

## **APCM Report Oct 2020: Youth and Children's oversight group**

This has been a very different and challenging 18 months in the life of the youth and children's ministry. Before reporting on what we have been able to offer during lockdown and this new season we find ourselves in, it would be foolish to ignore all the exciting youth and children's work which was happening between April 2019 and March 2020.

Our JAM and Footfinder children and young people continued to grow in confidence and in their relationships with each other and with the Lord. We continued to have a great relationship with our community including regular work in schools, uniformed group visits to church and our youth club continued to prove popular. The six Guiding groups and our Boys Brigade Company continued to provide a fun and varied programme throughout 2019 and into 2020.

Lynne also continued to assist the Diocese with their safeguarding training and was part of the National C of E Youth and Children's Development group as well as informally mentoring some local youth and children's workers.

One of the real highlights of this period was being able to use a Diocesan grant to train up some young people and volunteers in the area of youth mental health – they each gained a recognised qualification in Youth Mental Health First Aid from MHFA England. We helped support several of those young people as they went on to organise and run a day for their peers based on what they had learned.

### **Youth and Children's Ministry in lockdown and this new season:**

Youth and children's ministry in this season has certainly been a challenge but our heart was to provide what we could with the resources we had available.

One of our key focuses, particularly in the early stages of lockdown was mental health and well-being – how could we help our children and young people navigate this time relatively in one piece. In practice this took the form of online sessions with games and bible studies for our footfinders. We weren't able to resource an online regular session for our JAM children so looked to provide some activities through the online services and we sent encouraging postcards to them. Also many of the JAM group engaged with holiday club (see below). In addition, a lot of pastoral work happened through welfare/encouraging text messages to our youth club members and church young people. We were acutely aware of the drain that home schooling was having on our families so tried to shy away from yet more online video calling/content where possible.

As it became clear that restrictions on meeting were not to be a short-term situation, we added in a monthly games session via video calling software for JAM so they could at least see each other on screen if not in person.

Boys Brigade, some Guiding groups and Royal Air Force Air Cadets all moved to an online format also. Lynne was able to lead to Chaplain's sessions for the cadets and lead two mental health seminars for the youth stream of New Wine during this time.

Holiday Club at Christ Church has been a key feature for decades but rather than just do nothing this year we were able to put together a pack of activities based on the story of creation from Genesis which provided activities for the whole summer holiday. The packs included a reflection each week with a series of 3 challenges which encouraged fun and healthy habits, as well as spiritual development. This was supplemented with a weekly online games session. This pack was sent automatically to our JAM children and offered to previous attendees of Holiday Club with several opting to join us.

One of Lynne's favourite projects in this time has been our "Back to School" keyfobs. Just under 100 keyfobs were made by a small army of volunteers and delivered with a card to children and young people to remind them they are loved, that God goes into school with them and that we are praying for them.

Whether in person or online, the youth and children's work at Christ Church is overall of a good standard and the children and young people feel happy, safe and loved. We also adhere to recommended safeguarding practice and ensure our volunteers are well trained and vigilant in this matter.

Moving forward, we are looking to reopen our youth club (subject to the frequently changing guidance) in November and we are going to run a monthly JAM session starting mid October. We are in contact with the schools although regular work is unlikely until after Christmas. The tough decision has been made to close 17<sup>th</sup> West Kent Boys

Brigade Company and Lynne will also be finishing her Chaplaincy role with the Royal Air Force Air Cadets at the end of October – these decisions haven't been made lightly and carry a level of sadness with them but they were not made as a result of the pandemic.

Whilst this season presents significant challenges to how we work with our church and community it also allows space for creativity and opportunities to trial things which is both daunting and exciting so please pray for wisdom, energy and creativity.

As ever, a huge thank you is owed to all who have been involved with the youth and children's ministry over the past eighteen months. Thank you for all that you bring to the children and young people that you steadfastly serve.