

Evaluation

Topic: The How To of Youth Work

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Biography:

Robin is the Director for Lay Training at Ridley Hall Cambridge which includes a popular youth ministry degree. Robin is passionate about resourcing the church for ministry and mission, evangelism and discipleship. As a youth minister and youth worker of over 20 years experience, Robin has a particular interest in training youth leaders to build God's church. Robin is married to Sam and enjoys various fitness activities including callisthenics and running.

INTRODUCTION

An evaluation or review can occur on many levels, from the strategic to the personal. But one of the most effective forms of evaluation, and the one we will be focusing on here, is the session evaluation.

Session evaluations are carried out by the whole team straight after each session and provide an opportunity for every worker to reflect on how the session went. Reflections on the session are primarily discussed in light of its stated aims. I.e. How well did the session meet its aims, why and why not?

The primary aim is to reflect on what went well, what might need changing, and whether the group is on course to meet its aims.

The session evaluation also acts as a record of what happened. This can be very helpful when you come to review the whole year as, over a period of time, it can highlight a number of factors including: pattern of attendance; changing nature of engagement; nature of growth or decline; variety and mix of methods etc. It is also good practice as it provides a written account of events that can be referred to should any concerns or issues arise.

Last but not least, the session evaluation provides an opportunity for both volunteers and workers to off-load by talking through their experiences and, if necessary, passing on key information. As well as ensuring everyone is accountable, this also helps to ensure the team doesn't take the stresses and strains of the work home with them. This will have a significant impact on the teams' sense of well-being and their long term commitment to the work.

THEOLOGY

To undertake 'ministry' is to serve others. It is to follow the example of Jesus who came not to be served, as was his right, but to serve. This is not service for service sake, however. Ministry is service to others in the name of our most high God. This is the same as saying; ministry is serving

others in such a way that we make manifest the purposes of God. Or, service in line with the will and purposes of our Father in heaven. *Youth ministry* is serving young people in such a way that God's will and purpose is made manifest in and through all that we do. Evaluation is simply taking this seriously. Evaluation forces us to think and pray, what are God's purposes for the young people we are ministering to? What does this require from me? And perhaps, most importantly, are we seeing God's will made manifest through our work? To undertake evaluation is to take seriously our prayer that: 'Your will be done'.

PRACTICALITIES

An evaluation is completed in two parts. The first section is either completed at the end of the previous session evaluation, or just before the session. The second section is completed straight after the session.

First section to include:

- Aim of work within which the session falls i.e. discipleship, mission, outreach etc.
- Date, session, location, name of workers
- Aim of this particular session
- Planned activities

Second section to include:

- Name of young people who attended – it is good practice to use initials rather than full names
- Overview of session – this is a commentary on how well the session met its aims (be honest!)
- Note of any key incidents/conversations – this can be wide ranging and include anything that workers feel was pertinent
- Any action taken – this includes anything pertinent to child protection, first aid, health and safety, reporting concerns etc, as well as notifying parents of changes in times, buying equipment etc.
- Future considerations – this includes any suggestions and/or promises made to undertake tips, change how things are run etc. as well as ideas for future sessions
- Prayer

REFLECTION & LEARNING

- What do you think is the biggest hurdle to undertaking regular evaluations in your context? How and when will you address this?
- Think about your contribution in evaluations: How do you participate and encourage others to do the same? What do you do well and what might you change?
- What barriers are there to your full contribution in evaluations? How and when will you address these?
- What mark out of 10 do you think God would give your work? Why do you think this? What do others think?

DEVELOPING PRACTICE

Commit yourself to spend at least 15 minutes at the end of each session in evaluation.

Initially it can feel like an extra burden to hang around for a further 15 minutes at the end of a session but persevere and you will come to see the benefits.

Be part of a no-blame culture

Session evaluations are a vulnerable place. It is easy to become defensive for all sorts of reasons. For evaluations to work it is essential that people feel able to be open and honest. This requires that they are, and feel, truly valued and supported.

Work on receiving critique and praise.

Working together can be difficult, especially when there is a difference of opinion and/or a need for change, and will take work. Rather than looking at others take responsibility for yourself and work on receiving critique with assertiveness, criticism with patience, and praise with humility.

Encourage Youth Participation

Think about how you can involve the young people in evaluation. It is important that the team have protected space as they will need to discuss sensitive issues, but enabling the young people to participate will help to ensure your work remains relevant while communicating value to the young people and helping them develop skills and confidence.

Advance evaluation skills

Advanced evaluation skills require a particular combination of self-awareness, self-confidence and practice wisdom. This often requires the kind of sustained, focused, effort that is part of social care or ministerial training.

FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/your-church/worship-resources/leaps-and-bounds-good-childhood-youth-toolkit/youth-cl>

<http://www.youthworkresource.com/useful-forms/>

<http://www.cwvys.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/HB-Planning-Evaluation.pdf>