

The Parsonage Project

A Youth Centre at Dursley Tabernacle URC

The story

The Church's decision to prioritise youth and community work by appointing a paid Youth Worker led to the establishing of a Family Café in the Church Sanctuary and grew into a vision to transform some of its decaying buildings into a new Youth Centre for the town. With prayer and consultation, The Tab entered into a partnership with the local Town Council and appointed a Development Worker to oversee the project and turn its vision into reality. Now open, The Vibe is offering faith based and secular Youth Work in the town and is staffed entirely by Christian Youth Workers.

PRACTICAL

Where did the idea come from? How did it start?

The Youth Centre was a direct response to a need in the town. The existing Youth Club building was bulldozed to make way for a supermarket and the Town Council were looking for a new venue. It was also a response to a direct need of the church to find ways to develop its decaying Parsonage which was no longer fit for purpose. The timing of the Church Youth Worker appointment meant that the Church was in a position to identify the connections and act on them.

Who is it for and what needs is it meeting?

The Vibe is a hub for young people in the town. On Sundays it is used by the Church Youth Worker for social and faith related activities with our own young people, making them feel that they are a valuable part of the church community. During the week, the Town Council are now funding a Christian organisation to deliver secular Youth Work from our premises. Young people who are normally out on the streets of the town are now flocking to a safe and managed space each evening, building relationships with a team of Christian youth workers. Because the Youth Centre exists as a focal point, a network of service providers including local police, schools and youth leaders are now meeting regularly in the centre to review provision and respond to needs as they arise. The local Police and Crime Commissioner has injected funding to increase the provision, in recognition of its impact on anti-social behaviour in the community. Plans are developing to run job clubs and employment training from the centre as well as health related services targeting the specific needs of local young people.

What preparation did you do?

The church took support and legal advice from the West Midlands Synod about the initial drawing up of the Partnership Agreement with the Town Council. Further advice was then taken about the establishment of a Licence for the Town Council to use the building, and to support the formation of a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation with Town Councillors and Church Staff as the key trustees. The Partnership had to appoint an architect, go through a process of public consultation and obtain planning permission for modifications to the building which is a Grade II Listed Building in a conservation area. The project had to be put out to tender before a contractor could be appointed. Every step of this journey was supported in prayer and each part of the process was discussed with Elders and approved by the Church Meeting.

What resources did you need and how did you find them?

The building project to construct and fit out the centre, separating it from the rest of the Parsonage and managing the utilities in this part of the site, cost approximately £400K. About £100K came from the Church and £300K from the Town Council. The costs of the secular service provision are now being met by the Town Council. The church now funds its own Youth Worker. The centre now operates as a charitable organisation with ongoing financial support from the Church and the Town Council.

Funding was obtained from a range of sources including the West Midlands Synod of the URC, a range of local businesses and the local Police and Crime Commissioner. The church made an appeal to its congregation, dug deep into its own reserves and also obtained an 'Awards For All' grant from the National Lottery for equipment in the centre. Smaller fundraising initiatives included an account with The Giving Machine so that supporters could generate free cash for the project through their online shopping.

The Church Youth Worker was initially funded with a Synod Mission Fund grant which was match funded with money from the church. This role was central to the early success of the project, but the Church soon realised that it needed someone who could dedicate their time to the coordination and management of all the various strands. As the church took on the Youth Worker's salary, a second grant from the Synod Mission Fund, match-funded with volunteer labour rather than cash, was obtained and a Development Worker was appointed for three years to further support the project. A core team of five church staff including the Minister, the Church Secretary, the Youth Worker, the Property Elder and the Development Worker then drove the project forward with a balanced range of skills and expertise. Both the Youth Worker and the Development Worker were in paid part-time roles, but both added considerably to the project with additional volunteer hours and worked hard to protect the Minister and the rest of the Church from being driven off course by the demands of the development. Both of these roles were advertised locally but, in the end, both posts were offered to existing Church members.

Who have been your partners in this project?

The key partner has been the local Town Council. Support and guidance was also obtained from the West Midlands Synod, the organisation 'Streetspace' and a local Christian charity called 'The Door Youth Project'.

How did the congregation get on board?

The congregation supported the project every step of the way through prayer. They responded generously to financial appeals and all decisions were taken with the full support of the Church Meeting.

