



London Baptist Association Guide



becoming a volunteer youth leader

Introduction

Welcome to the LBA's guide to becoming a volunteer youth leader! This guide is intended for anyone who is thinking of, just become, or has been for a while, a volunteer youth leader in one of London's Baptist Churches.

Volunteers are the backbone of youthwork in this country. Over the years God has used countless numbers of people like **YOU** to make a difference in the lives of teenagers.

This guide is only a simple introduction – but hopefully will point you in the right direction and provide you with information as to where to go should you need further guidance.

What is youthwork?

This may seem like a stupid question! But foundations are important. Why are we about to do what we are about to do? Why do churches work with young people?

Many organisations – Christian and statutory have sought to define youthwork. Essentially it is about working *with* people who are in that part of life we call youth – a period often defined as one of transition. The National Youth Agency defines it this way:

“The purpose of youthwork is to facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social development and enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society”

For Christians the heart of that process is the belief that God loves young people and wants them to be who they were created to be – in relationship with him through Jesus. Therefore, youthwork is also about supporting young people's spiritual growth and providing a place where they can weigh for themselves the claims of the Bible.

One biblical mandate for youthwork could be Psalm 145:

“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts, they will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty”
Psalm 145v3-4

Ⓟ To ponder:

- What would you say youthwork is?
- Why is your church doing youthwork?
- Why are you/ do you want to be involved in youthwork?

Before you start (1)

There are some things that should happen before you start working with young people:

- Your church should have a *Child Protection policy* – if they do you must try and get a copy and read it through
- You may have to provide references and sign a declaration regarding any criminal convictions
- You should be asked to sign a form agreeing to a “police check” or “CRB Check”

These things are an essential part of a churches responsibility in ensuring that work with children and young people is carried out in a manner which is safe for both children and workers.

Issues covered by a child protection policy should include what to do if abuse is discovered, and guidelines for ensuring workers and young people are not put in vulnerable situations.

The Baptist Union publishes *Safe to Grow* which outlines these areas.

Before you start (2)

There are other things worth finding out before you start such as:

- Who are you working with?
- Who oversees the work?
- What is the vision and strategy for your churches youthwork?
- What support will you get?
- Is there a youthwork budget and who manages it?
- How long are you committed to doing this for?
- What level of commitment is expected?

Obviously these issues vary from church to church!

There are, sadly, enough stories of people volunteering to “help with the youthwork” and getting dumped running it for 20 years to make these questions worth asking!



The Ideal youthworker!

Ⓟ Take a minute to think about what characteristics you would describe the ideal youthworker as having.

How do you measure up?

You may be the ideal youthworker!!!
But then again...

Youthwork is primarily built on relationships. As such the key to being the best you can is to forget the ideal and be yourself!

You have a unique set of gifts and abilities! To be a good youthworker you do not need to be either young or trendy! You just need to be willing to be used by God, to listen and to care.

As an American youthworker once said “leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand”¹.

Who you are matters more than what you do. While the programme you put on is important (be it a club, cell or a Sunday group) and needs to be fun and interesting, what matters more is the relationship. Young people will spot if you are faking it!

Technology can help build relationships – e-mail, text or instant messaging (MSN is a favourite) can be used to good advantage! You could even have a *virtual* meeting!

Young people and their world

There is much that could (and has) been written about young people and their world! Youth cultures are ever changing and evolving.

The best way to find out is by talking to young people. But there are some good resources around (see *Resources*).

Perhaps the main thing is to remember that unless you are a peer leader the experience of young people today is not likely to be the same as when you were young. While remembering your own youth can help empathy with different situations – the world has changed! Only 10 years ago e-mail, the internet and mobile phone were insignificant communications media – funny how things change! Dr Martin Hayward suggests that “teenagers lead accelerated lives on many levels”²

Adolescence is a funny old thing! Young people need space to discover faith for themselves. This is a time of change and of looking for identity. It can also be a time of experimentation. The balance of “space” and “concern” needs Godly wisdom!.

¹ John Maxwell in *Youth Ministry Handbook*, McDowell (ed), Word, 2000

² Quoted in *Your and Your Teenager: W.H. Smith Total Guide*, W.H. Smith, 2001

Getting started

How you start depends on what you are doing! Working in a youth club is very different from running a Sunday group. Planning is essential. Setting some simple goals is also worthwhile.

Resources are available for work with most ages and stages – and most situations – but the truth is that even the most “ready to use” packages still need some preparation!

Essentials

Apart from the obvious preparing of the programme there are a few other essentials to consider.

Health & Safety

We need to ensure work with young people is safe. Elsewhere in this *guide* reference was made to Child Protection. Apart from that we need to ensure the venue is suitable. What are the hazards? What damage could a group of teenagers do? These issues are doubly important in an “open” youth club environment.

Security

Linked to health and safety is security: for staff, young people and equipment. Are adequate measures taken to prevent anyone wondering in to a venue where young people are? How can we best keep money, and equipment safe?

These issues apply even more when you are taking young people on a trip or in a minibus. Have all the necessary precautions been taken to ensure the safety of young people and leaders? Are you properly insured? This may sound like bureaucracy – but it is necessary.

A minimum ration of 1 adult to 10 young people should apply, and leaders of both genders should be present in a mixed gender setting if possible.

Fun!

Despite all the above, youthwork should be fun!
Being safe shouldn't take away from that.

Whatever activity – even the most serious Bible study can be fun!
Young people have a lot to contribute and love to laugh. One youth group had “having a laugh” as one of its aims.

