

# Bristol Methodist District Youth and Children's Work Review

May 2026



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*Müllers*

# Summary of Findings

## Bristol Methodist District Youth and Children's Work Review



### Aims of the review

This is a scoping review of the work that is currently happening across the District specifically among those who are under 18 years old. It will identify areas of strength and good practice that would benefit from further support, identify any areas where there are realistic opportunities for new work and the areas where there is little or no opportunity for development. The aim of the review is to facilitate the development of a District vision that leads to a strategy that will be implemented over a 3- 5 year period.

### Method

As part of this review there has been:

- 11 key stake holders interviewed from the District (ministers, superintendents, lay workers, volunteers)
- All church websites within the District have been looked at to ascertain their invitation to families
- A questionnaire sent out to every minister in the District, with 38 respondents
- 4 site visits carried out, interviewing young people and meeting with key volunteers and paid staff.
- A review of the current children and youth work offering of the Connexion.

### Outcome

There is so much to be celebrated within the District. Many paid staff and volunteers are giving of time and resources weekly to support the spiritual growth of children and young people. This is often being carried out quietly and in the context of being church family. The review has highlighted 4 key areas where there are opportunities and challenges to this work and the potential for an increase of support in this area. There are also systemic challenges to be considered.

#### Being Ready

Being ready to welcome, to invite and to help families feel at home in every congregation.

#### An Authentic Children's and Youth Voice

Listening to children and young people as active members of the church family.

#### An intentional Focus on Children & Youth Ministry

Ensuring this ministry is well supported so that it has the impact it needs to have and that it isn't diluted and doesn't lose focus.

#### Network and Community

Creating an authentic sense of working in partnership for leaders and a community for young people and children within the District.

#### Systemic Issues

An awareness of the tension between Sunday and mid week worship, changes in staff and ministers, and challenges of time and resources.

### Recommendations

Following the findings of this review, there are several recommendations to be considered. Please see the full review for more information in each area.

- Naming and supporting key stakeholders at congregational, Circuit and District level with a focus on children and youth ministry
- Creating lead paid roles within the District to hold this focus.
- Recognising the good news stories that are already happening and supporting networks to develop in key areas of children and youth ministry.
- Funding opportunities for children and young people to connect, either within the Connexion or with events happening ecumenically locally and nationally.
- Holding authentic space for children and young people's voices to be heard at congregational, Circuit and District level
- Ensuring congregations feel equipped to reach out to the children and young people in the community around them in ways appropriate, accessible and sustainable for their context.

### Conclusion

The original review proposal asked two key questions:

- 1.What is our District vision for children and young people's work?
- 2.What strategy do we need to employ to turn the vision into reality?

The first can only really be answered by the the District and it's members. The people spoken to as part of this process have a shared a passion for supporting children and young people to find their own faith in a community of care, nurture and family. They are looking for connection, guidance and a sense of working together to achieve this goal.

This review highlights the importance of ensuring that any strategy does not depend on a single individual. Instead, establishing key roles (supported by long-term contracts, effective line management, and appropriate resources) could help implement a broader, more sustainable approach that intentionally prioritises children's and youth ministry across the District.



## Aims of the review

This is a scoping review of the work that is currently happening across the District specifically among those who are under 25 years old\*. It will identify areas of strength and good practice that would benefit from further support, identify any areas where there are realistic opportunities for new work and the areas where there is little or no opportunity for development. The aim of the review is to facilitate the development of a District vision that leads to a strategy that will be implemented over a 3–5 year period. (Taken from the proposal document)

\*Although the Methodist Church defines young people as those under 25. This was later amended to focus on under 18s for the purpose of this review.

## Background to the review

At the Bristol District Synod in September 2025 there was a workshop focusing on children, young people and families. The outcome of that workshop was that:

“Synod asks the District Policy Committee to: (a) explore the possibility of employing a Children, Young People and Families Officer or District Youth Enabler; (b) develop a Children, Young People and Families Strategy, and (c) report back to Synod by June 2026.”

The DPC decided in light of this draft resolution to commit to a review of the work being carried out with children and young people within the District. They commissioned Müllers (a Bristol based charity working to release children from material, relational and spiritual poverty) to undertake this scoping review. The review was to be undertaken from January 2026 – May 2026.

A proposal for the review was drafted with 9 questions to use as a starting point for consideration along with an additional 8 questions proposed by a Circuit youth enabler within the District.

## Methodology

This review is predominantly qualitative in nature however there are also some quantitative elements to it. It was agreed that there would be different strategies employed in order to obtain a broad overview of the work with children and young people within the District.

The review will therefore consist of:

- Interviews with 10 key stakeholders from across the District using the proposal questions as a basis for the conversations.
- 4 Site visits, which would include gathering the voice of young people in the Methodist Church
- A questionnaire sent out to all Methodist Ministers within the District.
- A scoping review of church websites and online resources.
- A gathering of other relevant research and documents.