What were the key steps to get from idea to day 1 and how long did it take?

The project took five years from the appointment of the Youth Worker in 2010 to the opening of the Youth Centre in 2015. Key steps were: appointment of Youth Worker; development of youth/community relationships through café and work in local schools; partnership with Town Council; appointment of architect; public consultation; approval of planning permission; appointment of Development Worker; fundraising; going out to tender and appointing the construction company; managing the construction phase; putting in place new policies and

frameworks; working towards the granting of the Licence and forming the CIO; fitting out the centre; the launch; service provision.

What legislation did you have to deal with?

Legal considerations concerning the charitable status of the Church and its partnership with the Town Council, the issuing of the Licence to the Town Council and the formation of a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation all had to be dealt with. The change in use of the building meant that we had to apply for the suspension of council tax payments and exemption from business rates. Various changes to the arrangements for site utilities such as gas, electricity, water, telephone and broadband services have had to be dealt with. Insurance requirements have changed and the building had to be re-valued. Listed Buildings regulations have had to be considered at all times and often these have come in to conflict with Health and Safety requirements in public buildings and Part M Building Regulations concerning access for those with disabilities. Rules and policies governing the management of a publicly accessible computer network, the management of CCTV on the premises and the management of a maintained Fire Alarm and Panic Alarms linked up to a Police response have all had to be considered.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

What impact has this had on the life of the community?

Young people who were hanging around in supermarket car parks and being involved in anti-social behaviour in the town are now spending more of their time in a purpose-built, managed space which they feel that they have ownership of. The quality of the facility means that young people now know that they are valued by the town. There is a focal point for provision for young people in the town and consultation about how best to respond to their needs is now ongoing.

How has this changed the relationship between the church and the community?

The church has a much higher profile in the town and strong links with the Town Council. These factors are beginning to open up possibilities for further community development in the church.

IMPACT ON THE CHURCH

How does the project connect with your faith and mission?

Dursley Tab was the site of one of the very first Sunday Schools in the country, founded by William King who was a friend of Robert Raikes. The church's commitment to work with children and young people has continued for 200 years and is at the heart of the church's identity. In the church meeting where the decision to enter into this project was taken, it was agreed that the Youth Work in the town was coming home. Every step of the project was incorporated into weekly prayer meetings and reviewed in Elders' meetings and Church Meetings. It was held in prayer by many of our members. At all times throughout the project, the Church Minister has worked hard to ensure that the worshipping life of the church community has not become side-lined or distracted by the work on the project, rather it has enhanced our faith community. New families have joined the church because of the outreach of the family café and our enhanced community profile. Our faith based youth work continues to thrive and a team of our young people will be travelling to Nicaragua in July 2016 with the Peace and Hope Trust to engage in practical service and share their

faith with the poorest of communities there who eke out their living by scavenging from rubbish tips and breaking rocks for construction projects.

How has the life of the church been transformed because of this project?

The church property has upgraded its heating and wiring and installed a new Fire Alarm throughout. Its elders are more aware of their responsibilities in terms of health and safety and more conscious of appropriate standards when managing buildings which serve the community. Church members now have a much greater awareness of the wider community and have lifted their thoughts beyond their own needs and requirements. Their routines and priorities have been challenged. They have been prepared to take huge risks with their money and their property and they have had to develop tolerance and patience and a willingness to accept change. The grace of the gospel feels closer as a result.

Additional resources and weblinks

Film links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqBECrKMvnE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W935UsnUpwM&feature=youtu.be>

Church website: <http://www.dursleytab.org.uk>

Town Council website: http://www.dursleytowncouncil.gov.uk/Core/Dursley-Tc/Pages/Current_Projects_1.aspx

Dursley Vibe facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/dursleyvibe/>

Family Café link: <http://www.netmums.com/southglos/local/view/baby-toddler/parent-toddler-groups/tab-family-cafe>

Streetspace website: <http://www.streetspace.org.uk/Streetspace/Home.html>

The Door Youth Project website: <http://www.thedoor.org.uk/>

Awards for All website: <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/awards-for-all-england>

The Giving Machine website: <https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/>

Peace and Hope Trust website: <http://www.peaceandhope.org.uk/welcome.htm>

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