

# Sunday 11th August 2024 - The Youth Net & Light For Children

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Date: 11 August 2024

Preacher: Sam, Anji, Lottie & Trish

[ 0 : 00 ] As a church, I know if you're part of things here week by week, you'll know that we feel very grateful, or I feel very grateful, particularly as Vicar, and blessed for all the financial support and the giving that comes in to enable us to do what we do as a church.

St. John's is a registered charity, and although we raise some money from things like hirers who use the building and fees for funerals and weddings and occasional grant comes in and so on. The money that we need to operate and do what we do mainly comes from us, from our giving. So a very big thank you to you and all who give so generously, as I say, to enable us to do what we do. And we shared that kind of news, I guess, once a year or so at our annual meeting, if you were here the other week. Jay, our treasurer, he gave a report on how we spend the money that comes in, and you can catch up with that online.

If you can't sleep tonight, that's a good way to get involved with that one. And as a rule, as a church, we strive to be as generous as possible, while obviously aiming to live within our means with what we feel God is calling us to do and be as a church.

[ 1 : 10 ] That's the services, the groups, the way in which we can hopefully support our local community and so on. However, each year in particular, we are committed as a church to giving away 10% of our income, an amount which last year came to about £10,000.

Money which we mainly give to a number of charities to help them a bit to do what they do. So this giving from what we receive, that's an important principle for us to live by as a church, hopefully reflecting our gratitude and our trust in God and gratitude for his generosity to us.

But also as a way for us to seek to be a blessing with what we ourselves have first been blessed.

So as a church, we generally try to give to a number of charities, whether they're local or national or international, with whom we have a connection.

So just to rattle through these quickly, but these charities currently include Parfait Project, which is known to many of us who support those affected by domestic and sexual abuse.

There's Burwood Be a Friend, again another local charity who provide help for local folks in need, as well as reducing food waste through the community store they run. There's Food Bank, who meet the food needs of those in crisis.

[ 2 : 29 ] A more recent one we've taken up is an organisation called Period Power, who provide free sanitary products and ensure that they're available across our region. There's the YouthNet, who we'll be hearing from a little bit this morning.

It's a charity working with individuals, schools and organisations in and around Stafford. There's UCB, the Stoke-based broadcasting and media charity.

And there's Light for Children, again, who we'll be hearing from in a bit, who support young people and families out in Romania. And on top of these sort of set charities, there's other ways in which we're able to support local causes and so on.

In particular, we also use some of our funds to help pay for and provide for the barbecue and the crafts that we offer to our community in the Play in the Park events. Another one of which is coming up on Monday week as well.

Now, of course, with all that we're able to do in this way, we know we're simply able to give away what ultimately comes from God anyway. But we figured it'd be good to hear a little bit this morning and in a couple of weeks' time from some of the charities who we're connected with as a church.

[ 3 : 43 ] Really to be encouraged by what they're up to and to be more informed about the ways in which we can pray for them and maybe get involved in their work as well.

Which means, as I said, we're going to hear from the YouthNet and from Light for Children today. Okay, so first up is the YouthNet. So Sam is visiting us today and Angie and Lottie as well. You might recognise these two. But Sam, Angie and Lottie, do you want to come on up? Let's give them a round of applause as they make their way forward. Because this trio here from the YouthNet, you're going to share with us some of your work, aren't you, and what you're up to. So I'll hand over to you and then we'll get together in a bit. Fantastic. Thank you so much for letting us come and share this morning. We are incredibly appreciative of your support. I hope that by the time we've had our quick ten minutes that you will be encouraged in terms of what your financial giving and your prayer support and your support for these two wonderful ladies here goes into each week.

[ 4 : 55 ] And so we're going to give you a whistle-stop tour of the YouthNet this morning. And we're going to give you a little bit of history and overview of the projects, why we do it, and how you could support us in different ways.

And if you have any sort of questions or anything else that you would like to know, then we will be in the corner after the service. So please do come and chat to us. There are going to be loads of things that we don't share today, but hopefully you will get sort of a broad overview.

So my name is Sam. I have this grand title of the director. These two ladies here know that that means absolutely nothing. That we are a team and we work together in schools and the local community and in local churches.

This is my amazing team. I just want to point out there's a team of eight of us, a quarter of which come from your church. Okay, so be encouraged because whatever you're doing here, you're clearly doing it very well.

Okay, so we have this vision to see children and young people flourishing, that we want them to engage positively with the Christian faith and with their local communities. And we are definitely an organisation that does it in a number of different ways.

