

Youth and children's work report 2023

Our youth and children's work has changed significantly over the past year with the departure of our full time worker, Rachel McGirr, at the end of November 2022 for an exciting new life in Malaysia where she is now working in a school.

After discussion with the Parochial Church Council, we agreed that youth and children's work continues to be a priority for the church and we felt it was right to readvertise the post, largely in its current form, as soon as possible. We did this early in 2023 but did not receive any applicants – which is a common occurrence for churches in the position of looking for youth and children's workers at the current time. After some prayer and consideration, we have decided to leave the post open for applications for the time being but also to reconsider what the possible solutions could be and whether God is calling us to a different model. Your prayers for the PCC and staff team as we work through this would be much appreciated.

Our Sunday children's work continues to focus largely on the 9.30am all age services where we aim to have a mixture of worship which everyone can participate in, and special activities taking place in church as part of the service for children – of all ages!. Huge thanks are due to Mark Davies and to Julia and David Slaney, who have been helping John with the leadership and planning of this service, especially since Rachel left, and to Jackie and David Loach, David and Hazel Wimshurst, Cathy Levis and several others who have particularly helped with planning activities for children and keeping the creative area in church stocked up and (relatively) tidy!

The growth and links with families we see through both See and Know and the monthly Messy Church services continues to be fantastic. Jessica Criddle leads both these activities and has sent the following report:

See & Know continues to meet weekly during term time. We meet in the main church and have playtime, refreshments and singing time with a Bible story. Over the past year the average attendance has grown from 24 to 43 (calculated in Feb 2023; this number will be higher now as we have been getting over 50 children most weeks in March and we had one week with 64 children). We have new families attending each week, the majority of whom come along because they were invited by a friend. The group is led by Jessica Criddle and Liz Porritt. Elaine Wontner-Smith and Cathy Levis do the very important job of providing refreshments. We have also had some help provided by students from Shipley College as part of their work experience programme.

See & Know welcomes everyone, regardless of who they are, how their week has been and what time they turn up or leave. We learn the names of children and adults, people are listened to and everyone leaves well fed and watered. We celebrate with families when they welcome new babies and every child who leaves to begin nursery or school is given a proper send-off and a Bible to remember us by.

As a team, we are so encouraged to see the group grow in the way that it has, but this does come with its challenges. We are running at capacity. The group is beginning to feel crowded and it is a struggle to get to know people in the way we would like because there are simply too many of them. This isn't putting people off, praise God, but I don't feel able to support people and build relationships as well as I would like. God is clearly moving among this group of people. I believe these families are meeting Jesus through our love and service and I want to see that continue. I also believe that if I am right with this, he will be calling other people to come and help, so that this important work can continue and many people be won for the Kingdom through this group. Please do speak to Jessica or Liz if you think God might be calling you to this wonderful opportunity to see lives changed for eternity!

I would like to thank Liz, Elaine and Cathy for all their help. I would not have been able to do it without them. I would also like to thank Jackie Loach and Jeanne Evans for being a wonderful back-ups when team members have been ill or on holiday. Katherine and Martin also do an excellent job of setting up for us, which is much appreciated.

Messy Church is now back for its second in-person year after the pandemic. The number of attendees is still fluctuating, although we are building a core group, who attend each month. We do not advertise the service widely, so most families come because they have heard about it through See & Know, however some of our regular families have brought along friends. It is loved by all who attend and everyone is blown away by the hospitality and community that they find there.

This year we have looked at spiritual disciplines, the Psalms and the story of the Bible from Garden of Eden to the garden of the new creation. Our busiest month was December's Christmas special attended by 57 people when we based the session around the Two Ways to Live gospel presentation. Every family is given a takeaway bag, with ideas of fun ways to apply what they have learnt that month. This bag also includes a written devotion for the adults, linking the theme to the gospel and to Jesus and encouraging them to choose to follow Jesus.

Messy Church is not just for families. It is for all-ages and you don't need children to attend. Everyone is welcome to come and explore a theme in a more creative way. It would be lovely to see some other members of St. Peter's come along and see what we are doing and to be encouraged by how many families are attending.

As with See & Know, the challenge is having enough people to do everything I would like to be able to do. We are currently limited in the number of crafts/activities we can run, due to a lack of volunteers and I am doing every part of the celebration (story, songs and prayers). As with See & Know, God is moving in this group. In order for this work to continue and grow, God will be calling people to come and help. If you think this could be you, please speak to me and I will happily chat with you about what you think you might be able to do/what God is calling you to. Commitment can be flexible, so please don't think you can't help because you can't make every month!

There are many people to thank: Julie Rainer and her kitchen team (the staff team), who always cook a delicious meal for us, which is appreciated by everyone who comes. Karen Baguley, Julia and David Slaney, Helen and Andrew Scott, Mark Jordan, Serena Andrews, Julie Platt each do a wonderful job of leading tables, providing refreshments and moving furniture. We are also blessed to have Layla Naidoo and Eleanor Jordan as our junior leaders, helping register people. The commitment of these volunteers is second to none and I am so grateful for all the hard work they put in to making Messy Church work.

Work with older children and teenagers continues as well, through our Risen and Youthie Groups. Julia Slaney writes: Risen is a youth group for 13-18 year olds. We meet every Sunday evening in term time, currently in the upper room. (We are temporarily moving while this room is in use over the next year, but hope to return afterwards.) Risen is a space for young people to have fun and explore faith and life with a relaxed atmosphere, usually accompanied by hot chocolate! Risen is led by volunteers Matt Kershaw, Jonathan Starley and Julia Slaney. Young people attending Risen has come in waves over the years. While the brilliant Rachel McGirr was still here, we were in touch with around 5 young people attending Risen, but since she has left numbers of young people coming regularly has gone down, though we are still in touch and hope to regrow our little group.

Youthie is more of a traditional Youth Club type group which meets in the halls on alternate Friday evenings.