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2020-21

MATT WILD'S UPDATE

CROPS DIRECTOR

This is the first newsletter that we have been able to put together since the beginning of the pandemic. For the last 12 months due to the pandemic most of our communications have been digital; creating video updates and communicating via all our social media platforms. We wanted to bring you this newsletter to share with you a little of what CROPS has been about in the last year.

Vision

This last year has been like no other in the history of CROPS. In positive and challenging ways and certainly in the many years that I have worked at CROPS (too long) it has had the most change and adaptation that I've known.

At the end of summer 2020 as we were heading into the new academic year I had a sense that the work of CROPS was needed 'Now more than ever', that our mandate had not changed, but that the need amongst young people was even greater. The young people needed the time to hear the message that we seek to share and because of the impact of the pandemic on their lives in particular they needed our support and to know that we are not giving up on them, like never before.

Therefore, the work of CROPS has adapted to continue to reach out to children and young people in and out of schools, and this publication shares some of the stories of how we have

responded to the challenges and the opportunities in which to do old things in new ways as well as starting new things.

The Team

What is clear to me is that without the team of (mostly volunteers), staff and trustees we would not have been able to create what we have done this year, and we wouldn't have been able to, for me looking back, exceed even my expectations about the continued impact that we can have in young people's lives.

The team have had to rise to the challenge of working remotely, communicating in new forums, adapting to run events in person with young people, visiting schools, with all the new COVID guidelines. This has been challenging and has required a new way of thinking and preparation, which at times was difficult to adapt to and we could've just packed it in. But instead we stood firm and did what we needed to do to make sure that the young people knew that they were not forgotten



about and that we would be there to support them in this strange time.

There is a lot of work that is unseen which goes into making all that we've done this year happen, if that be the outdoor events which we pushed to do so that the young people could regather and connect and have support during a weird year. We have been overwhelmed by messages from parents who have been so appreciative and thankful, that without the online and in person events that we offered throughout the year the young people would've easily fallen through the cracks.

"WHAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH LOCKDOWN AND CONTINUED TO DO HAS BEEN OUTSTANDING, WHERE THE YOUNG PEOPLE COULD'VE JUST FALLEN THROUGH THE GAPS, THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE KEPT GOING, PUSHED ON TO DO THINGS – RIGHT FROM THE GET GO OF LOCKDOWN REALLY MADE A DIFFERENCE."

– young person's parent

TOGETHER

BY MATT WILD & AMY CHARLTON

In February 2021 half term, CROPS put on an online 4-day youth event for our young people that included many aspects of our normal Letton Hall residential. TOGETHER 2.1 was a space created where the young people could jump on the Zoom and connect straight in with us live, with worship, challenges, and much, much more.

We brought together around 30 young people, at this point in the year the young people had been

doing online school and therefore having them jump on Zoom every day, whilst we knew this experience wasn't going to be the same as our normal residential together the young people really leaned in, they were so expectant to jump on Zoom, sometimes showing up before the leaders were even ready ;) The deep sense of community that was felt by those young people who took part even being scattered across Peterborough in their homes.

We saw God move in the young people's lives as they were able to connect in worship even through a screen. Our worship evening was a highlight for many of the young people, not physically being able to worship together but still God created an atmosphere where the young people could worship in their rooms and connect with God. It was certainly God's plan and provision for these young people over the half term.

There were times of great fun, which included activities like our pancake making evening, the big quiz, and other various activities, which all made the experience



“THE TOGETHER ONLINE WEEK WAS A REALLY FUN AND CONSTRUCTIVE EXPERIENCE IN MY JOURNEY OF FAITH. A FOUNTAIN OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR WEARIED SOULS IN A DESOLATE AND BARREN TIME.”

– Reuben Wild



TOGETHER

“TOGETHER 2.1 WAS ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF MY YEAR, DURING THE CURRENT CLIMATE IT ALLOWED ME TO RE-STRENGTHEN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD. ANOTHER HIGHLIGHT OF IT WAS BEING ABLE TO TALK WITH OTHERS ABOUT OUR JOINT LOVE AND PASSION FOR GOD.” – Kasia Tarver

that much more memorable and also was a great opportunity for the leaders to grow in relationship with the young people more.

