



9. Setting up a Youth Club

So, your parish wants to do something with young people and it's decided to set up a Youth Club! What exactly does that mean and what does it involve?

Know what you're doing!

First, it's decide exactly what you're trying to do and why. Be clear about your objectives. What are your motives? What is your vision? Even if your original plans change or develop, its important to know what you're trying to accomplish and what needs and issues you are hoping to address. For example, are you simply addressing the needs of young people in your community? Or are you trying to do something specifically spiritual?

What other resources for young people are already available in your community? Engage in a little survey! Talk to people. If possible, and you have the contacts, consult the young people themselves. This could be done with the young people in your church, in the community, or through schools. Find out what's already going on in the area.

Are there specific issues in your community you should be aware of? See what others have done in similar circumstances. Read around. Ask

around. There are lots of cases of good practice around – both locally and nationally.

For example, there is the 'traditional' youth club set up, with the usual activities of table tennis, pool and other planned activities, providing a space for young people to meet together. However, some groups have addressed the needs of young people in a specific way – for example, those interested in a certain kind of music, those who are interested in exploring spirituality, etc.

Where?

Where are you going to meet? What premises are available? This will determine the kind of activities and nature of the group. Don't feel as if you have to be restricted to a church hall in bad condition when there are other halls or premises around in better condition. What other organisations are you sharing the building with? Is there storage space for items such as table tennis and other large equipment? Is there storage for smaller items? Is there secure storage for expensive items - for example, video games or music systems? Is there anywhere outside for football, etc. If not, and you are organising those kinds of activities indoors, do the lights and windows have any protection? Do you have to be careful of notice boards and work from playgroups and other users? Is there adequate toilet provision?

When?

When are you meeting? What day and time? Will you meet only in school term time? Or will you be making arrangements specifically for the holiday season? Try not to clash with other youth clubs meeting in your area.

Who?

What age group are you aiming at? What criteria, other than age, are you setting for the members? Do they all have to attend church? Do they have to attend their own place of worship, whatever religion, or can anyone come? What kind of policy do you have available for people with specific needs? Will they be able to participate in the activities?

What?

An outline programme should be planned for a club night, and programmes must be planned in advance for at least three, preferably six months. It's no good leaving it until a few hours before to put things together. In addition, an outline programme for special events and outside visits, etc should be prepared well in advance. What activities are you going to offer? Are you going to have special occasions or theme nights?

The programme could contain such things as sports, games, dance, drama, music, art and craft, cooking, quiet activities, simple things like board games, table top activities, team building game, discussion, debates, topical Issues, and social action. Invite other people in with specialist skills. Some Youth Clubs participate in initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Are you going to provide Information and Advice for young people? If so, what kind? Local Authorities and Health Authorities as well as other agencies will have lots of literature available on various topics concerning young people. However, depending on the nature of the club/group – do you have to have parent's permission to deal with certain issues, such as sexual health, sexuality, drugs, etc?

How?

Forms should be kept with personal details for all members, including name, address, telephone number, date of birth, and a person to contact in case of an emergency. Keep a register each week – perhaps in the form of a signing in and out book so you will know who is present at all times. If you are taking your young people off the premises then you will need a parent permission form for each young person and give parents details of the activity. Also bear in mind how you will transport young people (See separate Resource Sheet 6)

Rules

Have a few basic rules in place and procedures to take if these rules are broken. You could involve the young people themselves in drawing up a simple rule system. You should also have a policy in place with regards to particular issues - for example, drugs, alcohol, smoking, etc. For instance, what action is to be taken if people break the rules or you find someone in possession of illegal drugs? Ensure you abide by Health and Safety regulations, Disability Discrimination Act, etc.

Promote

Thought needs to be given to how you will advertise and promote your youth club. This can be done in various ways: through advertisements, flyers, letters, schools, word of mouth, and one-to-one. Can you talk to the parents of the young people you are hoping to attract? How can the young people be encouraged to bring their friends? Does it really matter how few young people you begin with? Have you got a name for the Youth Club? Or are you going to wait for the young people to come up with one?

Child Protection

A Child Protection Policy needs to be in place and everything you do should be in accordance with this. All leaders should be aware of it and work within it.

Leaders

What leaders are available? When are they free? You must have enough to have the minimum of two leaders with any group in a separate room/area. Child Protection Disclosure forms must be completed for all leaders and a clear disclosure obtained.

What skills do your leaders have? This can often influence what kind of youth resource and activities you provide.

Appoint your leaders carefully and for a probationary period to allow evaluation and assessment. Some leaders will need gentle nudging and encouragement to release their gifts and confidence. Others may have to be 'let go' – enthusiasm isn't the sole reason to appoint people!

When the club is set up, regular evaluation sessions should be held between leaders (ideally 10 minutes at the end of each meeting). This helps to look at the programme and support all volunteers. One volunteer must be prepared to be overall leader.

