



Section 3 Getting Engaged

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For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?
Luke 14 v28 – 31

Deciding to respond meaningfully to these issues as a church is costly and will mean radical change for church activities, church structures and church members. For individuals it could mean a complete change of lifestyle, a house-move, a career-change or a new ministry. This section aims to inspire, inform and motivate churches and individuals who feel God calling them to get involved. There is also information for those who find themselves at the frontline through contact with a family member, relative, acquaintance or stranger tangled up in the world of guns, drugs, knives and gangs.



Responding as a Church

To respond to these issues the Church must become relevant, it must de-stigmatise the issues so that those in the congregations and in the community can feel free to step forward for help and support. Consider the following as a way for your Church to be a light in the community:

- Have an open door policy which offers support and advice for the community
- Train the decision makers, the youth leaders and members of the congregation on the issues around guns, drugs, knives and gangs
- Allow the Church to host community forums and meetings on these issues
- Hold outreach events e.g. barbeques to let the community know that you are there
- Develop partnership initiatives with neighbouring youth clubs, supplementary schools etc
- Continually and consistently raise awareness of the issues by having regular testimonies where you invite someone who has come off drugs or been delivered from a gang situation to give their story
- Hold listening events where you hear from young people and/or members of the community directly
- Host conferences related to outreach and the community
- Have a prayer strategy attached to voluntary groups in the community, asking them regularly what they would like you to pray for

Pastors and Church leaders need to listen to their young people within the Church who will be taking the church forward to the next generation. We would also suggest the following:

1. Leaders, Pastors and youth workers initially assess what their churches offer to young people (e.g. worship, counselling, creative forum, youth forum)
2. Youth concerns become a priority agenda item
3. Arrange a meeting with the youth of the church for open and honest dialogue.
4. Create a training programme for all leaders re youth empowerment. It is important to note that there are some very creative youth workers and ministers that can be invited in to take part in your training programmes.
5. Develop a confidential counselling network for youth issues.
6. Create a strategic model on how young people will be allowed to fill leadership roles within the church-responsibilities and authority. This area may require professional support and advice.
7. On going assessment (be sure you know who is to do this job) of youth entering the church, what are their issues? And those already "churched" what are their issues?
8. Set an annual programme for youth involvement in church activities.
9. Youth empowerment and support to be on all prayer and fasting agendas.

Responding as a Congregation

The Church of St Paul and St Silas, Lozells stands on the busy main road running through the neighbourhood surrounded by shops and cafes serving the many minority-ethnic communities that live in the area.

If you had walked past the modern church building in the days and weeks after the 2005 disturbances in Lozells you would have seen a sign on the door that read: "Called to be peace-makers, hope-carriers, light-bringers in Lozells." A huge pot of flowers sat outside the door symbolising hope, rebirth and beauty in those troubled times.

Hours after the rioters moved off the street, the Priest-in-charge of St Paul and St Silas, the Revd Canon Jemima Prasadam, led the Sunday service in the open-air, outside the church. Together they read psalms and visited local business people, distributing candles as a sign of peace.

The following Monday, members of the congregation offered to walk with local families who were taking their children to school but were worried that the streets might be still be unsafe.

This was not a one-off response to a crisis. Jemima Prasadam, known as Auntie Jemima, explains that the church had made a conscious decision to be at the heart of the community, building bridges and helping people to work together. The congregation now made this a priority.

"It is so easy to destroy but much harder to build the sense of community. The church encouraged people to break down barriers and befriend each other. We took people every day into the local shops, which were nearly empty, to support both the African-Caribbean and the Asian businesses.

"We cleaned the streets of glass, metal and the debris of petrol bombs while offering candles and then peace bracelets made by the children as a sign of hope for the community."

Every Thursday between 12 and 20 children and young people aged seven to 14 of all backgrounds meet in the church for activities and prayer. The group crosses barriers of gender, ethnicity and faith. Staff and volunteers also reflect the diversity of the community. Together they have produced a Common Statement. It reads; "We are the children of Lozells, people of God. We love and respect each other and we will work together to improve our environment and make Birmingham/Britain a better place for all."



Outside of the church building, Auntie Jemima and her congregation have campaigned for a local park to be redeveloped. "We run a summer outreach in the holidays but there was nowhere for the children to play outside. Along with the children and their parents we started cleaning the park, picking up bottles and litter. But there were no safe surfaces and it needed new play equipment. That is now all in place," explains Auntie Jemima.