## Parameters

It was agreed at the onset of the review process that for the purpose of clarity young people are those aged 0–18, rather than 25 (the more commonly used definition of young people within the Methodist Church.) For the purpose of this review children are defined as 0–11 year olds and young people as 12–18 year olds.

It was also agreed that the review would focus on the churches in the District that have an active Sunday congregation. It's noted that there is significant work happening in Methodist buildings across the District that do not have a Sunday congregation. Both of these areas are valid topics for further research.



## **The key questions looked at during the review process**

1. How does / how can the District support Circuits and churches where there is strong or flourishing under 25s work? Or where there is little or nothing happening?
2. Where are there realistic opportunities to develop work with under 25s where it does not exist at present? What financial or logistical support would help to enable this?
3. How does / how can the District encourage the networking and sharing of practice between those who run groups: for toddlers? For children? For teenagers? For young adults?
4. How does / how can the District encourage networking between young people and between youth leaders?
5. How does / can the District help Circuits and churches to give follow ups on national and local youth activities eg 3Gen?
6. How can the District encourage church leaders of uniformed organisations?
7. How does / how can the District support Circuits and churches as they encourage under 25s to be active people of faith through the transitions from being a toddler, to a young child, into adolescence and adulthood?
8. How does / how can the District encourage and equip groups working with under 25s who experience the challenges of inclusion through physical and mental health, disability, gender, race, sexuality etc?
9. Can the District hear the voice of the child, the youth, the young adult?

## Reviewing church websites

Prior to carrying out the review there was the sense that there were small pockets of active ministry with children and young people. It was decided to do a review of church websites in order to seek out churches that had children's and youth ministry occurring that wasn't on the District's radar.

A sweeping review was undertaken of all the church websites within the District. It's acknowledged that not all churches have a website and that some use social media / local hard copy publications to advertise their church rather than a website (and websites might also not be up to date). However by looking at the websites available a broad picture emerged of what children and youth ministry looks like across the District. This process also highlighted the impression a visiting family might have of a church through the church's online presence.

The review looked at:

- Any mention of children / youth on the home page of the website and in subsequent pages
- Photos of children / youth activity and the voice of the child
- Description of roles within the church
- Mid week activities (external organisations)
- Outreach activities for children / youth (led by the church)

### Out of 145 churches

Although the review has produced some data, this might not be completely accurate due to the reasons mentioned above.

**23%** of churches appear to have lots of children / youth provision as well as community outreach (more than 3-4 different activities happening regularly, either weekly or monthly).

**37%** of churches appear to have some children / youth provision, talk about children and youth and have some midweek activity happening. (1-2 activities happening either weekly or monthly)

**39%** of churches don't appear to have anything for children and youth and don't appear to mention children or youth on their website at all.

**31%** had toddler groups (either run internally or externally).

**16%** ran Messy Church sessions or a similar ministry.

**19%** ran Junior Church groups / Sunday School / Children's Church.

a further **12%** were churches that have children's activities (within the service) available. There is the sense that this is more common than the survey reflects as churches may not mention this on their website.

**18%** had youth groups (and there were more with community groups such as mid week youth clubs).

**14%** of churches with linked uniformed organisations mentioned on their website. The actual figure may be more than the survey suggests.

### Outcomes

- There is much to be celebrated across the District in terms of children and youth work.
- Churches could use more clear invitational language on their home pages to welcome families and children. (for example, using the terms 'children and young people' specifically rather than "all-age" where appropriate.)
- If staff and volunteers referenced on the church website work with children and young people this should also be stated explicitly and a way of contacting them given where appropriate and within GDPR guidance.
- A church's online presence needs to be considered as part of it's welcome to children and young people.

## Interviews

In total 11 interviews were carried out: 4 ministers, 1 Circuit youth enabler, 1 learning officer, 1 Superintendent, 1 Lay worker, 2 volunteers within children and youth ministry and the previous District youth enabler. 7 out of 9 Circuits were represented.

The interviews followed a similar pattern of informal conversation using the 9 key questions as a guide. These interviews took place online and the recorded transcripts were then used to analyse the responses into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

### Outcomes

- All the key stakeholders interviewed shared a passion for children's and youth ministry. They spoke about how this is played out in their own context through various activities and ministries.
- There was a clear theme of intentionality throughout.
- There was a desire for more support and a stronger network for training, resources and community.

More detailed responses can be seen as quotes throughout this review as well as in the SWOT analysis in the appendices.