Training

In a survey in 1999, the Welsh Association of Youth Clubs found that 89% of youth workers responding felt that training had an influence and impact on their practice. They said that training:

"Made me realise my strengths and weaknesses... developed me personally...made me think about

the work...helped by connecting me to other workers...gave me more confidence working alongside staff and youth members."

Leaders must be prepared to go on training. Ensure you provide initial and ongoing training and support for your leaders. There are lots of training opportunities available. Consult your leaders on what training they need. Key into local authority youth provision and see how they can help and support you. Consult with parishes and groups who have set up similar projects.

Responsibilities

In accordance with Child Protection procedures, for Health and Safety requirements, and to ensure a well-run club the leaders should be aware of their responsibilities. This should be in written form so that there is no confusion as to what is expected of leaders. Give leaders a brief job description outlining their areas of responsibility. For example, one item may be that leaders arrive well in advance to prepare for the club and stay on afterwards to clear up.

Resources

In addition to training, there are many resources available, both on-line and published, dealing with all kinds of issues and activities. (See Separate Resource Sheet). Are there existing groups in the area who can help you out with resources? Is there a possibility of obtaining second hand equipment?

Policies and Procedures

In order to provide a safe environment for young people and leaders alike, and to ensure that everyone knows the procedures in place, there are a few policies to consider.

Accident Book/Reporting

This is really important. You should log any accident or incident of concern and keep them on file in accordance with Data Protection. Make sure a working phone (landline or mobile) is always available. Ensure you have someone trained in First Aid and a First Aid Kit available.

Equal Opportunitites

All young people should be treated equally regardless of sex, race, sexuality, disability, religion, intellectual capabilities,

Drugs and Alcohol

You need to decide your policy on drugs and alcohol. The young people need to be informed of your policy. The policy should also include the procedures in place for leaders if you discover, for example, alcohol or illegal substances.

Volunteers Policy

Volunteers will, no doubt, be the essence of your work with young people. As well as having an expectation of them, they too, should have expectations of you or the organisation that has technically employed them. This means care, concern, support, training opportunities, a safe environment, expenses reimbursement (when applicable), etc.

Risk Assessment

Assess the building – how safe it is and any hazards it may present. Also assess any activities you are providing. In whatever activities you provide ensure that safety is a priority. Be aware of Fire Exits and what procedures are to be taken in the event of an emergency. For online resources check out www.hse.gov.uk/pubns, which has a free downloadable leaflet about Risk Assessment and other important areas.

Funds

What funding is available to start off? Does the parish/church budget for youth work? Are you going to be affiliated to the Local Authority that may lead to obtaining small funding? Are there Funds you can apply for? How much entry fee do you charge (if any)? Are you prepared to fund raise? Do you raise money by having a tuck shop during meetings (with the resulting litter!)?

Participation

It's important to listen to the young people – what do they want? What do they need? How are you going to do this? When the club is set up, depending on the age of the members, it's a good idea to set up an executive group of members be elected by the members, to bring in any rules necessary, deal with any behavioural problems, and put forward ideas for programmes and the development of the club. These should meet regularly with the leaders.

Are there young people who are interested in being trained as peer leaders or who can be youth leaders themselves when they reach a certain age?

Qualified Youth Workers

Some parishes employ part-time qualified youth workers. This may be one way forward, as it's not as expensive as you may think. Alternatively, the money from this could be directed into training for existing, voluntary youth leaders and other resources.

Inform

Remember to keep the parish updated and informed about the youth club – they have to be aware of its developments and needs. Ensure you have their practical and prayerful support. In some

cases, parishes can be antagonistic towards the youth club – how can you inform them of the needs you are addressing and the work you are doing on their behalf?

Useful Addresses

Youth Cymru

Sackville Avenue

Heath

Cardiff

CF14 3NY

029 2061 6123

www.youthcymru.org.uk

Formerly known Welsh Association of Youth Clubs. Youth Cymru primarily exists to support youth workers, club leaders and their management committees in developing their programmes and meeting the priorities of the young people they work with.

Wales Youth Agency

Leslie Court

Lon y Llyn

Caerphilly

CF83 1BQ

029 20855700

www.way.org.uk

The website has many useful resources, some of which are free to download. It's also possible to visit their headquarters in Caerphilly and browse through their extensive library.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (Wales)

Oak House,

12 The Bulwark,

BRECON,

Powys

LD3 7AD

Tel: 01874 623086 Fax: 01874 611967

E-mail: wales@theaward.org

www.theaward.org

Useful Books

Health and Safety in Youth and Community Work: A Pocket Guide by Doug Nicholls (Russell House Publishing, 1997).

Check out www.Russelhouse.co.uk which has hundreds of published resources to order online for working with young people, from Health and Safety advice to Games and Activities. Or contact them on:

Russell House Publishing Ltd

4 St George's House

Uplyme Road Business Park

Lyme Regis

Dorset DT7 3LS

England

01297 443948

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