

## Update from Nick Blanch – May 2024

Dear all,

I present to you... the Relational Team!



Yes, this is the team I am leading and these wonderful people are dotted about the UK (I think Glasgow is the furthest!), it's rare that we are all together in the same room. But we managed it recently and it was brilliant to finally spend some face-to-face time with them. We had a full day together as we strategised about the future and started to put some shape to our work. Most of the team are tasked with supporting Youth for Christ centres and helping churches to engage with young people. How we build effective and intentional relationships is crucial, so it was great to break that down a bit more.

Straight after this, Youth for Christ launched their new strategy!

*"It's time for us to enter the arena on a scale like never before, to positively disrupt culture. We want to disrupt culture so that young people aren't stabbed for the contents of their backpacks, teens don't send pictures of themselves nude to paedophiles to be reimbursed with drugs, anxiety is replaced with peace and suicide is no longer an epidemic throughout schools!" Neil O Boyle, National Director.*

You can read more about [it in our magazine here](#) but here are some of the headlines. Over the next 5 years we are intending to:

- Reach and equip 10,000 churches to engage with unchurched young people.
- Empower schools to speak well of Jesus by providing 5,000 RE teachers with support and materials.
- Support 1,500 youth leaders with quality resources to connect with young people in powerful ways.

- Commission 100 'Pulse Gatherings', designed to connect at least 3 churches together to pray and engage with youth mission in their community.
- Support the 60 local Youth for Christ centres to reach more young people and thrive in their local communities.
- Launch a national Youth for Christ centre in a local community!

It's a big mission, but we really are in a youth crisis at the moment, and I fully believe we need to make big changes as we go forwards.

Big plans start with small steps, and one project I'm excited about is our Learning Community days.

In my experience, much of the church is already skilled and experienced in youth work. But with many churches no longer running youth ministry as they were in previous years, they feel less confident and more cautious. Therefore, we don't always need to provide lots of training and instruction, but reminders or encouragement that churches can do it again. Where people feel a bit rusty, we need to help grease the wheels. Learning Communities are exactly that.

A Learning Community is designed so church groups can come together to share experiences about their youth work so that they can create and implement a strategy to improve. Delivered by one of the Regional Pioneers, it relies less on clever input and training, but more on asking purposeful questions to create thinking space and the opportunity to consider what will work for them rather than imposing a one size fits all approach.



We just launched a pilot Learning Community in Norwich to see how it could work and here's one of the conversations I had;

*"We've got some young people that have started coming to our church, but we aren't providing anything for them. We weren't sure where to start because we didn't even have a team. But because of this learning community, it prompted us to act and ask for help. We've got a few people who have come forward to help. And some of them are a nice surprise because I wouldn't have expected them to volunteer for this."*

Churches commit for a year and attend three specific learning community gatherings. At each gathering, we reflect on what we're currently doing, where we want to get to, and how we're going to get there. Each time, by the end of the day, there is a tangible way forward that can be delivered, ready to reflect on next time we gather.

*"It was great to get quality time as a team to really dig down into our aims & analyse how things have been going. There were great pointers for how we can move forward & hearing from other groups was helpful too." Claire, The Way Church (discloser - this is also my church!!)*

The potential of this project is huge and so we will be touring with this in June to allow our local Youth for Christ centres to see it and consider delivering it to churches across the UK.

Meanwhile as the strategy becomes more widely known, interest enquiries are growing about how we can help churches and alongside the team, I am also meeting up with people in London, Lincoln and a few in Norfolk. I was also able to join Norwich Youth for Christ's showcase and see Gwil Davies commissioned as the new Director. He's doing a great job there and it was brilliant to catch up briefly with the Norwich team.



Almighty Father,  
Give to this your servant grace and power to fulfil his  
ministry. Make him faithful to serve, ready to teach,  
constant in advancing your gospel; and grant that, always  
having full assurances of faith, abounding in hope, and  
being rooted and grounded in love, he may continue  
strong and steadfast in your son Jesus Christ our Lord; to  
whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, belong glory and  
honour, worship and praise, now and forever. Amen.

There's so much more I could tell you about the work, but I'll leave you with this endearing photo after 24 hours of livestreamed gaming! I completed this challenge as a way of raising my support levels for Youth for Christ. I must be getting old as this was way harder than I expected! I crashed about halfway through, possibly because I hadn't eaten enough!! But thankfully lots of people encouraged me along and I got to the finish line. Phew - it's all worth it for the kingdom. 🙏



Thanks again for all your support!

Nick