



The
United
Reformed
Church



They've asked me to be a
**youth work
volunteer**

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Introduction

'I've often known people to shy away from becoming a youth work volunteer because they feel they're "not young, cool, agile, [insert other relevant adjective here] enough." This saddens me. Let me assure you this is not what young people are searching for in a youth leader. In my experience what young people want and value are genuine and meaningful relationships which demonstrate consistency, commitment and care. Young people bring so much joy and life to our churches; they are a gift. Our ministry with them is hugely significant – at its best it not only enriches the lives of our young people, and the wider Church, but it can also be a blessing in our own lives.

Megan Tillbrook

Children & Young People Development Practitioner, URC Yorkshire Synod

'The Lord replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you.'"

(Jeremiah 1:7; New Living Translation)

This booklet has been primarily written for those who have been asked to consider becoming a youth work volunteer in their local United Reformed church; it aims to give an overview of the role's scope and core responsibilities as well as the necessary skills and abilities of post holders.

The information herein applies equally to all youth work volunteers, including those working with Pilots and the uniformed organisations such as Guides, Scouts, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade – but these latter groups will provide their volunteers with specific training and guidance.

Defining the age range

For the purposes of this booklet, young people are defined as being aged between 11 (in the first year of secondary school) and 25 years old.

The United Reformed Church is unique in that it extends its youth offer beyond 18 years, up to and including 25 years of age. If churches do include young people between the ages of 18-25 years, it is good practice that separate and distinct support and ministry is offered to this group from that which is offered to both the under 18s and the 'adult' (26 +) congregation of the church.

Where numbers of both children/young people and workers allow, most churches will divide young people up further into more manageable groups: 11-14 years, 15-18 years and 18-25 years. It is worth noting that's is becoming more common to run a single youth group for young people aged 11-18 years and, in these instances, it is crucially important to be aware of the different needs and development stages of each age group – and to run some separate activities even where the group is meeting in a shared physical space.



What do youth work volunteers do?

As already made clear, youth work is a blessing in both the life of the young person and the life of the volunteer. It is a privilege to be invited by a young person to journey alongside them, to spend time together, to learn from each other and to share with each another.

The tasks you'll be expected to do will largely depend on the type of youth work that your church offers. For example, if you've been asked to help with the Sunday junior church then the type of work you'll be doing will be very different from that of a team of detached youth workers engaging with local young people on a Friday evening. Do talk to the youth work lead in your church for detailed information on the tasks involved in the work you've been approached about.

Nevertheless, despite these differences in local situations, there are general tasks common to all youth work activities and projects. These tasks include:

- Ensuring all equipment is clean, safe and suitable for use
- Setting up space and equipment before the session and tidying away again at the end
- Supervising and monitoring the safety of the young people in the group
- Confidently communicating to parents/carers
- Talking and sharing appropriately with young people while always maintaining appropriate and clear boundaries. The youth and youth volunteer relationship is a special one, however it is not a friendship and there are guidelines of conduct to adhere to
- Leading (or supporting) activities which promote the emotional, social, spiritual and/or physical development of young people.

In addition, we are called to be witnesses to our faith and to share the love of God with others. This includes demonstrating in our own conduct and encouraging in others Christian values including kindness, generosity, patience, compassion and fairness in all that we do.

We strongly recommend reading the relevant youth work volunteer pack for the role you are considering – either **youth work volunteer leader** or

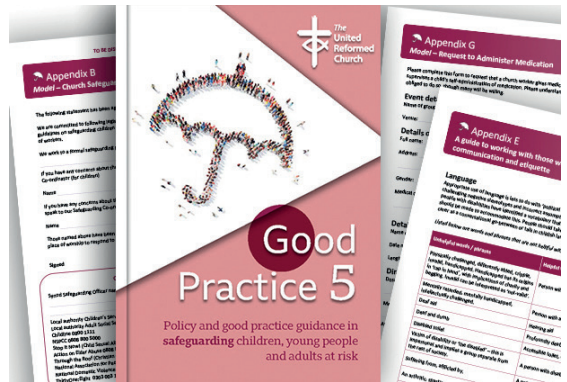
youth work volunteer helper. Both packs contain a role descriptor, an application form and volunteer agreement. Obviously, they're not specific to your church and church projects but they will provide a really good starting point for you.



