relationships to develop.

After8 is currently focused on helping the group to transition into a more self-supporting group of young adults linked to Linwood Parish Church. More than half of the members of After8 have now left school and are in work, college or university. After8 is, at present, the only church-based group offering opportunities for young people.

The Parents and Supporters focus group named the following activities that they knew were offered as part of the youth work programme, mostly offered through After8:

- Linwood High School café
- Leaflet deliveries for church
- Car boot sales
- Sponsored walks
- Quad biking
- Showstoppers (holiday club)
- Crafts / baking
- Youth assembly
- Church service participation
- Involvement with Community Learning
- fundraising

- Go-karting
- Laser quest
- BBQ
- Beach bonfires
- Camping
- Snowboarding
- Ice skating
- Glen Kin

1.2 Residential Work

Residential work, and in particular outdoor activities, has long been recognised as an excellent way to build relationships, to expose people to new experiences and to create an environment where preconceived ideas and understandings can be challenged or developed. This is a key element of the After8 programme with around six residential opportunities each year.

These residentials are often focused on outdoor activities, which offer an excellent vehicle for team building, challenging personal limits and relationship building. Each residential includes times of reflection and discussion around faith and spirituality. The young people value these opportunities to talk about their beliefs and how those impact their lives. The staff at the outdoor centres regularly comment on the quality of these reflective sessions.

1.3 Relating to the Congregation

Each focus group was asked how young people contribute to the life of the church.

Interestingly, in every focus group except the Young People's and the Youth Leaders' groups people initially reacted by saying that there was very little interaction.

However, when asked to give examples the same people went on to list a wide range of ways in which the young people contribute. These included music, leading worship, speaking to the congregation, helping with fund raising events, clearing out the church grounds and hosting social events.

The groups were surprised at the number of ways in which the young people are involved in the life of the church.

1.4 Schools Work

The Youth Worker is a school chaplain in two primary schools, East Fulton and Woodlands, and also in Linwood High School.

Representatives from the three schools noted that the Youth Worker:

- Takes part in school services and assemblies
- Helps devise school policies
- Encourages links with community

- Attends residential visits as a leader (as well as helping build relationships with the children this also saves the schools money as they don't have to pay a member of staff to go)
- Facilitates a COSY Café at Linwood high, a lunchtime activity giving leadership opportunities
- Is involved in P7 positive behaviour initiatives (East Fulton)
- Delivers elements of P5/6 Health & Wellbeing programme (Woodlands)
- Provides direct link to former students (Linwood High School)
- Delivers citizenship lessons (E Fulton)
- Provides programme of events for focus weeks
- Co-ordinates a projects to provide art installations for National Youth Assembly
- Supports all school events (cluster)
- Involved in preparation and delivery of Religious Observance

This is a huge range of activity and the Schools highly value both the input of the Youth Worker, both professionally and personally.

The Parents and Supporters focus group were mostly unaware of the extent of the Youth Worker's work in the schools and the Schools focus group were mostly unaware of the range of activities offered in the other contexts.

Both groups expressed a concern that there was a possibility the Youth Worker could take on too much work.

2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2.1 Relationships

The Parish Project Worker (Youth Worker) has built excellent relationships with the young people in After8, leaders, schools, community groups and those who have some connection to the work.

2.2 Support From The Church of Scotland

The former Board of National Mission gave no clear guidance to the congregation about payment of expenses to the Youth Worker or their responsibilities for office set up and equipment.

Support from Ministries Council for both the Team (minister and Youth Worker) and the congregation has been similarly lacking.

2.3 Management

There is no clear management of the work by the Kirk Session.

The Management Committee has no clear remit and no clear relationship to the Kirk Session or the Youth Worker.

The line management of the Youth Worker by the Minister is a helpful arrangement.

2.4 Ownership

There is a lack of ownership of the work by the congregation beyond those with direct experience of the project.

Those with direct experience of the work of the project value it highly.

2.5 Communication

The work of the project is not well communicated to the wider congregation and community.

2.6 Strategy

There is no agreement on the age range of the young people the Youth Worker should work with.

There is little evidence of a clear, written strategy for further developing work with young people.

All the work currently undertaken broadly meets the remit of the Youth Worker but much of the work is opportunistic in nature. This has allowed the youth work to react to new opportunities but could also result in missing other new opportunities or lead to gaps in provision.

There is no clear progression of activities or opportunities for young people between leaving Sunday School (Primary 7) and After 8 (Secondary 3).

There are very limited worship options for young people (and adults) beyond the traditional Sunday morning service.

There are no exit strategies in place for young people leaving at the upper end of the youth work.

There is no continuation strategy in place to secure the continuation of the youth work beyond the current post holder.

2.7 Funding

There is no standing budget for youth work as part of the congregational budgeting.

There was no initial expectation that the congregation would have any responsibility for contributing funds to the youth work.

The congregation did not expect to pay expenses beyond mileage. This continues to be a problem.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2.8 Strategy

The Kirk Session, in consultation with the Minister and YOUTH WORKER, should prepare a strategy document outlining the key areas of work to be addressed. This should project forward to between 3 and 5 years.

This should include:

- A clear definition of the age range of the youth work, 10 – 25
- A clear definition of the range and scope of the Youth Worker's remit. This should also address the relationship to, and expectations of, the national church events and commitments and the Glen Kin Experience.
- Church based provision for the Primary 6 – Secondary 2 age group (e.g. restarting Pulse8)
- Addressing the variety of regular worship opportunities beyond Sunday morning worship
- A commitment to recruit, train and support volunteers to deliver services
- Funding requirements and a plan for accessing funds
- Communicating the work of the Youth Worker to the wider congregation and community

2.9 Management

The Management Committee should:

- Be a standing committee of the Kirk Session
- Include young people as full members
- Include representatives from the schools
- Be responsible for oversight of the implementation of the strategy for youth work

2.10 Finance

Youth Work should have an annual budget agreed by the Kirk Session.

The Kirk Session should investigate sources of funding and make plans, in consultation with the Youth Worker for accessing such funding.

The Kirk Session should have a clear understanding of the costs it is responsible for. These should include the following as a minimum:

- a laptop computer (replaced every 4 years)
- a mobile telephone
- mileage incurred in the discharge of duties
- office equipment (desk, chair, stationary, printer, external hard drive)
- broadband internet access

2.11 Communication

The work of the project should be communicated in the following ways:

- frequent reports to the Management Committee and Kirk Session
- regular updates in the Parish Magazine
- regular information about the Youth Work during Sunday Worship, preferably from young people
- an annual report involving contributions from leaders, young people and schools and prepared by young people and the Youth Worker
- consideration should be given to establishing a website to be updated and maintained by young people as part of the youth work

2.12 Support

The Ministries Council create a package or support for congregations considering a youth worker, including:

- consideration of the role of the Youth Worker
- expectations of the congregation
- the role and ethos of youth work
- financial commitment of the congregation (expenses and budget)