[ 6 : 07 ] And that is by choice. So we're not choosing to do one particular thing. We are choosing to be in all places that children and young people might be.

And that is a deliberate focus for us. This last year, we celebrated our 20 years, which has been exciting. And I just want to give you a very brief history.

And because we have morphed and we have sort of rolled where God has led us. And it's been a very exciting journey. So we started in 2003 as a gap year student project.

And then employed somebody else after me to do some sort of inter-church work. And we worked inter-church and in schools. We restructured 2012 and I became a very reluctant director.

I didn't apply for the post because I didn't think, well, I didn't want to do it. Because it was too hard. God had other ideas. And in 2016, God really took the organisation and it's gone bonkers since.

[ 7 : 11 ] Absolutely bonkers in an amazing way. And so we have survived the COVID years. There was only seven weeks within the whole COVID time that we were not actively working in one project.

And you'll see the range of projects. And now we have definitely returned to normal. And we feel that we are in a new season. And I want to say thank you for your support because it's support like yours.

And that allows us to have confidence in the new season and to be able to go forward with that confidence that we have the support behind us to trust where God is taking us next.

Because I think the next little period is going to be one of growth and one of quite an interesting journey for us in terms of challenges. But in terms of the fruit that we see.

We're receiving a number of words at the moment, which is really encouraging. So these are our projects. And Angie is going to do you a whistle-stop tour through the projects.

[ 8 : 09 ] Do you want to click? Yeah. Strap in. Right. Okay. So we have Engage. No, we're going to Explore first.

See, that's up first. Explore is first. Explore is Ali. Now, Ali is absolutely awesome. The wealth of knowledge, thirst for knowledge, creativity and resources Ali has is insane.

She is absolutely brilliant. And she runs our primary faith-based project, delivering Christmas and Easter events, workshops, RE lessons, collective worship, prayer spaces. And as you can see, since January 2016, she's had over 30,000 engagements with primary age pupils, which is absolutely unbelievable.

She is incredible. She quite often saves us when it comes to all things technical as well. She's just ace. She also works within. We all kind of dip into each other's projects. So Ali does some work with our growth and IF project, which I'll talk about next.

So we have Engage. Now, Maddie is our Engage lead. Now, Engage is what Ali does, but with secondary schools. So the faith-based project, delivering RE lessons, workshops, conferences, sacred spaces, assemblies and debate clubs.

[ 9 : 21 ] These two faith-based roles are incredible. So to get somebody in a school to do this is really tricky. So the relationships these guys have built up with the schools around the areas is brilliant.

And doors are opening all the time. And we're getting new schools coming in, which is great. And the schools that we're in regularly keep having us back year on year on year, which is great. So one of those little facts up there, sacred spaces, on average, 85 to 90% of students say the sacred space was good and helped them engage spiritually or reflect personally.

And it's just a quiet space where they put areas out where people can reflect and maybe learn what being spiritual might be or praying or some kind of connection to help them on that kind of awareness journey around faith.

Now then, this is me up here, but this isn't me anymore. That is, but I'm not the lead for IF Project. So IF Project was something that I took the lead on from when I joined the YouthNet in 2017.

And we deliver the Prince's Trust Achieve programme into secondary schools as a GCSE option, which is fantastic.

[ 10 : 40 ] So we get handpicked at groups of around 12 young people. And depending on when those schools do their options, we get them for either two or three years. So the end of year nine, so year 10 and 11, or we get them from year nine, 10 and 11.

So we have them on a rolling year-by-year programme in the schools that we're in. We're in three main schools in Stafford, King Eddie's, Western Road and Stafford Manor.

They get three lessons a week with us. So generally a double lesson and a single every week. And we get to do tea and toast, which is quite often the way forward, or biscuits and hot chocolate, things like that. But we deliver this life skills programme essentially.

So there's modules including sports, digital skills, career planning, how to give presentations, how to just talk to people, how to make phone calls, how to write their CVs, all sorts of things.

Cooking, lots of cooking, lots of community projects. And it is a wonderful, wonderful project to be part of. Kathy is now our lead for the IF project, although I still do all the admin because I like that side of things, believe it or not.

[ 11 : 49 ] I know it might not seem like it, but I do. So, yeah. Oh, sorry. I just went past you, Sam. Okay, so this is our growth project.

Now, I am now the lead for growth project. And this is now Staffordshire-wide. So, it's our ability to go into schools and deliver the PSHE programmes on their collapsed curriculum days.

Now, one of the skills I came into the team with already having was my drug and alcohol education. Obviously, some of you know that because I've done some training here for the church as well. And that's how I first met Sam.

