

Seven Thoughts on Starting Youth Ministry From Scratch

As you think about developing some youth ministry, here are some questions / areas to consider as you make a start (these also apply to children's ministry)

1. **Are there young people in your community / village / town etc?** If the answer to this is "no" or not many, then do not stress too much about what you are doing / not doing. If the answer is yes - is this just that they live there, or that they not live there but there is a school in your parish / area too? If so, then the key question is, "are you (someone from your church) involved in the school at all?". Are people in the congregation - praying for the school / praying for young people / aware of anything the school might need that the church could provide - e.g. even in some secondary schools, they might not have the space to gather a crowd or do a "full school" assembly, what is the score with that - could the school make use of your church building for RE / visits / school celebration? A first step to creating an "environment" where youth work could happen is raising the profile and presence of your church in the community amongst young people.
2. **Are there young people the church is already in contact with - but doesn't realise it?** Are there any other organisations using the church building that - for whatever reason - the church is not counting as "youth work", (even your own stuff that you might not count - bell ringers, choir) scouts, guides etc? How can you support what is already happening (offer a chaplaincy service? Invite to special church services?)
3. **Is there a vision to "do" youth work?** That sounds obvious, but everyone might want to see the church do it - but the "church" is a collective

term for everyone, WHO - specifically, would be up for it (getting the training, getting a DBS check, pioneering something if the church has not done it before, prepared for a long term commitment) - those people need to be identified, brought together so they can pray and discern what they might be able to offer . . .

4. **Can you build from what already exists?** Grow the Sunday School, start doing mid week activity with children . . . do it well, and you might find that you have a growing number (in a couple of years) hitting year 6 . . . then plan to form a transition group with them (3-6 young people is enough) once they are in yr 6, start meeting with them separately from Sunday School from the Easter in the year they will finish . . . When they hit Yr 7 - STAY WITH THEM, unless you have initiated contact with young people when they are 12 / 13, it doesn't make sense to simply expect someone else to work with them when the leaders who have known them since they were 8 can grow with them through the next decade, there are a number of youth clubs for children and young people where this is the ethos - start with them at 6, then see them through til they are 16 and start again at 6. In addition, in smaller churches this makes a lot of sense . . . as there are less people, and often children and young people in a village context are used to doing stuff across a wider age group.
5. **What else is happening in the area amongst other churches?:** (Anglican in the Deanery or Area, ecumenically) - can any other church with more team / resources - help? Join in? Enable?
6. **A couple of principles / values.** Young people need - love // acceptance // guidance // significance. Can (and will) your church offer those - these values create a foundation on which youth work can thrive, I would call these four things the foundations - based on our relationship with Jesus, and the values of youth work - participation, empowerment, etc. the "walls" that create a safe place for young people to thrive.
7. **Finally.** It is better to do something well occasionally, than to do something weekly - but badly. *Opportunities* to do stuff does not mean it *should* be done - there are good things a church can do, but is it a God thing (is the time right, has prayer been poured in, has God said anything specific?)