

# developing a youth strategy

One of the keys to being effective in our work with young people is to have developed a youth strategy for the local church. This will help to provide purpose, direction and a way of measuring effectiveness of what we do.

## The importance of developing a youth strategy

### Purpose

It is very easy to find ourselves with doubts about what we are doing. Are we meeting the needs of our group? Do we always do the same things? Am I making a difference? I could go on. Add to this how exhausting working with young people can be, and it is just a short step to feeling depressed and despondent with our contribution, both personally and as a church. Developing a strategy for youth ministry can be all we need to allay these feelings.

A youth strategy gives us purpose as it helps us to see what we are trying to do, why we are trying to do it and what difference it will make to us, the life of the church and God's kingdom. Knowing we are part of something significant and life-changing provides us with the energy and motivation to keep going, even when it's tough.

### Direction

A youth strategy tells everyone (the church, the leaders, the young people, their parents) what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to try and do it. This instils confidence and can relieve fear in what we might be

trying to do. Imagine getting into a car with a friend at the start of a long journey. What would you rather hear them say? "Well here we go, I know roughly where we're going but I've not really any clue as to how we get there!" or "Belt up, I've punched in the destination to my satnav and we'll be there in 3 hours". The former may be fun but who knows where we might end up whereas the latter will get us to where we want to be so we can sit back, relax and enjoy the journey. The same should be for all we do in our youth ministry. It should be enjoyable and should instil confidence. Of course there will be issues and problems that arise from time to time and these can be difficult, just like diversions and adverse weather conditions can

affect our journey, but we know where we're going and what we're trying to achieve.

### Measuring effectiveness

If a youth strategy provides us with purpose and direction, then a natural outworking of this is how it also provides a means of measuring our effectiveness. To put it another way, is the direction we're currently going the same as the direction we're supposed to be heading? It's not supposed to be a way of measuring success, after all that is very hard to do in a ministry setting and it is God who decides what to bless and be fruitful, but we can make sure that we are doing all we can to be heading in the direction that we believe God is calling us.



We know where we're going and what we're trying to achieve

A good youth strategy (and any church strategy for that matter) should not only tell us where we're heading but also the possible journey we might take to get there.

A word of warning here. There is a danger of developing such a rigid strategy that there is no room on the journey to change anything. This can be harmful, as God may want us to do some things in different ways or even something new along the way. To use an analogy, rather than being like a bus ride with the destination proudly named on the front and a pre-arranged route and regular stops, we need to think of our strategy to be more like a yacht. The crew know their destination but how they get there depends very much on the weather and sea conditions and sailing where the wind is strong. In the same way we need to know where we're headed but leave plenty of room for the wind of God to guide us along the way.

### What are the ingredients for an effective strategy?

#### Clear vision of the future

A good strategy will paint a clear picture of what the perceived future might look like. It leaves no one in any doubt as to what the hope for the future looks like. It will also show clearly how we hope to see that vision become a reality, what the practical steps might look like.

#### Inspirational

It will inspire people to get involved. An effective strategy should excite people, be something that inspires their spirit and gives people a sense that this is what God is calling them to be a part of.

#### Challenging

A good vision and strategy should challenge people enough to make them feel uncomfortable as inevitably for a strategy to be effective change must happen and this is usually uncomfortable. But it must instil enough confidence for people to believe that these



Leave room for the wind of God to guide us

challenges are worth overcoming and indeed possible.

#### Motivating

A strategy is only useful if it motivates people to get involved. Otherwise it does nothing useful, in fact it may do the opposite and demotivate people as they get a sense of what could be but realise that they are not moving towards that vision.

An effective youth strategy must motivate people to want to see new things happen, to see change occur and to want to do all they can to help that vision become a



A good strategy will paint a clear picture

reality.

#### Owned by everyone

The final ingredient is vital and the effectiveness of the strategy will be directly related to this. The more people who own the strategy, the more effective it will be. Youth ministry is not some little wing of church life which doesn't effect any other part. It is a core part of the body of Christ in the local setting. Therefore the youth strategy needs to be owned by not just the youth minister and youth leaders, but also the church leaders, the congregation not to mention the young people themselves and their parents.

The way in which we develop the strategy will be vital in how we enable all these different groups to take ownership of it.

#### Worth taking the time to develop

An effective youth strategy can transform a church's ministry to young people and is a vital contribution to the life of the local church. It is worth spending time thinking about how you might go about creating this strategy, who might be involved in steering it and how everyone can contribute. It is also worth spending some time thinking through how you will review the strategy and how frequently.