**"sometimes it would be nice to think I'm not doing this on my own." – Volunteer**

**"we're not going to lament what happened, what's the past. Let's be more forward thinking. Let's focus on where we're going, not on lamenting the fact that the church isn't quite how we remember it." – Minister**

## Questionnaires

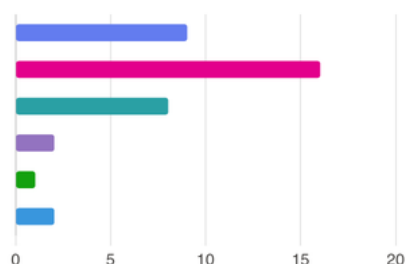
There were 38 responses to the questionnaire which again used the 9 key questions as it's basis. A full report of the data produced by the questionnaires can be found in the appendix. People involved in children and youth ministry in different areas of church life across the District responded to the questions.

### Outcomes

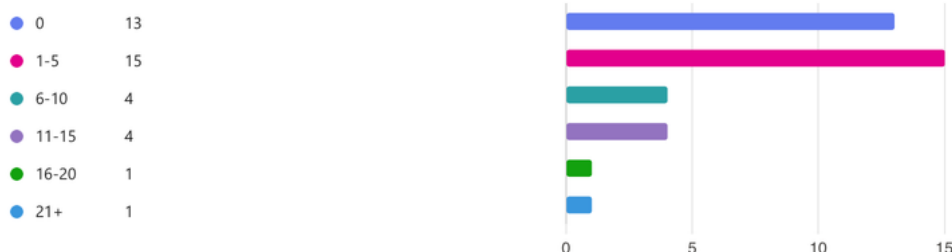
- There are many churches across the District that have children or young people as part of their congregation or who actively seek out opportunities to engage with under 18 year olds. 42% had 1-5 children attending regularly and 39% had 1-5 young people attending regularly (at least once a month.)
- There is a large amount of community activity that happens within churches midweek; 33 out of 38 had at least one mid week activity and 21% had 5 or more midweek activities.
- Respondents were keen to share stories of faith of children and young people.
- The largest barrier to more outreach happening in this area was time and capacity of volunteers and paid members of staff / ministers with 37% of respondents citing lack of volunteers or volunteers being overstretched as the reason why further outreach isn't happening. A further 16% felt a lack of funding for paid positions and outreach was a barrier to increasing children and youth ministry.

### How many children (aged between 0-10) do you have attend your services on a regular basis (at least once a month)?

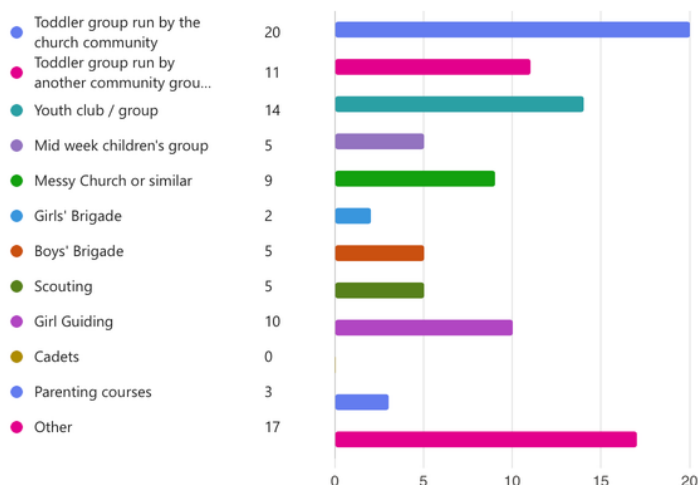
|         |    |
|---------|----|
| ● 0     | 9  |
| ● 1-5   | 16 |
| ● 6-10  | 8  |
| ● 11-15 | 2  |
| ● 16-20 | 1  |
| ● 21+   | 2  |



**How many young people (aged between 11-18) do you have attend your services on a regular basis (at least once a month)?**



**Tell us about any midweek groups relating to children or youth that happen in your building:**



**Tell us about a stand out moment you or someone in your church community has had in engaging with children and young people recently:**

"We began a toddler group about 18 months ago. A Mum began to attend regularly and came to our Carols by Candlelight service. She then, through encouragement and prayer from the Toddler Group leaders, began to attend church. She now attends church regularly and is on a journey of faith."

"We have a girl who attends with her grandmother every week. The young girl feels very at ease in the Church and has been designated official book monitor!"

"There are so many, from mentioning in secondary school, to the detached work on a Monday evening to the growth of our team particularly in our young leaders. But most proud of the young people we are privileged to engage with and be trusted adults to."

"We began a toddler group about 18 months ago. A Mum began to attend regularly and came to our Carols by Candlelight service. She then, through encouragement and prayer from the Toddler Group leaders, began to attend church. She now attends church regularly and is on a journey of faith. Her two children were dedicated in our church recently and she & her partner will marry in our church this year. She is always encouraging other Mums to attend Toddler group and come to church. She says being part of our church community has changed her life."

"I love being one of the leaders that go to 3 Gen with young people from the Circuit. It is always a joy and a privilege."