Co-operation extends beyond clean-up and community events to support for church celebrations. At a recent harvest festival food for a harvest supper was donated by a supermarket run by Muslims and the Hindu temple provided food for hampers. Local Sikhs also contributed to the fundraising and £300 was raised for help orphaned children in Africa.

Such collaboration reflects the deep personal relationships that have been built by the people of faith. They visit each other regularly sharing meals, fellowship and friendship and working together to build a community where diversity is not tolerated but is celebrated.



Responding as Individuals

If your church has used some of the worship resources, shared the toolkit around its leaders and ministers but has decided it is already fully committed and can not develop new initiatives at this time, it may well be that individuals within the church have been challenged, called or led to respond to the needs of people caught up in guns, drugs, knives and gangs. Their response may be a commitment to volunteering one night a fortnight or taking on a course in youthwork or perhaps a decision to move to a hard-pressed area and engage full-time with local needs. What follows is some case studies of people and groups in Birmingham demonstrating a practical love for the marginalised and disaffected.

One family's response

Sam Miller was a pastor at Sutton Coldfield Vineyard when he felt God calling him into a new role. The twenty-six-year old, whose wife was pregnant with their first child, spent a month listening to God at a Worcestershire monastery to discern what their next step should be.

Over the next few months the couple felt led to live missionally in Perry Common, North Birmingham. They built links with local churches and began to get to know

the area. Sam gave up his job and they bought a house on the estate, moving there in August 2003. Hannah, Sam's wife, began teaching on the estate and is a governor of the local school.

In September 2003 Urban Devotion Birmingham was launched as Sam and his family with a small group of young people on gap years began to invest in the community – spending between them 80 to 90 hours a week in prayer for the estate. They did regular prayer walks and started to build links with young people on the estate, learning from them what the needs were.

Sam says: "We were learning together about prayer, mission and being financially dependent on God. That year we came into contact with about 250 young people through the clubs we ran and another 700 through the schools. During our first year on the estate crime dropped by 47% and now it is at an all time low.

"We knew from the start we wanted to do more than diversionary activities and schemes that attract funding. We wanted to be able to listen to God and follow God's agenda for the estate. By living on the estate we are more than service providers – we are part of the community and

we provide consistency and model a different way of living.”

Sam said that the second year was spent consolidating the work and now the team of six staff and 20 volunteers feel ready to branch out into new areas. They have just begun prayer walking nearby estates.

“In other areas people’s community is based around places of work but in an area like this it is based on geography. That is why missional living is so important as well as the co-operation of all the churches working on the estate.”

Urban Devotion Birmingham is keen to meet anyone feeling called to live in a hard-pressed community in Birmingham. It also welcomes volunteers, prayer partners, people wanting a year out and finance partners. For more information e-mail office@urbandevotion.org

Joining An established voluntary group

There are already many organisations working in hard-pressed neighbourhoods who need the support and commitment of volunteers in order to function. Some of these organisations are faith-based, some are part of the statutory sector and others are voluntary organisations. A full list of these organisations is in section 4.

Case study - street pastors

Street Pastors is one of the better known groups working in several towns and cities in the UK and internationally too. Street Pastors launched their Birmingham office in April 2004, the first trainees, drawn from different churches graduated in September 2004 and they now have 20 fully trained Street Pastors, 15 more taking part in the training and another 15 about to begin.

Street Pastors patrol the streets visiting restaurants, clubs and pubs in groups of 12. Their beat currently includes Aston, Lozells, Witton, Newtown, Winson Green, Birchfield and parts of Handsworth and they are soon to expand into the city centre. Consultation is also taking place into the idea of a multi-faith or non-faith based team of Street Pastors to work in Balsall Heath. As the numbers of Street Pastors grow the teams will divide and begin to patrol new areas.

The Street Pastors training includes communication skills, methods of diffusing tension, drug awareness, youth issues, self-awareness and training in reading situations.

On the streets the pastors aim to engage with the people they meet, spotting gaps in the services and signposting people to

other organisations offering relevant support and help. The aim is not to evangelise but Street Pastors have their name emblazoned across their high visibility jackets and conversations often turn to issues of faith and religion.

On a typical night the pastors will walk 6 or 7 miles usually from between the hours of 8 or 9pm until 2 or 3am. They patrol on alternate Friday and Saturday nights and usually volunteers are needed once every 3 to 4 weeks. But once trained, Street Pastors tend to look on the streets with new eyes and may have the skills and confidence to intervene in a tense situation as they go about their work or near their home.

Co-ordinator Pastor Mike Royal said; “Self-awareness is a key quality for a Street Pastor. They need to be aware that they might not be the best person to intervene in a particular situation or that they are in a situation where they can be helpful. It is important that we are a diverse team of people – currently aged 21-60+ and we do need more Asian Street Pastors.

