

Detached Youth Work

Topic: The How To of Youth Work

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Biography:

Mark has over ten years of experience of running and managing community based youth projects. For the last ten years He has been based in Peterborough working with Churches Together in Central Peterborough and the Sparx Project in Dogsthorpe and Welland.

Mark is married to Madeline and is currently enjoying being dad to 7 year old triplets, working at YMCA Time Stop and returning to where his youth work began in helping with a new youth group at his church, Oundle Road Baptist Church.

INTRODUCTION

Detached work happens away from a building setting, in locations where young people choose to gather. The worker is often engaging with young people who do not have access to or would not want to go to a youth club or other building based provision. A detached work can act as a mediate or advocate, enabling young people to be more involved in their community.

Detached youth work offers the church based worker the opportunity to engage with young people who would not choose to enter the church building.

Detach work can be a bit of a scary prospect, losing the security of a building, where the worker has more control. This section aims to give practical advice to make it a less scary process.

THEOLOGY

I Believe Jesus was a brilliant detached worker. He wanted to be out where the people were.

By going out Jesus was able to meet with people who would never have gone or been allowed in the temples. By going out he was able to see and react to people's needs.

The model of going out was something he then encouraged the disciples to do and follow.

PRACTICALITIES

Like any good youth work detached work needs to be planned and properly prepared for. Below are some steps in planning and preparing for starting a detached project:

Planning Stage

You will need to identify the area you intend to base the work, having done this you need to ask the question how well do I know my area? You may know the roads and places in your area, but do you really know the places that young people gather in and use? This may not be obvious. I.E. in some places the last place the young people will gather is the youth shelter!

A good exercise before you go out is to get a map of the area you intend to work in and highlight the following:

What you think are the key places for young people in the area. (School, shops, Takeaways, gathering points, parks, playgrounds and skate parks)

Are there any places where you know there are issues affecting young people? (Anti-social behaviour, using unappropriate places to play ball games, skate or ride motorcycles)

Walkabouts

Once you have completed the map carry out what I call walkabouts. These enable you to walk the area and test out whether the things you highlighted on the map are right.

Try to resist the temptation on these walkabouts to start making contact with young people. At this stage it is important to observe where young people might be, if there are particular groups or individuals that would be target young people when you do start the work.

It is worth carrying out several walkabouts and if you are able to, vary the time and days. This will help to identify the best time to do the work.

I have found it useful in the past to involve other people in the walkabout. A police officer, PSCO or councilors are useful people to highlight issues in the area.

Use the walkabouts to identify points where you could base your work. ideally these are the places where the young people are gathering, it needs to be an open safe space, where there is adequate light. Be aware of all the access points and any potential hazards.

If you are working close to shops or houses it is worth introducing yourself to the shopkeepers and the local residents. This is really important if there have been local issues. When I did a piece of work in a park where there had been issues we produced a flyer for residents so they knew who we where, why we were doing the work and when we were doing it.

Starting the Work

Detached work often takes time to build and therefore it needs the team to be committed to it. The team should be two or more. I find four is ideal as any more can be too scary for the young people! Try to have a mix team.

It is worth investing in shirts, hoodies or jackets that allow you to be identified and easy to spot. Ensure that everyone comes in appropriate clothing and footwear.

It is good practice for each member of the team to be wearing a lanyard with card with their name

and photo together with your church/organisation details on it. I also would carry a flyer explaining who we are, what we are doing and giving a contact number. This can be given to young people to take home to parents or members of the public.

Each member of the team should have a fully charged mobile telephone. It would be good practice to ensure that other church organisation leaders know when you are working and

Each team member should carry a fully charged phone with team members numbers and emergency contact person from the church or organisation. It is worth having a project mobile. This is the number that is given to young people or members of the public to make contact with you.

It would be good practice to carry a small first aid kit and if working at night a small torch is useful.

When working members of the team should keep in view of other members of the team.

When you start to approach young people it is best to take a low key approach, recognising that they will be suspicious and have the right to not want to engage with you.

Below are some tips that I have used in the past when beginning a new piece of work:

Have some drinks and food and the young people will come!

Identify key young people who are happy to engage with you and then get them to introduce you to others.

Get a flyer into local school so young people are aware you are going to be around.

If you have other young people from church/organisation who are happy to come and play a game that you can then invite others to join in with.

While the above ideas might help to make a start the only way of developing the work is to ensure that you are consistently out and about so young people can come to trust and rely on you to being there.

REFLECTION & LEARNING

Make sure that you have somewhere to end up at to debrief the session.

In the early stages it worth making notes about who you have seen. You may not see people every week so it is useful as a memory aid to keep some notes about things they mentioned or are interested in. It makes an impact if next time you meet them you are able to follow up the conversation in some way.

DEVELOPING PRACTICE

It is worth talking to others who are doing detached work. It is worth exploring if there are other projects in your local area.

In further information I have put some useful references that I have found online.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Mahon M; Church on the Street (Urban Theology urban theology.org)
- YMCA George Williams College; Detached, Street-based and Project Work with Young People(infed.org)
- Rogers V; Street-Based or Detached Youth Work (jkp.com)
- The Youth Association: Detached Youth Work Policy (youth-association)