## Site Visits

4 site visits took place as part of the review process, two were to Messy Church sessions and two youth group evenings. During the Messy Church sessions there were informal conversations with families and key volunteers. The youth group evenings involved bringing 3 questions to the young people and their youth leaders:

1. What do you love about your church?
2. If you were in charge of church what would it look like?
3. What do you need / how could the District help to make this happen?

### Outcomes\*

- The young people involved loved how they were known within their church and that they felt part of their church family. They enjoyed having roles within their church (children's groups, tech rotas, tea and coffee duties, being a steward). They had real community with each other too.
- They wanted more opportunities to be involved further, to invite people in to their group and to seek out other youth groups locally and within the District for connection and community.
- They saw the need for a network of youth groups, their leaders were also looking for a community of support, but that didn't put extra pressure on their already busy workload.

\*see the appendix for the full answers

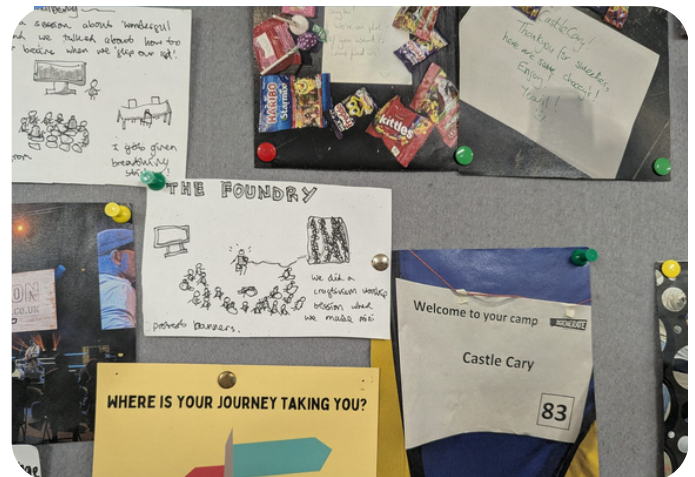
### Community

The Messy Church at Bath Road Methodist Church, run as part of the ecumenical partnership highlighted a real shared vision of reaching out to local families and providing a community of care. Families appeared at home and volunteers sought to make connections. Considerations were made for older children attending so everyone felt included.

### Identity

The youth home group at Castle Cary Methodist Church had a strong sense of their identity within their church and their community. They were empowered to speak out and stand out.

There was a real sense of ownership and of belonging in the group and a desire to reach out and connect with other young people.



### Family

Visiting Sunday Night Youth at Zion United Church meant witnessing what a church family should be like. The young people clearly love their church and their church family. They have freedom to share ideas and wisdom whilst growing in their own faith too.

One of the young people said that one thing they loved about their church was 'Barnabas Time' where members of the congregation would be invited to share encouragements as part of the church service.

## Case Study: Milton Methodist

Milton Methodist was one of the 4 sites visited as part of the review. The minister was also interviewed as part of the process and the website was reviewed.

Families appear to be welcomed from before they arrive at the church. On its page on worship the website speaks of children as 'Full of wonder and trust, we can learn so much from them.' There is information about children and youth groups and the invitation to come and join is prevalent. The facebook page shows a video of what to expect when entering the church and how an area has been set up for people of all ages who appreciate movement during worship.

During her interview, the minister spoke of the activities her church runs with joy and passion for the families in her care. The regular Messy Church sessions welcomes grandparents and great grandparents, families travelling from further afield to meet with relatives that attend and young people who have 'outgrown' the session itself but continue to come and be part of the team. Children bake rocky road for the session and everyone engages in the worship time in their own way. The sense of welcome and belonging is strong. After Messy Church happens, it's shared about in church services linking the different ministries together and showing unity as a church.

Another of the minister's churches has less children but a clear heart for being a peaceful space with pupils from the nearby SEND school coming to tend the garden onsite.

## Areas for Focus

There is so much to be celebrated within the District. Many paid staff and volunteers are giving of time and resources weekly to support the spiritual growth of children and young people. This is often being carried out quietly and in the context of being church family. The review has highlighted 4 key areas where there are opportunities and challenges to this work and the potential for an increase of support in this area. There are also systemic challenges to be considered.

### **Being Ready**

Being ready to welcome, to invite and to help families feel at home in every congregation.

### **An Authentic Children's and Youth Voice**

Listening to children and young people as active members of the church family.

### **An intentional Focus on Children & youth Ministry**

Ensuring this ministry is well supported so that it has the impact it needs to have and that it isn't diluted and doesn't lose focus.

### **Network and Community**

Creating an authentic sense of working in partnership for leaders and a community for young people and children within the District.

### **Systemic Issues**

An awareness of the tension between Sunday and mid week worship, changes in staff and ministers, and challenges of time and resources.