I delivered some drug and alcohol training for the youth net. And then within six, 12 months, I was involved. So, we go, I'm in schools all around Staffordshire.

As far as JCB Academy up in Uttoxeter, our very own Chase Terrace. This year, I covered year nine, 10, 11, 12 and 13 with their drug and alcohol education, which was brilliant to be back in the school.

[ 12 : 50 ] And you can ask Fionn and Lily, who's here, what that was like, if you like, because I did their U group, which was fun. But we also have all these other topics that we can deliver as well that we're in other schools doing.

And again, Ali, Maddie, Sam, Kathy, all of us deliver these growth days for the collapsed curriculum. So, the emotional well-being, we did a lot of that post-COVID.

We've been asked to come in and do some small targeted group work on that as well, which is brilliant. So, it's opened more doors there. Okay, next. Scott. So, Scott runs our Connect Stafford Youth part of the project.

Now, this is with other projects, isn't it, Sam? This is with the police. Who else? So, very briefly, a community-based project delivering detached work in Stafford.

And we link with schools where we identify young people who are at risk of ASB, as they're antisocial behaviour. And so, we do detached work, early intervention work in schools, like mentoring small group stuff.

[14:00] And we do community interventions too. So, yeah. So, this is something I'm going to be part of from this September as well. But it's very exciting.

And we get to see a lot of our young people out and about. And sometimes they've come and seen us and found us, ask us for stories afterwards about some of the follow-up we've been able to do with students that we've had and finished with us a few years before.

And have come back for help and support, which has been brilliant. So, Lottie. Lottie runs our Doxie in St. Paul's part of the project.

And she is as incredible and even more than she was when she was here. She is absolutely fantastic. I have run into several parents in my role in school saying, oh, the youth network. Do you know Lottie? And I'm like, yeah. Yeah, I know Lottie. She's like, oh, she's amazing. She's changed our community. And these are some of the comments we get. It is incredible. So, she runs a youth club. We've got KFC on a Sunday morning.

[15:00] Excellent. What's that? Kids for Christ. Not chicken. Okay. I didn't know that one. Doxie Kids at Doxie Hub. St. Paul's family support groups.

Collective worship. Pupil voice and worship council at St. Paul's school. So, Lottie is doing an incredible job there. The community is changing. We drove past a family that Lottie was telling me how involved they've got and how they will take on leading.

Like when they go into Llande. Now, in a few next week, one of these families is taking a coach and being the lead on that coach and is really supportive of everything Lottie does.

And it's just great that she's got those families in the community 100% on board, which is just brilliant. So, that's Lottie. And then we've got Jo. Jo is our Connect.

She's a Connect worker like Lottie. And she is a counsellor, a trained, qualified counsellor. And she's in one school on a regular basis. And she's employed by us.

[16:01] But she goes to King Eddie's in Stafford. And she is working with probably not as many as they would like her to work with because there's no room. She is just fully booked all the time.

These young people are really reaching out and really appreciate the support that Jo is able to provide in the school as a counsellor, which is fantastic. So, they're delivered in the school. She's also now bringing some of those skills into our IF project as well.

And it's been amazing to have her as part of that. Okay. Then we've got Sam who heads up our Doxy Hub. So, it's the latest project. We needed a building.

So, we're delivering family fun sessions and kids groups, a bit like Play in the Park, but on a slightly smaller scale and kind of more regularly.

And then there's going to be parents and toddler groups, which you've already started, already doing. Lottie's been running that for a while now. They partner with Doxy Church.

[17:01] And the food surplus pop-up days are put on every term, involved with the food bank. All the connections are there. And that means that we can earn some income through those bookings as well. So, Sam is kind of making sure that that building is running nicely, ticking over as best as it can.

Fantastic. Thanks, Sam. Okay. I never looked at the time, and we are going to move quick. Okay. So, why do we exist? Why do we have all those projects, and why do we do it in that way?

I guess the first reason for us is we want to demonstrate Jesus' love for us to other people. We want to bring kingdom to all the different communities that we work with.

We want to bring kingdom life into the schools community that we work with. But also, we are aware that there are massive changes for children and young people, and have been over the last, I don't know, 20, 30 years with social media.

Culture is different in our country. There's a whole range of things that mean being a teenager and a child now is very different than it was when I was a child, when we were children, and we need to be, I guess for me the sad fact is that a lot of children and young people aren't in churches, and so we need to be where they are.

