

They've asked me to be a youth work volunteer

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

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 6](#); 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 Tf ()Tj /Tular imTJ T*1g can a

Key skills include:



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.

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
- **Youth Work in private dwellings** – guidance from Churches Together in England (CTE).

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