## Being Ready

We could consider what it would look like in the Bristol Methodist District if every church was:

- **Ready to Welcome**
- **Ready to Invite**
- **Ready to Feel at Home**

**"the young people in the church are 'brought up by the village'"**  
-Parent

### **Ready to Welcome**

When a family is invited to church for the first time they will often look up that church online or on social media to ensure that they will feel welcomed and will know what to expect. Talking about children and young people on the website and perhaps showing photos of the children's area or group or activities that have taken place can all help to reassure families that they will be welcomed in. **Ready to Welcome** doesn't necessarily mean having provision for children and young people each week, instead it's an attitude of preparedness. Having a named person or people in each congregation that can advocate for the needs of children in their church community would be a great way of churches being ready to welcome.

**"There's the barrier of there only being one or two children makes it hard to invite more, a chicken and egg situation"**  
-Volunteer

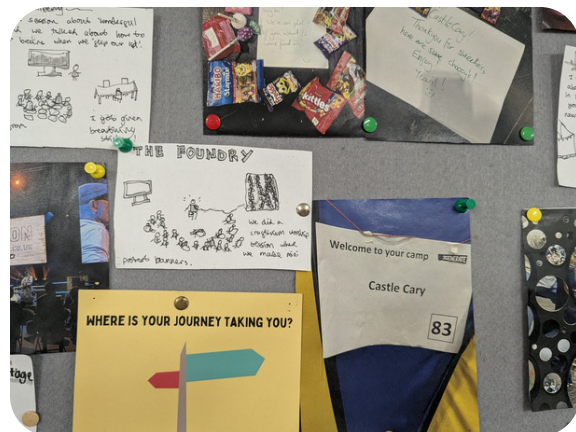
## Ready to Invite

This recommendation is for churches to be looking outwards, to invite and recognise the links that are already there. Many churches rent out their buildings to uniformed organisations who could be perceived as simply being hirers rather than being a link into church and back out into the community. Organisations such as the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade have the Christian message at their heart and are seeking out ways to connect with churches for support and shared goal of making God known. One interviewee spoke about how their GB company organises flowers for anyone on the church pastoral list, showing connection and care between the church and Girls' Brigade.

Churches often have good links with schools. It's important to be fostering these links, building trust, inviting in and seizing the opportunities given whilst being relevant and appropriate to the community the church is located in.

There are an amazing number of church run toddler groups and some brilliant work being done by other organisations to support the key role these groups play in the lives of the children and families they serve. The questions to churches in this position could be "what's the next step with the church toddler group? What's the next invite?"

**"(we're) known and loved in the best way"  
-young person, site visit**



Youth group notice board

## Ready to feel at home

The good news stories shared within the questionnaire really highlighted that people are known and loved in the church. What are the next steps in families feeling at home in church? One family at a Messy Church visited as part of this review said that it was the only group their neurodivergent child could access because of its routine, structure and welcome.

The Fuller Youth Institute carried out a piece of research released in 2026 called 'Gen Alpha and Faith'. One of the key findings of this report was that Gen Alpha (those born between 2010 and 2024) increasingly wants in-person connection, but connection that is unstructured and where they can feel at home, where 'they feel most like themselves'. 65% of Gen Alpha teens say home is where they can be real. Small churches in particular have an opportunity to support and facilitate children and young people to feel at home and to belong. By being intentionally intergenerational and fostering relationships across age groups, as well as giving appropriate responsibility and ownership over areas of church life, children, young people and their families can thrive in the small church context.

"Gen Alpha wants more connection with adults. In fact, 40% say having a mentor, guide, or elder they can talk to regularly would help them grow in their faith." Gen Alpha and Faith Report, Fuller Youth Institute, 2026.

The interviewees all gave similar answers to the question 'Do you think the Methodist Church Listens to the voice of the child'. It appears that on a local level it does happen regularly. In churches where young people feel welcomed in and at home they are often able to share their views. However people were more unsure at a Circuit or District level. There are young people who attend the Synod but these are from only one of the 9 Circuits within the District.

As well as already established routes for young people to have a voice, there are other ways of listening to children and young people that could be considered.

- The Church of England is currently doing work in this area with the Growing Faith Foundation. The aim of the foundation is “to change the culture of the Church of England so that children, young people, and families are instinctively placed at the heart of all mission and ministry” (Growing Faith Foundation 2024 Impact Report) and to do this by seeking out and actively encouraging the voice of the child and young person.