Mike explained that during a crisis such as the disturbances in Lozells in October 2005 the Street Pastors have a key role. “The police know that we have the skills to diffuse tension and we know the area and the community. Many of the key players already know us.

“We worked in teams of ten for 15 hours non-stop. We diffused several tense situations and stopped a sit-down protest on the A34. Eventually I decided that it was unsafe for the team to remain in the situation – we were between the police lines and those involved in the disturbances – and we left. The well-being of the team is always paramount.”

You do not have to be a pastor to become a Street pastor. Selection to join the Street Pastors team is through an application form and interview. Applicants need to be over 18 and been part of a church for more than one year. They also need a reference from their church leader and strong calling! For more information please visit www.streetpastors.org

Responding to Individuals

For Pastors, Youthworkers and Leaders

Helping a parent concerned about their child

There are certain warning signs that you can also inform parents to look out for to ascertain whether their child is involved in a gang or on drugs:

- A sudden drop in grades and lack of interest in school
- New friends who look dodgy
- Shift of loyalty to dodgy friends
- Changing of nickname or creating one that links to the new friends
- Out of control behaviour
- Anti authority against the police and yourself
- Flashing hand signs and a change in language and dress code
- Change in health and appearance maybe because of drug use
- An inability to account for time spent away from home
- Disengagement from family members
- Unexplained increase of money and income

Remember to offer continued pastoral support to both the parent and the young person and offer to refer them to one of the appropriate services listed in Section 4. Be careful not to judge or blame – parents are pretty good at doing that to themselves. Remember the young person could be in danger or at risk of abuse. Do not hesitate to get advice from professionals or colleagues working in this field.

Ongoing pastoral support of families

Supporting parents who have relatives in gangs or who have lost a relative to violent gang related incident

- Don’t judge – empathise
- Be loving show that you care in everything you do and say
- Say something to uplift not to make worse
- Be approachable and prepared to help
- Listen to them

Women with sons in gangs or growing up in a gang environment

- Young people need to have affection unconditional love shown to them at all times, treat them with affection
- Speak positively into their lives. They are not integrally

bad, but their actions are

- Get involved, ask questions speak to them, this will open a door for them to be able to come to you if they have any problems
- Listen to what they have to say, try to understand where they are and get them to come up with the answers to their solutions
- Encourage them that they are needed in your life and the life of the wider family network.

Face to face with a young person – some pointers

If you, a relative or a friend become concerned about a young person’s behaviour, and suspect that they are involved in gang activity the following should be considered:

- What is the age of the young person?
- What areas do they come from?
- What colours or clothing are they wearing?
- Have they admitted involvement in gangs, if so which one?
- Have they taken any drugs in the last 24 hours?
- Are they fully aware of their surroundings?
- Why have they sought refuge in the church?
- What are they looking for the church to do?
- Are they related to any of the church members?
- Are there any signs of physical marks to the body?

Thinking about these issues in a crisis encounter will help you discern the way forward, who else you should involve and what kind of support you can set up for the young person involved. Remember to keep praying!

Responding as Youthworkers

Introduction

The National Youth Agency's definition of youth work is "to help young people learn about themselves, others and society through informal educational activities. To promote young people's personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole."

This is quite a heavy undertaking when you consider that these young people are the adults of tomorrow and youth workers in every agency are charged with aiding them through that transition to adulthood. With this commitment to young people, one youth worker I spoke to said that to experience the premature death or suffering of a young person was like a candle being extinguished reducing the light in a room. You may know or have experienced losing a young person that frequented the centre where you may be attached to so you understand what it is to bear the pain of the family, the friends and your own pain when a death occurs especially when linked to a gang or drug related incident.

In this toolkit section for youth workers, the aim is to give guidance on what a youth worker can do to keep young people from the growing cycle of drug and gang involvement and what to do if the worst happens to a young person in your centre.

The two articles below have been pulled together to provide this information. References for further reading are at the end of the toolkit.

1. Youth approaches to gang culture

Youth workers have the ability to meet young people where they are emotionally and socially, through a number of methodologies and some workers are committed to building relationships over a long period of time. Many youth workers do not represent statutory bodies, and although they need to be aware of legal issues, can be perceived as a less threatening form of authority in the lives and experience of young people in gangs. Therefore they are often able to discuss issues with young people in a more relaxed and candid manner. Current practice and ideas shared by participants suggest that the following roles that youth workers might adopt and which may be of significance in working with young people in gangs.

