

Finding Volunteers for Youth Work

(or... Fantastic Leaders and Where to Find Them)

Many young people want to continue exploring faith through their teenage years and be a part of a church community. What is often missing and difficult to find is not young people, it's adults who will safety support, encourage and host them.

Here's 10 ideas to get you thinking about how to inspire more members of your congregation to get involved in youth ministry.

1) You're not looking for a 'youth leader'

The term 'youth leader' can immediately put-off a range of people. It can be assumed to be something for only trained professionals or bring to mind an extraverted young adult who wants to make a mess and play ping pong. Make it clear that whatever term you use to describe them, youth leaders/supporters/encouragers can be of any age and personality type. Perhaps this video clip will help:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hckSfJb8PXQ&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjoCOInGOYOsNfWYsIbRPWrI&index=11&t=5s

2) You have something worth sharing

Some adults don't think they can relate to young people today and assume they don't have something worth sharing. Young people however want to hear our stories, to know how God found us and why we put our faith in Him. Young people may have different cultural references and even go through different challenges but that does not disqualify someone from walking alongside. If your congregation doesn't feel they understand young people, the best thing to do is spend time with them, ask questions and find out.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T6rve28jvo&list=PLcc_HT5TeqjoCOInGOYOsNfWYsIbRPWrI&index=12

3) Telling stories

If you already have some young people in your congregation, make sure you tell their stories. That could be in the pew sheet, magazine, online or during a service. If you can, show some photos or a short video to demystify them and give teens a bigger profile in your community.

4) Find a champion

Is there someone in your congregation or team who is a 'people person', excellent at inspiring others? Get them on board to help you. If you already have a group of youth leaders, task them with sharing what they do and chat to potential helpers. If you are starting from scratch, perhaps you could appoint a youth champion? Not necessarily someone who would be comfortable leading a youth group, but someone to raise the profile of young people in the community, lead prayers for young people and talk to others about building a team and strategy.

5) What are you asking?

Most volunteers won't be immediately ready to jump in and plan a youth session, deliver a talk on relationships and commit to every Sunday morning of the year. Break down different roles within your team and be very clear about the responsibilities of each. Talk about the opportunities of each role and utilise people's strengths in administration, tech support, prayer support, helping at an annual big event or trip away, catering etc

6) How long am I doing this?

If you are asking a new volunteer to join an existing programme, think about how you can safely have them join a youth session as a guest, making it clear there is no obligation or commitment to keep going after one session. Meet with them before and after the event to get their thoughts and offer some encouragement. Agree together how long they might commit for, then review and ask if they would like to continue.

7) Ask and ask again

Often, it takes more than one ask. Rather than asking for a yes or no on the spot. Begin by asking the person to think and pray about it. Give them an overview of your plans and strategy and what is expected of a leader, then give them time to think it over and consult with others.

8) You're not alone

Make it clear that responsibility for young people won't be left to them alone. Before you ask for volunteers, think carefully about what training, help and support the church can provide. It could be a monthly Bible study, invitation to a local network or support from the Diocese. Be clear about safeguarding expectations and ensure they have good communication links to the parish safeguarding officer.

9) You must help or else...

It can be tempting to stand at the front of church and plead for anyone to help, or declare in a notice sheet that if people don't help, the youth group will stop and we'll lose the young people forever. Instead, speak positively about the opportunity of supporting young people. You don't want to be using someone unsuitable out of desperation, and it's not helpful for anyone to volunteer out of guilt.

10) Pray

Finally, pray for young people and those who might support them. This could be as a whole congregation or leadership team. Pray and seek God, who loves young people and wants to move in their lives.

....and a reminder on safeguarding

Ensure anyone working with young people has been trained and checked, that every reasonable step has been taken to ensure the safety of young people. Ensure your safeguarding policies are accessible and have been understood by any potential youth leader. You can find more info here <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/diocese/safeguarding/>