[illegible]

### Answers given during the youth group site visits

## An intentional Focus on Children & Youth Ministry

Ensuring this ministry is well supported is crucial so it can have the impact it is meant to have, without becoming diluted or losing focus. It appears that roles (from the website review, interviews, questionnaires) that perhaps used to be separate have been merged into community or outreach roles. Whilst this makes sense financially, it can mean that the impact and focus on children and young people is reduced. And as well as job roles, areas of ministry may have also merged. Clarity around job roles and ministry shows intention and helps to keep focus. "There is a tension expressed that exists between having a congregation or a community focus to a role. This is also described as either a discipleship or mission focus. Yet the separation between the two can be unclear, as 'fuzzy edges' may exist between them. This is difficult to navigate for practitioners, whose roles are often very broad in nature." We Are Family Research 2016.

There is a desire from stakeholders for more funding from the District to support children and youth roles congregationally and at a Circuit and District level. As well as grant opportunities for national youth events, 3Generate is already part funded by the District, there is a keenness for joining in with other ecumenical events and for that to be supported at a District level, for example facilitating children's teams attending the Hand in Hand Conference or young people visiting Satellites youth conference.

Connexional youth and children's resources are available through The Well but there was also the trend of people wanting resources available through the District, particularly around training, practical guidance and session plans.

From the interviews it became apparent that there have been seasons of intentionality previously within the District, with workshops at Synod, previous reviews of children & youth ministry and the employment of a District youth enabler.

The Youth and Children Growth Report by the Church of England in 2022 looked into reasons for church growth and concluded that "Growth begins with the church leader prioritising youth and children's ministry. This often will look like being very upfront and vocal with the wider congregation and PCC in regards to the vision that is trying to be achieved, as well as a willingness to make decisions that may impact how the church seeks to spend its resources."

**"I don't mind what you're doing as long as you know why you're doing it" – Volunteer, Site Visit**



Messy Church Prayer Table

**"...deciding very early on (in ministry) where I'm going to spend my time and making that very clear and being very honest about that...my focus will be on those on those activities that are missional." – Minister**



## **Network and Community**

This area of focus is two fold, firstly creating an authentic sense of working in partnership for leaders and also creating a community for young people and children within the District.

Key stakeholders involved in this review saw the District's role as being a catalyst for children and youth workers to work in partnership across the District. This could be through shared events and networking opportunities with times to share good news stories. It could be through facilitating training and support, being able to signpost to experts in different areas of children or youth ministry and by having an awareness of what is available. In order to do this well it's important that there are named people at District level who are championing this, as well as considering a post for a paid role at District level.

There's also the potential for different networks within the District, for those running Messy Churches, those with toddler groups, those with brilliant school links, those with active youth groups. Finding a community of support in a common area is key to sharpen tools, up-skill, train, pray and champion.

**“.a community of practice. You know where people doing you know similar work across the District you know could meet on a you know on a semi regular basis to share, practise, to share stories, to be in fellowship with one another.” –District Learning Officer**

Young people within the District are keen to meet with others and need support for this to happen. This is a challenge in such a wide geographical area. One young person suggested a directory of youth groups.

There is a balance in encouraging participation in 3Generate whilst recognising that other local or national youth events might be more appropriate and accessible to different groups and supporting access to those too.

**“(3Gen) They came away feeling like they were part of something bigger.” Circuit Youth Enabler**

## **Systemic Issues**

Within all these areas for focus there is an awareness of some systemic issues facing the church. These can't be resolved easily but need to be recognised and acknowledged.

There is the tension between Sunday and mid week worship, with the pressures of Sunday morning congregation attendance and the way that the membership system operates.

There are challenges with short term contracts and funding ending for staff and for the changes when ministers move roles and priorities shift or there is a gap.

There is the challenge of time and resources for key volunteers and for ministers and lay workers too. These are all potential research opportunities.

## **Additional Findings to Consider:**

### **Children, youth or family work?**

Throughout this review the work carried out with children and youth (0-18 year olds) has been considered however this is a broad age range. There needs to be a consideration going forward as to whether the immediate focus should keep this age range or predominantly focus on youth. Either approach is useful and has value. It's worth considering creating two distinct roles focusing on different ages groups that work in partnership with each other.

It is also important to recognise that children and youth ministry does not function in a vacuum. There could be considered a missing generation amongst church attendance of 30 to 40 year olds. Family ministry is crucial to the life of a church. "There is a general recognition that working with children or young people in isolation is not the most effective way of enabling a lifelong relationship with God to develop. Nurturing spirituality needs to involve parents and the wider 'family', leading us increasingly towards an all-age approach to church." Page 11, We Are Family Report 2016

### **Language**

From reviewing the websites as well as in interviews it has been noted that there is a Methodist (and perhaps more broadly Christian) vocabulary at play with terms such as 'Lay Worker' and 'Pioneer' and 'Missional'. Whilst these terms have clear descriptions within the church for those outside of Methodism they might consider these terms confusing and perhaps unhelpful.

Changing these terms may not be possible, however describing job roles and using clear and informative language can help people to access the information they need and to also know that there is someone within the church who is focused on children and youth.