The theme of the week “Never Alone” was something which we carried throughout the whole week. We had a sense that the young people needed a clear understanding that in these times that we are made to walk with God,

and we were designed for life in community with other people. We unpacked this “Never Alone” theme in our devotional times/ group discussions times, discussion panels where the young people were able to connect with each other and with our amazing leaders! We were also privileged to have guest speaker Matt Forsyth come and speak right into the theme of “Never Alone” on our final evening together.

As a CROPS team we were quite apprehensive about putting on an online event as it was not something we had put together before and we were unsure as to how the young people would respond. However, we were shocked at their response, how much they wanted to be involved with all elements of the programme. The sense of connecting with young people and connecting with God exceeded the young people’s expectations and also the expectations of the



leaders involved! We are so grateful to God for how he moved in the young people’s lives and the leaders throughout this week and look forward to being able to do more events with the young people in person soon.



“CROPS IS A FREE PLACE, A PLACE THAT YOU CAN EXPRESS YOURSELF WITH GOD AND THERE’S NO JUDGEMENT GIVEN. THEY GIVE YOU ALL THE SUPPORT AND HELP YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY WITH GOD.” – Dan Tarver



TOGETHER

BY NATHANAEL GRENFELL

It's been a strange and unique time to be doing youth work! Everything has had to look a little different this year, but it's been so great to be able to still run some in person events throughout the year with our amazing young people.

Last September we started a journey when we launched our first TOGETHER Outdoors monthly gathering. It was absolutely fantastic to be able to gather together with our young people outside, to have fun and worship together in a safe way. In a time of isolation and increasing loneliness, it was great to be able to provide the opportunity for fellowship and community, and to ensure that no one felt alone in that time. As part of that, we also had our TOGETHER Week over the October half term where we had a variety of different activities during the week in Peterborough and a day trip to Letton Hall. The trip to Letton was a real highlight as it was amazing to be able to be back in a place so familiar and precious to the young people and to be able to have fun, fellowship and worship together. It was really great to hear from the young people about how much they enjoyed that experience and how for some of them it's been a real lifeline that in this season of isolation they can know that they are "Never Alone".

MENTORING

BY CHRIS WILD



"I lied".

It was almost a relief for the mentor to hear those words. The student's story had never really added up. They spoke of a happy home life and good friends but with their behaviour being so erratic at school, something more must have been going on. Together they discussed whether this should be the final mentoring session. Then just as the session was about to end, in the final lesson of the school day, it all came out.

"I lied about how everything is at home", "I didn't want anyone to get into trouble, what would happen to me if I told you the truth about something? I need to know what would happen to each member of my family if told you what was happening".

The further details aren't necessary. Just this snippet of a conversation shows the importance of giving our young people time and space to talk and be heard, by someone who has no agenda other than to listen and support. On this occasion it took a few months for the young person to fully disclose what was going on in their lives and appropriate support was able to be put in place both inside and outside of school.

Covid-19 struck when our mentoring project was seeing its biggest impact in our schools. Lockdown began the week were going into our 15th school, meeting our goal of mentoring in every secondary school in Peterborough! We had more mentors than ever, new mentors starting, and the amazing team were holding 1500 sessions a year. When everything stopped, the difficult lives of our students didn't. So, we talked with schools about a way forward and decided to continue our mentoring by phone instead. It's been great to positive feedback from schools about this recently.

"I know I have said it before, but I really can't thank your mentor enough for the support he has given one of our young people over this lock down period. The lad goes into the room he has his phone calls in like a tightly wound spring and comes out like he really is at peace with life! It has made such a massive difference to him and I know his family are very grateful for the support as well".

Most schools have now welcomed us back in person to continue mentoring as nearly normal and we are still mentoring on the phone or zoom where visitors haven't been allowed in, or where mentors haven't been able to go in.

We Thank God for the open door to continue mentoring at all our schools in some way, we're doing all we can to safely support students through the increasingly difficult time they're facing.