[18:22] Scripture unions say that have this sort of policy of working towards the nine to five. They reckon only 5% of children and young people are in churches. So we need to be where children and young people are, and that means we need to be in schools and we need to be in local

communities, and that's why we have the range of projects that we do.

Okay. So, I'm going to go through that. For me, the whole project, a lot of the stuff that we've talked about there may not be, apart from the faith stuff, may not be very obvious in terms of its faith content.

I think that the opportunity to build relationships allows us to speak Jesus into people's lives, and if you don't have the relationships and you don't have the contact with the people, then you don't even have a start to be able to help people and counter Jesus in the ways that they will understand and they will recognise.

Okay. Lottie. So, obviously we are a charity, and we rely on generous donations. As a church, you are already supporting us, so a massive thank you to all of you.

But if you're sitting here as an individual thinking, oh, I'd like to get a bit more involved, there are three options. You can give with our 200 club. The idea of that is it's an army of givers, and we worked out that if 200 people were giving £10 a month or more, then that would go a great way to change lives.

[ 20 : 00 ] So, that's our 200 club if people want to donate individually. We also have prayer. We all know how powerful and important prayer is.

So, you can get involved by praying for the youth net for any of our projects, the children and the schools, and that can be done through prayer nets.

And then if you are, like us, committed and want to help young people and children in Stafford area, we're always looking for volunteers to help with our projects or with events that we're doing, so you can volunteer and get involved with us.

And I'm sure you can speak to any three of us, any one of us three, sorry, about that at the end of the service. Lovely. We are done. Thank you very much. I know we've gone over.

Thank you for your patience. Thank you very much. Thank you. Great stuff. Great stuff. Great to hear about youth net and all that is going on in Stafford and beyond.

[ 21 : 15 ] And I do like the sound of KFC on a Sunday morning, Lottie, so I might nick that for some. Yeah. Well done. We're going to pray for youth net in a bit, but we'll group that together with praying for life for children because Trish is going to come forward and share with us what Life for Children are about and how you're involved and how we can continue to be involved as a church.

Give it up for Trish, everyone. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. So we've been involved with Life for Children for a long time now, getting on for 20 years.

So it all started with a young lady called Helen Rowe, who some of you will know, certainly are older members of the congregation. Helen went out to Romania as part of her university course and she was horrified by what she saw.

I'm sure those of you who are older in the congregation, you remember the photographs that we saw on the screens on our televisions when we realised what was going on in that country.

It was shocking when we saw the children in their cots in the orphanages rocking and being unstimulated. I think we were all deeply shocked.

[ 22 : 31 ] And when Helen first went out, it was still pretty well like that. She went out to a place called Derska where there was an orphanage and she went into the orphanage.

Now the children were fed, obviously, but they lacked a great deal of emotional support and emotional, just anybody really interested in their lives.

They were just placed in the orphanage. And the thing to remember really is that most of these children, in fact the vast majority of these children, aren't orphans and weren't orphans.

Not in the way that we think of them as being orphans. They were orphans because the policy at the time, the political policy had been have lots of children. It's good to have lots of children.

So people in that communist regime were having lots of children, but then they couldn't look after the lots of children that they were having. So the children got placed in orphanages, particularly girls, because they weren't that useful.

[ 23 : 31 ] And they stayed in the orphanages until they were of a useful age. And then quite often when they became teenagers and they were able to help with the family, then they were taken out of the orphanage and gone back to their families, which is a shocking way for young people to grow up.

So Helen was absolutely horrified by what she saw. And she made a promise to these young people in the orphanage that she would look after them and she would support them through to

them leaving the orphanage.

In fact, what happened was the orphanages changed in 2001 with a government policy. And obviously, as you can, if you remember back, politically things were changing within Romania. And so the orphanages closed. The orphanage, the original orphanage closed, and it became the children went into state-run apartments. Now, the state-run apartments are much, much better, obviously.

The young people are looking. They are looked after. They have their own rooms. They have one carer who is with them all the time. But the same policy exists.

[ 24 : 41 ] These young people are not necessarily orphans, and many of them are not. And probably, if you want to know a little bit more about that, Mike's probably, Mike and Yvonne are the ones to talk to, because I think Mike and Yvonne and some other members of the congregation went out in those very early days when things were still very, very fragile for those young people.

So, on the screen there, Dave's just put up a little bit about the children in the state-run apartments. These children still need a lot of support.

Although they're in state-run apartments and they are fed and they are sent to school, they're not provided with any school books. They don't get medical care.

If they go to the doctor, the doctor has to be paid for, and the state doesn't provide that. It provides them with a home, but that's about the limit of what it does provide.

