

Training in schools' work

Young people spend a huge amount of time at school. How can we better support them while they're there? And what can we do to help schools?

As head of further education for the Institute of Children Youth and Mission (CYM), training is something of a speciality of mine, and particularly on-the-job training leading to a professional qualification kind of training. I started out running a qualification in schools' work. It was a great course, if a little niche in its reach.

For many of you reading this, schools' work is just part of what you do. It's one piece of the puzzle that is youth and children's ministry. Personally I feel it's possibly the most crucial piece of the puzzle, one that is actually often missed altogether, but then you'd expect that kind of opinion from someone who writes for these pages! Anyway, the schools' work qualification is pretty rare, and if you were one of the 100 or so people to gain it you can wear it like a badge of honour.

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It's crucial that we don't lose our thirst for more training

Latterly, I have taken over the running of youth work practice and children's ministry courses, as well as a more general qualification aimed at young people on the fringes of mainstream education. It has been a challenging time, not only for CYM but also for further education courses across the board. CYM is the only organisation to offer a faith-based course that is accredited by a secular awarding organisation and yet its enrolment rates across the country are rather hit and miss. The bigger truth is this: no matter how passionate I may be about training, the landscape is changing, with fewer numbers enrolling than ever before.

Perhaps there are fewer youth, children's and families' workers employed now. Perhaps those who are looking for training – whether paid or voluntary – are looking for something specific that can be completed in short bursts without the additional written work that goes along with the formal qualifications offered by training institutes like CYM. Whatever the reasons, and I'd imagine there are many, it's crucial that we don't lose our thirst for more training.

There is plenty of research that points to gathering together with people who share the same passion as us to learn as being essential to maintaining good mental health, not to mention the benefits to the children and young people in our care. In addition, it's important to keep ourselves up to date with changes in policy and practices that impact our work. Very few of us who work with children and young people would say that our work would not be improved by understanding more about how children develop or why an adolescent does the things he or she does. In this, you have a solid rationale for seeking out training that develops your understanding and challenges you to make changes to your working practices that have the potential to bring huge benefits to you and your charges.

Having established that training is essential to our work, the next question is: what training is available? When I asked a bunch of friends and contacts on social media about this I received a variety of answers, many of which were not specifically faith-based but had been useful nonetheless.



Emotional literacy support assistant training

ELSA Support provides access to resources, training and other support for those who work with children in schools. The ELSA post is often held by someone employed by the school, but others can access the training and materials from this site, as well as others like it. elsa-support.co.uk

Lego therapy

This was the one that really caught my interest. Building Skills uses building with Lego to support social skills, particularly for autistic children who might otherwise struggle in their social development. There is formal training available, which you can access through the Building Skills website, or you can do some reading around the subject and train yourself. building-skills.org

Thrive training

Broadly, Thrive is a whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable children while encouraging them to develop resilience and other skills needed to access the curriculum. Lots of schools have adopted Thrive and opted to put all their staff through the training. It might be something you can sit in on if your school plans to introduce it. thriveapproach.com

Denomination-based training

Many Church of England dioceses, for example Chelmsford and Chichester, hold training sessions for youth and children's workers on the subject of schools' work. For more information about what's on offer from the Church of England and other denominations, contact your area support team.

National providers

For national youth and children's ministry training providers, the best place to look is the Christian Youth Work Training website. This site is dedicated to gathering all the training options available across the UK in the area of children's and youth work (also see page 22). cywt.org.uk

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The impact of training

What difference has training made for those who go into schools? Here are a couple of stories to inspire you.

Training young people

Marco Loxley is a secondary schools' worker with Bridgebuilder Trust in Milton Keynes. The trust has been running Moving On Up to Secondary Education (MOUSE) since 1999. Each year it recruits young people to go into primary schools to help Year 6 children make the move from primary to secondary. The young people get specific training to help them deliver the sessions and know how to act as visitors to a primary school.

"We recruit young people from local churches who are in years 11, 12 or 13 to deliver a short session, which explores the changes, choices and challenges of moving up to secondary school," explains Marco. "It has been a privilege for us to empower and equip young people with the skills to relevantly share aspects of their faith and their secondary school journeys with children who are about to embark on a new adventure. Our training for the project takes place over a full day, where we gather our team of young people together and deliver coaching on a number of key skills.

"While learning the content is an important aspect of the training, we also encourage team members to grow in confidence, develop their presentation ability, understand the context of delivering within a school environment and work together to create an enthusiastic culture within every session."

One Year 13 student who recently took part reflected on what he had got out of the experience: "I wanted to get involved with MOUSE because it was a fantastic opportunity to do something completely new. I had an absolutely wonderful time! The energy and enthusiasm when delivering the talks and games was brilliant. It is a perfect opportunity to serve the community, work with schools, develop and grow as a person. For me, it greatly developed my confidence and my team-working spirit, and was an enriching experience. My personal highlights were the Q&A sessions we did with the children at the end of every talk, seeing the children fully engaged in the activities and the atmosphere within the team. Everyone was just so kind and encouraging! I will definitely want to do it again next year."

Training volunteers

Irene Hanson is part of the Open the Book team based at St Stephen's Church in Preston. She describes the training the team received before they started delivering the programme at the local primary school very positively.

"The training was really good. We were looking forward to going into school but a little bit anxious about how it would go. The training was a mix of the trainer telling us about Open the Book and watching video clips, then the trainer saying: 'Right, you've got to have a go!' She put us into teams to have a go at dramatising a story using the props she provided, and afterwards we had to critique each other.