Please do consider if you or someone you know could play a part in supporting students who are struggling at this time, this is a difficult time for lots of students returning to schools.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS



BY RACHEL JESSUP

What a year! A huge amount of resilience and flexibility has been demonstrated over the last 12 months from children and teachers alike. We've all been learning new skills and adapting to different working environments. This year I have taught many lessons from my dining room – whole series of Old Testament and New Testament storylines over various different video conferencing platforms. Sometimes there has been a group of children in a classroom on my screen (or several groups in different classrooms). Sometimes the lessons were recorded so children working from home could watch them later (apparently this did actually happen, with children choosing to join in their own time). Sometimes there was a group in a classroom, a teacher and up to 13 other children joining the live lesson from home – mainly on mute – covering my screen with tiny

icons/images as I tried to engage with and involve everyone on the meeting call. Amidst all the diverse communications, the message has remained the same, the storyline of the Bible has remained unchanged and the fun and possible interactions have continued.

Both last term and this term I have been teaching a new lesson I wrote in response to the children's question 'Who Made God?' This has been specifically for Yr3&4 pupils who study 'Creation' as a unit. My lesson looks at the kind of questions we ask, and each pupil makes a 'Mobius strip' to help them explore beginnings and endings, time and expectations and why God says He is the Alpha and the Omega. Teachers have commented on the high level of questions and thinking the children do in this lesson.

In the Autumn term Lucy and I put together some assemblies for schools to use online. In the spring term I was able to do some live-streaming Easter collective worship into classrooms. Whole school assemblies will be the last things to return.

I have been invited into a classroom again to continue a Walk Through the Bible series. Obviously, it was a very different experience: I had a lateral flow COVID test beforehand, I wore a

face mask to go into the school and took all the normal COVID precautions. I was greeted with the words 'You're the one from the screen!' There were no children dressing up or passing items round the class and I'm currently only going into one school a week, at the moment. On the other hand, we were able to have questions and miming, hand signs and funny voices, we could still imagine the room as a map and understand where the Bible stories took place and what order it all happened in and God's Big plan for the world. Much has changed but so much more has not. The teacher told me before I left how much the children were learning and enjoying the lessons, they were so excited to be back in the classroom again – and so was I.

In the last twelve months I have created resources for Barnack CE Primary, Farcet CE Primary, Newborough CE Primary, St Augustine's CE Primary, St Michaels Church School, Stilton CE Primary, Werrington Primary and whoever else has accessed our on-line assemblies. Miss Coulson from St Michael's has shared lots of interactive prayer ideas that she has used in class and sent home, so we hope to broaden the CROPS website to resource teachers with shared lesson and collective worship ideas too.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTERVIEW WITH MATT WILD

How have you found not being able to go into school to do assemblies and lunch time clubs?

Not being able to go into schools, initially there was a real fear about what it might mean for our work in the future, is this going to be a huge interruption that we might lose the young people, that they would've moved on who would normally attend our lunch time clubs.

There was a real sense that not going into schools was our new normal for a period of time and so we had to change our game plan, in terms of how we were going to connect with young people and share a message. An opportunity was presented to us that we certainly wanted to rise to the challenge.

We began to create many online assemblies which have gone out to various schools. The teachers have been so grateful to still have CROPS interacting with the students during this time. We are slowly starting to head back into schools in person with our mentoring, assemblies and our new ThirdSpace course.

What's been the challenge of online assemblies?

The challenge has been that changing to an online space rather than in school context is that the dynamics are very different, you're not in a room with people, you can't feed off their energy or make eye contact. That sense of loss of personal connection, but what you can do with the time is different.

What has been positive about online assemblies?

We aren't physically with the student's but video media is very powerful and we have not been limited in our reach and can go out to multiple schools. We have reached more students than ever before.

What are you looking forward to?

It will be great to be regularly back in schools, being able to be with young people and be present with them. To be able to provide something which they haven't had. Things we took for granted that does have an impact. The young people have been so isolated, loss of relational connection and the renewed focus on community.

ThirdSpace

What we do every week does help in their lives, in the coming years as they rebuild and learn to connect with people around them again. The interruption of how we normally work has meant that we have been able to create a 6 week journey to help young people who have been through some loss or difficult life experiences that effects them in their day to day life, looking to give them some tools to help them be able to move on and find some sense of recovery and peace from the these experiences.

We have started to pilot this in one of the secondary schools in hope that we can also take this into other schools in the future.



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