Safeguarding responsibilities

Youth work volunteers have a duty of care to protect young people in any activity or event within the church or other church-led activities; you will need to have (or commit to gaining) a good working knowledge of relevant child protection procedures. In particular it is important that you're aware of how to recognise abuse and what to do if you are concerned about a young person, or come across any disclosure of abuse or neglect. Familiarise yourself with the relevant sections of **Good Practice 5**; the URC's handbook on safeguarding policy and procedures.

Do speak to your church safeguarding coordinator if you have any questions about this document. You will be required to attend basic and intermediate safeguarding training – and to renew it – every three years. Your local church and synod will arrange this for you.



If you volunteer with Scouts, Guides, Boys' or Girls' Brigade (or other similar group) you will have to attend that organisation's safeguarding training unless a different arrangement has been agreed between the church and the partnered organisation.

More general safeguarding issues include:

- Ensuring that the programmes you're running are appropriate to the ages and stages of the young people
- Making sure the activities and the space are risk assessed and meet current health and safety guidance.

There are two specific safeguarding concerns to be aware of in youth work; lone working and confidentiality.

The matter of confidentiality is of particular importance when considering working safely with young people. You are not in a position to promise confidentiality to a young person – the safety of the child is paramount. In this context if you believe that a child is at risk of harm from themselves or from another person, or that the young person is at risk of causing harm to another person, you are legally bound to share this information. Other matters shared by a young person should be treated with respect and appropriate confidentiality, and not shared without permission.

Lone working can also become an issue in youth work. No youth work volunteer should ever be asked to look after a group on their own. If you are asked to do this speak with a responsible person in your church; preferably the Children's and Youth Work Elder. However, you may find that young people value one-to-one conversations with you. This is common in youth work and as long as safety measures are put in place (for example, you and the young person must be visible to other workers at all times during a one-to-one private conversation) there are no reasons why this cannot go ahead.

As a youth work volunteer involved in regulated activities with children, you will be required to agree to, and sign, the URC's **Code of Conduct for working with children or young people**, attend mandatory safeguarding training and undertake a free of charge Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (England and Wales) or, if you are in Scotland, be registered with the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme to have a check. The DBS/PVG verifier in your church will be in contact with you once you have agreed to become a youth work volunteer; you will not be able to start working with the children until you completed your safeguarding training at the appropriate



level and your DBS or PVG check has been received and reviewed by the church. As part of your safer recruitment process, you will also need to provide two referees.

Expected skills and characteristics

Youth work does require a certain level of awareness and specialist knowledge but it also requires some desirable God-given innate qualities – such as empathy – which are equally as valuable as specialist training and qualifications in building relationships and developing an effective ministry with young people.

If you've been given this booklet to read it's because someone believes that you possess these God-given gifts and qualities! Remember that training and resources are always available from your local synod CYDO+ (the term for the Children and Youth Work specialist on each of the synod staff teams, see below for more information) their staff teams so you can also learn/improve specific skills once in role – see the preparation and development section for further information.

Key skills include:

- Communication skills – not only in communicating with the young people, but being able to talk with parents and other professionals (if required) about the young people in your care. This includes both sharing information clearly and listening attentively
- Decision-making skills – good judgment when responding to emergencies or difficult situations
- Interpersonal skills – you need to work well within a team and be able to develop good relationships
- A working understanding of the social and emotional development of young people – this is knowledge that all group leaders must possess and is extremely useful, but not essential, for other volunteers
- Empowering skills – supporting young people in developing their skills and knowledge, in taking on responsibility and making decisions themselves, encouraging them to try new things and put their ideas into action
- Adaptive – you may have to change an activity, your approach or even the whole session at a moment's notice to deal with an unforeseen complication
- Stability – young people value a reliable and continuous presence in their lives.