Diversionsary – engaging in activities that are legitimate and respond to the young persons need to 'let off steam',

Residential work – As one worker pointed out youth workers

have access to services and resources that are non-stigmatising and enable young people involved in gang culture to experience leisure and educational opportunities that are a brief escape which could allow a fresh perspective. For example, a time away from a housing estate on a residential.

Preventative and educational work - Working with those young people who are thinking about gang membership in terms of raising awareness about the associated risks and dangers and seeking to reduce harm.

Youth workers (some who may have been involved in gang culture) can offer support as a mentor; significant adult; a more objective sounding board to discuss consequences and options. Of course this does raise questions about safety, risk and a number of procedural questions about how workers engage with gangs. However, it is important to note the potential that this kind of relationship has in informing, educating and supporting young people in gangs.

Relationships – several of the respondents underlined the importance of forming non-judgemental relationships with young people in gangs. Whilst acknowledging a number of issues and risks that this can raise the main emphasis of responses were that young people in gangs, who do sometimes engage in unacceptable behaviours and can be dangerous, are also often misrepresented.

A cycle of stereotyping and labelling can aggravate problems for the young people and wider society. One respondent said that things like friendship, acceptance and love could redress the balance of life and create a better purpose for life for gang members. Whilst not wanting to understate the grief and pain that gangs can cause to others many of the workers wanted to emphasise the damaged sense of self worth that gang members can have about themselves and underlined the importance of responding to their need for an inner sense of worth.

It is important not to underestimate the power of providing a "listening ear and a safe place to be" as one worker expressed it. To young people who may have had traumatic relationships with adults as they have grown up and who now face the seemingly endless barrage of hostile adults who seek to control their behaviour a trusting relationship with a youth worker might be a real point of development and positive change.

Mediation – In recognising that gangs can be misunderstood and are subjected to a number of stereotypical attitudes a youth worker may be well placed to enable understanding



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between differing groups in a community or wider society. This kind of mediation may be between adults and young people, professionals and community groups or indeed between differing groups of young people. A concern in this area is the danger that a worker could be in and should seek a professional agency before engaging in gang mediation.

(Used with permission from Dave Wiles 'Youthwork Approaches to Gang Culture', Frontier Youth Trust, November 2003)

What to do if there is a crisis

Following the tragedy where two young lives were lost in January 2003, the media frenzy was focused on the storyboard-like detail of the shooting and cameras were fixed waiting for interviews of the parents. Behind the scenes young people had sought refuge at an Aston youth project where they would have met, spoke to or even been close friends of the girls. They were in mourning; they were crying, they were angry, some bent on revenge, many confused – why had this happened?

Similar scenes occurred when Danielle Beccan was shot in Nottingham later on that year.

For many youth workers this is a nightmare but what if there were to be a major incident involving the young people you work with, what could you do. Below is some advice drawn from a Youth Work Magazine article.

- Make space for young people to talk. Young people need to be able to process what is going on around them and to do that with adults who care about them and can help them to get a good perspective on it. They may not want to talk straight away so ask them how they are doing every so often in private conversations. Let them know it is okay to talk about what happened weeks, and even months after the event.
- Know who else is involved in supporting young people. There may be a whole network of people available to help young people through the crisis that has happened – teachers, counsellors, other youth workers as well as parents. Find out who else is around and



what their role is. Look out for young people who may fall through the gaps in this support.

- Beware of the rumour mill Make sure that you are not spreading rumours through what you say and take what you hear with a pinch of salt. Be aware of where you stand if a young person discloses information about what has happened: talk to your colleagues or employer about what you are expected to do in this situation.
- Don't think 'it could never happen here' You may live in an area that is deemed as safe but be aware that tragic events can happen anywhere
- Make space for young people to pray Even young people who are not Christians may appreciate the opportunity to pray or know that prayer is happening. Provide experiences for young people in assemblies or in youth group sessions by making a quiet space available where they can sit and think, or by creating books of remembrance they can sign or by creating simple rituals that they can take part in.
- Make the most of greater openness after a major incident Encourage your church or agency to get on board with any action that takes place after an incident. Following the New Year shootings an event called 'Enough is enough' took place at Aston Villa Football Stadium. This was organised by the young people at Aston Community Youth Project but involved the community, the council, the church and the police. It helped to build unity between the different groups and demonstrated solidarity.
- Get support for yourself be aware of how the incident is affecting you personally especially if you knew the people involved. Make sure that there is someone that you can talk or pray with, particularly if you are involved in supporting and caring for other young people though the aftermath.

(Used with permission from Youth Work Magazine, April 2005)