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"As a result, we felt very confident in going ahead with doing regular assemblies in school. In addition, it helped us realise that the fun, enthusiasm and sense of sharing the story was more important than getting it absolutely right. We often think that it all has to look perfect. It doesn't. What matters more is the way the message of the story comes across.

"We had our training in February last year, then we started in our first school – the school connected to St Stephen's – in April. The church was already doing assemblies once a week, so the school was very happy to welcome Open the Book. In September we started in a second school, and now people are saying that we should do more!"

How have your training experiences helped you in your work? What recommendations would you have for someone who is just starting out in schools' work? Let us know on Facebook or Twitter @ycwmag.

A story from North Wales

What does gaining training mean for your day-to-day work with schools? Wendy Swan has been a schools' worker with Agathos Trust in North Wales for 13 years. She reflects on the different training she has accessed and how it has influenced her work across the primary and secondary schools she supports in Flintshire.

There are many differences between working with children and young people in a church or community setting and working with them in their schools. They may be the same kids you see in the park, but the rules of play are different. How you speak and the type of activities you lead may need to change to be appropriate. I believe the best way to prepare is to get some proper training. Having input from experienced workers will help you get to grips with how to create great learning opportunities that will (hopefully) inspire pupils and staff to explore the good news of Jesus further.

Starting out

When I started out in schools, I was able to undertake a great introductory training course run by Scripture Union. This taught me the essentials about how schools' work, and an invited visitor, can best support a school's aims and values. At the start of my journey, this helped me to remember that we are there to support learning, exploration and development, not to proselytise! Scripture Union currently offers 'Training in Schools' Work', both as a residential and non-residential course, which will cover everything a new worker needs to know to get started and build good practice. content.scriptureunion.org.uk/training-schools-work-course

Continuing development

The biggest growth for me as a worker occurred as a result of studying the ENABLE course through CYM and Youthscape, which earned me a level three diploma in 'Voluntary work in an educational setting'. The course covers key points about managing behaviour, understanding a school's culture, and how to plan strategically and stay on point when balancing your vision with a school's needs. If there is an opportunity to gain accreditation in areas that are relevant to your role, do take them. It gives credibility to your offers of support to schools and shows your commitment to excellence. cym.ac.uk/courses

Bereavement training

Training with Child Bereavement UK has led to some very poignant and powerful times of supporting pupils and staff. I have been able to support friendship groups as they grieve, prepare and lead memorial services in schools, and help resource staff working with bereaved children. The schools have found it invaluable to have someone that pupils already know who can spend time with grieving pupils and lead small group activities to complement their own pastoral care system. This gets right to the heart of where the Church should be in the lives of children and young people. childbereavementuk.org

Sex and relationships

It's important that we, as the Church, respond to problems affecting young people, for instance the sexualisation of children. If we want to speak into the sexual choices and pressures young people face, we need to establish that we care about their health

and wellbeing. I trained to offer the Esteem programme, now delivered by ACET UK. My local secondary schools asked me to develop 'healthy relationship' sessions using the Esteem material, while other practitioners delivered the sexual health modules. It has been a real privilege to have frank and open discussions with pupils about the emotional impact of sex and their hopes for future relationships. I went on to train with the Romance Academy (RA), which added extra insight and ideas to my sessions. The opportunity to run RA courses for young people hasn't presented itself yet, but if the right co-worker comes along I have the tools and ideas ready to get started. acet-uk.com/relationships-and-sex-education-training and youthscape.co.uk

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Open the Book

This wonderful method of telling Bible stories in primary schools within an act of collective worship is great for getting churchgoers involved in their local schools. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to take part, and the fun your team and pupils have together will catapult you to celebrity status among the kids in your community! The storyteller training equips volunteers to be confident in the material and to see how simple it can be to help a large group of children engage with God's Word. You will be well supported through the regular communications and resources available online and on the phone. Training gives storytellers an overview of good safeguarding practice as well as tips for bringing stories to life. biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book

Safeguarding

It is absolutely essential to have basic training in working safely with children and young people, and also that you take refresher courses and review your practice regularly. We must always adhere to each school's policy, so make sure you're familiar with any differences there may be to your church or organisation's procedures. Most importantly, know who to talk to if you or a team member has concerns about a child. Your first port of call should be the school's safeguarding officer rather than your organisation's officer. Schools should always have safeguarding information clearly displayed. If you don't see it when you first visit a school, just ask. Your conscientiousness will help build a good relationship of trust with the staff. I've had a few safeguarding concerns over the years and knowing the safeguarding officers has meant good, quick communication and timely support for pupils at risk. It's not something to be scared about getting dragged into; it's about working with your eyes and ears open, and in a way that won't lead to difficult situations.

WENDY SWAN

is a schools' worker with Agathos Trust in North Wales: agathos.org.uk.

Learning something



Learning something new is a cornerstone of our work with children and young people. Looking for training that will teach us a new technique or way of working to encourage our young people and children to flourish will enrich our work and thereby our lives.

To love learning is to keep ourselves young at heart and mind. To embrace change where it is needed and understand the importance of it is to be a part of God's work on this earth. It is a key paradox of our faith that God, who never changes, is always doing something new with his people and for his kingdom: making a way in the wastelands and streams in the desert is how Isaiah puts it. How can we join in with the new thing God is doing in the lives of our children and young people?

- Look critically at your current skill set. Are you missing any key skills or knowledge? Do you need to update or refresh anything in your current experience?

- What are the needs of the schools you serve? Can you access any training that would mean you could offer support in that area?

- What about the volunteers who help you in schools? Are they up to date in their training or do you need to help them refresh their knowledge and skills in any area? How can you facilitate this?

- Could you offer you own skills and knowledge in order to train others? If so, how can you make that happen?