If you have not already done so, we strongly recommend reading the relevant information pack for either the **youth work volunteer helper** role or the **youth work volunteer leader** role.

What's the time commitment?

In terms of the length of service it is good practice for churches to be clear that these roles are undertaken for a specific period of time and then reviewed. (If this is not the system that operates in your church you might like to suggest it.) It's also sensible to set a probationary period – perhaps of three months – for all youth work volunteers. This provides an opportunity for both parties to try out the role and see if it works for you, the volunteer, and the group.



The ongoing weekly time commitment will obviously vary depending on the role taken on and how much team planning and preparation work is required for the group and not forgetting that volunteers will also be expected to set up and tidy up after groups. Talk to existing group volunteers or the leader to get a better idea of the weekly time commitment.

It is also worth noting that working with young people is a form of ministry and can take its toll on volunteers emotionally. Therefore, adequate time for pastoral care, team debriefs and sharing of experiences should be in place – have a chat with the leader or another volunteer to find out what support is available.

What preparation and development will I receive?

All synods have a Children and Youth Work specialist on their staff teams (collectively referred to as a CYDO+) and in this booklet CYDO+ is shorthand for the synod specialist.

Your synod's CYDO+ is a core resource and can provide training for all youth workers so talk to them as soon as you can. They will run training workshops, arrange your safeguarding training with the synod safeguarding officer, may provide bespoke training and will also be able to guide you towards other recommended training/training providers, possibly including your local authority. They may also be able to help with funding for some courses.

Other resources

Below is a list of recommended resource to help and equip you to work effectively with young people. Please contact your CYDO+ for information on more specialist subjects such as dealing with challenging behaviour, detached youth work and mental health issues and young people.'

- The URC's **children and youth work webpages** – include plenty of resources which are downloadable with ideas, books and activities as well as pertinent information for the age groups.
- *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus* by Mark Yackonelli
- *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love your Church* by Brad Griffin, Jake Mulder & Kara E Powell
- *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* by Andrew Root
- *Youth Work from Scratch: How to Launch or Revitalise a Church Youth Ministry* by Martin Saunders
- *What Every Volunteer Youth Worker Should Know* by Danny Brierley
- *Every Youth Leader's Emergency Guide Book* by Neil O'Boyle
- **Youthscape**: A Christian charitable organisation based in Luton which has grown into a nationally recognised resource for young people and those working with young people across the UK. Youthscape carry out insightful research, offer training and provide resources for effective ministry
- **Premier Youth & Children's Work online resources**: Premier Children's & Youth Work is the UK's leading magazine for Christian youth and children's workers and volunteers. The resources page offers downloadable session plans, discussion starters and games for working with young people
- **REBOOT**: Reboot encourages young people to ask the difficult questions about God and the Christian faith. Resources are available to download and share

- **National Youth Agency** (NYA): The NYA is the official body of the local government, local authorities and third sector organisations for advising and supporting the development of youth work programmes and policies for young people.

A service of commissioning or dedication

Many churches offer a service of dedication or commissioning for their youth work volunteers. A **sample service** is available.

The last word

Please do not be overly daunted by the content of these pages! Saying 'yes' to becoming a youth work volunteer in your church will almost certainly become an enjoyable part of your ministry and a real blessing to many. Of course, there will be challenges, but remember, someone in your church has



seen in you the qualities and characteristics that are needed to be an effective youth work volunteer and role model. It's unlikely that you'll arrive at the first session as a fully formed and completely fabulous youth worker but no one ever does! If you are interested and thinking of saying yes, there are plenty of people, training opportunities and resources – both printed and online – to help you become one!



This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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