### **Working Ecumenically**

Throughout the interviews and during the site visits and website review there was a strong sense that often the most productive and fruitful work happening when the church was working in partnership with other denominations. Unity was evident amongst the churches with a clear common goal. There was the understanding that young people in particular may benefit from accessing different expressions of worship whilst at the same time calling the local methodist church their home.

**"It's working ecumenically and actually trusting each other ecumenically as well...there is something a little bit about Kingdom, where if some of our young people feel that they want to go to another church because there's more young people there and young people's work. It's sad, but we want young people to have a faith and be vibrant and be encouraged in that."  
– Superintendent**

## Recommendations

- Naming and supporting key stakeholders at congregational, Circuit and District level with a focus on children and youth ministry.
  - Having a named person in each church who has a focus on children and youth. They could be connected into a Circuit network that would facilitate context-appropriate training, resource sharing and support for volunteers.
  - Having a named person in each Circuit who has a focus on children and youth. They could be connected into a District network. In larger Circuits, this could be a paid role as children and youth enabler – recognising the hours this role would entail and giving intentional focus. In smaller Circuits, having a paid role across two Circuits could be a possibility. These roles could follow the model set by the Gloucestershire Youth Enabler.
- Creating a lead paid role (or paid roles, focusing on children and youth separately) within the District to hold this focus; with key areas of responsibility:
  - Sharing resources (policies, procedures, Connexional resources, training materials)
  - Signposting (training resources, good practice, highlighting champions in different areas, for example Messy Church, toddler groups or youth home groups)
  - Supporting Circuit children and youth enablers
  - Occasional District wide events for young people
  - Advocating for children and youth at a District level at every opportunity
  - Increasing the authentic children's and youth voice within District and Circuit
- Recognising and celebrating the good news stories that are already happening and supporting networks to develop in key areas of children and youth ministry.
  - In conjunction with the new role but with the plan that the networks would sustain themselves with champions in each area sharing good news and great practice.
- Funding opportunities for children and young people to connect, either within the Connexion or with events happening ecumenically locally and nationally.
  - Reviewing the grants process to make sure it's accessible for all congregations and to consider broadening the criteria for giving grants.
- Holding authentic space for children and young people's voices to be heard at congregation, Circuit and District level.
- Ensuring congregations feel equipped by the District and their Circuit to reach out to the community around them in ways appropriate, accessible and sustainable for their context. Prompting congregations to be ready to welcome, to invite and for children and young people to feel at home. Supporting congregations to do this with their online presence as well as face to face.

## Outcome

The original review proposal asked two key questions:

1. What is our District vision for children and young people's work?
2. What strategy do we need to employ to turn the vision into reality?

The first can only really be answered by the the District and it's members. The people spoken to as part of this process have a shared a passion for supporting children and young people to find their own faith in a community of care, nurture and family. They are looking for connection, guidance and a sense of working together to achieve this goal.

This review highlights the importance of ensuring that any strategy does not depend on a single individual. Instead, establishing key roles (supported by long-term contracts, effective line management, and appropriate resources) could help implement a broader, more sustainable approach that intentionally prioritises children's and youth ministry across the District.



## Further Research Opportunities

- Methodist Schools
- Young adults (18–25 year olds)
- Websites and church communication
- Resource audit
- Mid week opportunities with children and young people in Methodist contexts that don't have a Sunday congregation
- Systemic challenges mentioned previously such as keeping consistency of vision when leadership changes

## Links to relevant organisations and research

- **Toddler Groups:**
  - National Network of Church Based Toddler Groups <https://1277.org.uk/>
  - National Playtime Conference <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/events/tourevents/playtime-national-conference-2026/>
- **Messy Church:**
  - <https://www.brf.org.uk/what-we-do/messy-church/>
- **Family Ministry:**
  - Parenting for Faith <https://www.brf.org.uk/what-we-do/parenting-for-faith/>
- **Intergenerational Worship:**
  - Worship for Everyone <https://worshipforeveryone.com/>
- **Children & Youth Ministry Networks and Training Resources:**
  - Müllers Y&C Network <https://www.mullers.org/ycnetwork>
  - SWYM 360 Community <https://swym.org.uk/360-community/>
  - <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/>
  - <https://www.urbansaints.org/>

## Research

- **Youth and Children Growth Research** <https://churchsupporthub.org/all-resources/youth-and-children-growth-research-2/>
- **Growing Faith Impact Report** <https://churchsupporthub.org/all-resources/the-growing-faith-foundation-impact-report/>
- **Gen Alpha and Faith** <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/gen-alpha-in-2026>
- **We Are Family** [https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/we-are-family-booklet-1017\\_qo1NFVD.pdf](https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/we-are-family-booklet-1017_qo1NFVD.pdf)

## Thanks and Acknowledgements

Thank you so much to everyone who has engaged with this review. I've really appreciated you giving your time and your energy to this process. It's been brilliant to hear the stories of what God is doing in the lives of children, young people and families within the District. It has been a privilege to meet so many of you.