So, they still have to have a great deal of support, and that's where Helen has stayed involved.

Obviously, the original children have grown up now, and many of those are now in their 30s, and they've all moved away.

[ 25 : 55 ] But the state-run system is still there, and it's still very, very apparent. And for those of us who've been out, and there are a few of us here who've been out to Romania, you can see that things have improved over time, particularly those people who've been two or three times.

But there's still a great need for the young people to have the emotional support that a family would give. That's what they're lacking. They're lacking the things that families do, providing of books, providing them with toys, taking them out places.

It's that sort of thing that still is not there. Is there another slide there? So, Christmas, just left that one in just to emphasise that Helen is very involved in the church.

It is a Baptist church that she goes to, and she does work very hard to make sure that her Christian message goes through to the children at all times, really.

And that's just a little bit about what she does at Christmas. She provides all the children who are involved in the state-run apartment that she supports, they all get a Christmas present.

[ 27 : 04 ] Now, it's not the sort of presents that our young people expect. It's some fruit. It's maybe a colouring book. It's maybe some pencils. It's very simple.

But it's the sort of thing that they really, really appreciate, having something that's theirs. Maybe a new toothbrush. Maybe a new flannel. It's that sort of thing that's really, really important to them.

And Helen, because she's obviously a Christian lady and very deeply involved in the church, she makes sure that Christmas is particularly a really, really spiritual time for the children.

I think it's December the 6th, I think it is. They celebrate Christmas on St. Nicholas' Day. So it's not the same time as us, but obviously it's the same idea.

Another screen. Yes, we have, as a charity, we have supported some young people to go through university. Many young people, actually.

[ 28 : 03 ] And for many of those young people, that's almost a dream beyond imagining. Because for many of them, particularly when they were growing up in the state-run system, the idea of being able to go into higher education is just beyond their belief, really.

It doesn't cost as much as it does in this country, but we have supported many young people to go through university and to take their experiences, their skills, into the next generation.

And that's the important thing, because they're the leaders of the future. So they're the people who can help to put a stop to systems that are not working for young people. Medical support, as I've already said.

Helen has a really good arrangement with the local optician. And we provide, or we are able to provide the frames, and then the optician will put in the lenses.

So Helen will take frames to the optician, and then he puts in the lenses. So we purchase the frames quite cheaply, and then that's the way that we help with young people getting their eye

appointments, and obviously their dentistry as well, which again is something that isn't really provided in their state system.

[ 29 : 22 ] Again, just to emphasise Helen's bit, she's very keen to let us know what she does within her church. She has a church orchestra.

Helen, I think, is a recorder player initially, but she also plays other instruments. And she tries to make sure that the young people are aware of what goes on in other places.

So you can see up there that she taught them to sing God Save the King. And Helen is very much a royalist. So anything that's to do with the royal family or things going on in this country, she's always up for encouraging the young people to be involved in that.

And she has a little orchestra going on. She teaches them recorder. And these are not just young people who go to the church, but they're also young people from the state system who might be interested in finding out a little bit more about playing a musical instrument.

And Helen's there to provide that for them. And then after-school music, again, she does the same thing. She provides some after-school music in one of the local schools.

[ 30 : 34 ] And the next page. Helen was very keen. This presentation that we've got up here came from the annual report that Helen did in January.

And she was very keen to show a picture of the original orphanage and the original Derska children, to go back to showing people where it all began, really. And she said at the bottom there, she's very grateful to be in touch with many of the original children who are now in their 30s.

Okay. And there's a little thing at the end there. I mean, I think it's important that Helen has had to deal with many things that she would not have wanted to deal with over the years.

There have been many young people who have passed away. And she's had to deal with funerals. Because in some cases, the family haven't come forward. And she's found that very, very challenging.

What's not been put up there on the presentation is that many young people in Romania got HIV and AIDS. And so over the years, she's supported a big group of young people through AIDS and HIV.

[ 31 : 51 ] And many of those young people have now passed away. She's had to deal with people having children outside of marriage, which she's frowned upon.

She's had to deal with the possibility of having abortions, which are all things that Helen, as a fairly innocent and naive young lady from Chase Terrace, has found quite challenging.

But that's the reality of life out there. So again, I'll just also say, the same as YouthNet did, we are very, very grateful for the support from this church for all the years that the charity has been going, both through the tithes where the church gives us money every year, but also all our fundraising activities all take place here.

And they are all incredibly well supported by you all. So we're very, very appreciative of that and very, very grateful. So thank you for listening. Thank you. APPLAUSE