Fun should not be had at young people's expense or by putting them down – although making a fool of yourself is acceptable!

Jesus was a humorous man – just read the gospels!³

Help!!!

³ See Douglass Adams *The prostitute in the family tree*, Westminster John Knox, 1997

Where can you get help and support?

Pete Leveson is the London Baptist Association youthwork coordinator. He can provide training and point you in the right direction if necessary. The LBA puts on various day courses looking at different aspects of youthwork – for information check out www.lbayouth.org .

Locally other churches may have people who it could be helpful to meet and *network* with! Your LBA district may have events you can plug into.

Other agencies can also be useful, such as YFC, Oasis, Centre for Youth Ministry, Frontier Youth Trust, Hope UK, etc.! Most have websites and there are a number of links at www.lbayouth.org

The Baptist Union has a “Mission Adviser for youth and children”, Nick Lear. He may also be able to help.

The most important thing of all

If youthwork is about relationships- then the most important of all is your relationship with God. It may seem like a cliché – but much of our faith is caught not taught! As youth leaders “you are constantly communicating a message to the kids you work with”⁴.

Needless to say that prayer should be the foundation of all you do. Perhaps easier said than done with our busy lives. But without prayer all our planning, our fun and games, and our programmes, our clubs and groups will be powerless to make a difference in young people’s lives. What we are offering young people is not our ideas but the chance to meet with God and walk with him. And that needs prayer.

You are a star!

In a time where the statistics show young people are leaving churches we need people to be willing to invest in young people.

If God has called you to work with young people then go for it!

And keep on going! Be encouraged! Youthwork can be lonely and hard work. But who knows the fruit that will come out of your efforts!

We have the best news to share, and the best reason for doing youthwork – a hope to offer for this life and beyond through Jesus!



⁴ Doug Fields *Help I'm a volunteer youth worker*, Youth Specialties, 1992

Resources

Books

For a more complete set of recommended books – see Youthwork Magazine's *Youth Ministry Book Supplement* – available from Youthwork Magazine - www.youthwork.co.uk. Most of these can be obtained from local Christian book stores – or try www.amazon.co.uk. Youth Specialties publications are distributed in the UK by YFC.

Youth work theory/theology – general

(in a rough order – starting with the most accessible – in my view!)

D. Fields *Help I'm a volunteer youth worker*, Youth Specialties, 1992

P. Ward *Youth Culture and the gospel*, Marshall Pickering, 1992

McDowell & Willey (eds) *Youth Ministry Handbook*, Word, 2000

M.Green & C. Christian *Accompanying Church House*, 1999

P. Ward *Youthwork and the mission of God*, SPCK, 1997

D. Field *Purpose Driven Youth ministry* Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 1998

T. Jones *Postmodern Youth ministry* Youth Specialties/Zondervan 2001

Discipleship

L.West & P. Hopkins *The D Factor*, Monarch 2002

K. Moser *Changing the World*, Aquila Press, 2000

G. Cray *Postmodern Culture and Youth Discipleship*

Evangelism

B. McLaren *More ready than you realise*, Zondervan 2002

K. Edgecombe *Will they or won't they?*, Scripture Union, 2001

Programme resources & Ideas

Various organisations and publishers offer programme resources and ideas – for a variety of types of youth group. Here are a few ideas:

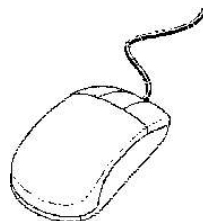
- **Youth Specialties** – from the USA – so stuff may need some work. They offer a comprehensive range of materials for teens and leaders. Available direct, from YFC or your Christian bookstore.
- **Scripture Union** – resources focusing on primarily on teaching the Bible . Phone: 01908 856000
- **Group Publishing** – also from the USA. Another wider range of stuff – including the helpful www.ministryandmedia.com, looking at taking films and videos to use in sessions
- **Churches Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS)** - Anglican based group offering a range of materials
- **Christian Focus publications** - recently started doing some youth materials
- **CPO** - printers and publisher – produce a catalogue of youth materials from a range of groups called “Sorted”. Contact direct or Pete Leveson LBA youthwork coordinator has some copies.

Other ideas:

- **Rock Solid and RS2** from YFC. Rock Solid is a club for 11-14's to attract unchurched youth. RS2 is discipleship materials for the same age range. Good stuff – but you need to subscribe so can appear costly. www.yfc.co.uk or phone 0121 550 8055
- **Youth Cells** - materials available from Cell Church UK. They run regular training and information days about youth cells - small peer led youth groups. www.cellchurch.co.uk or phone 01582 463 232
- **BMS World Mission** – produced a series of 3 resources looking at issues and giving a world perspective. Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' roll are available from the BMS resource department.
- **Other mission agencies** – Tearfund, Christian Aid, WEC, Wycliffe all have youth departments and produce some materials.

The internet is a good place for ideas! Youthwork Magazine publishes “must see” websites. www.lbayouth.org has various links.

Share ideas with other churches, make use of creative people, encourage young people to “own” the programme.



Other Resources & Information

- **Youthwork Magazine** - has been referred to already. Monthly publication with information, ideas and theory on youthwork . Also a good place to find out about camps and events.
- **Other magazines** - Sugar, J17, Mizz, Cosmo girl – all good places to find out about youth culture and the world of young people. They also have good quizzes and things to learn from and use in sessions.
- **WH Smith's Total Guide to You and Your Teenager** – aimed at parents – it's a good introduction to the world of young people.

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