**"In all these other conversations, it is essential to remember that 'youth ministry' is only one part of the puzzle. A thriving youth ministry doesn't automatically mean a thriving church. All aspects of church culture need to be working together and gearing itself towards mission, growth and change." – Circuit Youth Enabler**



# **Bristol Methodist District Youth and Children's Work Review**



## **Appendices**



# SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats  
(in no particular order)

## Strengths

- Church activities such as:
  - Messy Church
  - Open the Book
  - Lots of toddler groups
  - Mid week youth clubs and groups
  - Parenting courses
- Links with uniformed organisations
- Invites into schools and Methodist School links
- Small intentional youth groups
- Good connexional resources
- 3 Gen and other large youth gatherings
- Circuit reviews that consider children and youth ministry
- Mission statements (Gorano) that consider outreach to children and youth at a Circuit level
- Circuit Youth Enabler role
- Passionate volunteers and keen ministers

## Opportunities

- Gathering youth together Circuit and District wide
- The creation of resources that are needed around policies and working with young people on a District level
- Encouraging meal times / social times for young people
- Intergenerational youth led activities and services
- Pioneering activities
- District website having a children youth resource presence
- Proposal to support easy funding for other festivals not just 3 Gen (District advance fund)
- Budget to reflect mission to children, young people and families
- Stronger links with GB and BB
- Key person in every congregation
- Church Website changes
- Learn from Circuit youth enabler
- Messy Church – input into and feedback out of, linking up
- Toddler group network opportunities
- Doing things in an appropriate way for the context of the church
- More youth reps from each Circuit at Synod

## Weaknesses

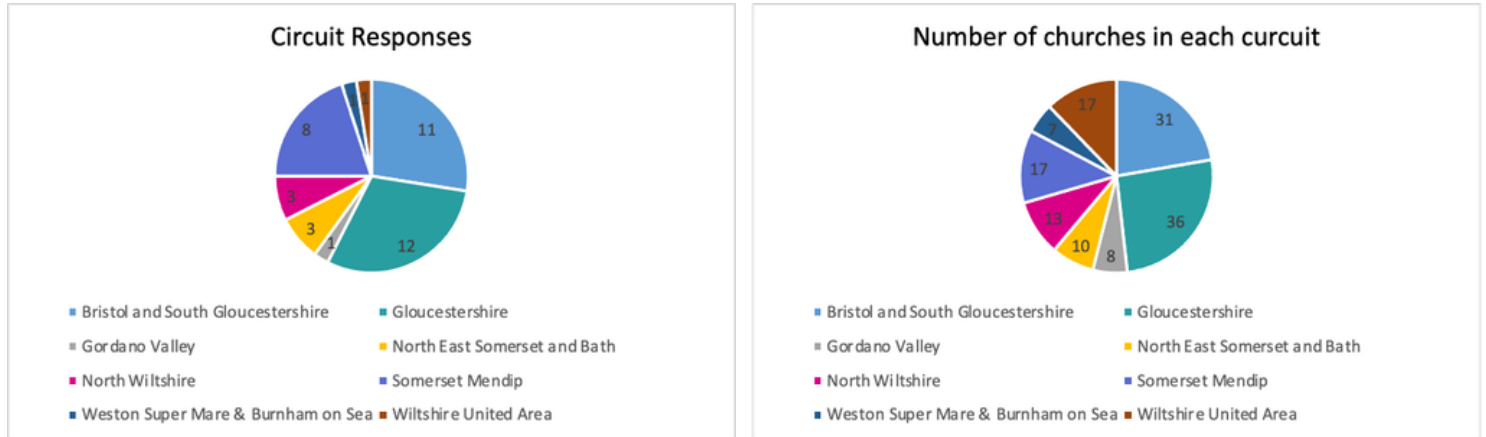
- Uniformed groups viewed as hirers not necessarily seen outreach opportunity / partners in the gospel
  - The assumption that the only link into church life is through parade services
- Youth funding can be fleeting
- Changeover in ministers means a shift in priorities
- Youth work training is not appropriate or relevant or they don't have time for it.
- Congregations don't see the change and become demoralised
- The District only hears the voice of YP who are in 'the bubble' or connected in already
- The demographic of churches means children or young people might not feel like they fit in
- Lack of resources, policies and knowledge means people not having the courage to start things (fear of getting it wrong)
- Job descriptions for family ministry leads are too big with not enough pay.
- The tension between people being really busy doing things week in and week out and wanting to grow/develop the role.
- The question of Messy Church a being a standalone worship gathering or being a stepping stone to Sunday worship? or both
- The blurring of specialisms and choosing which areas of work to be prioritised

## Threats

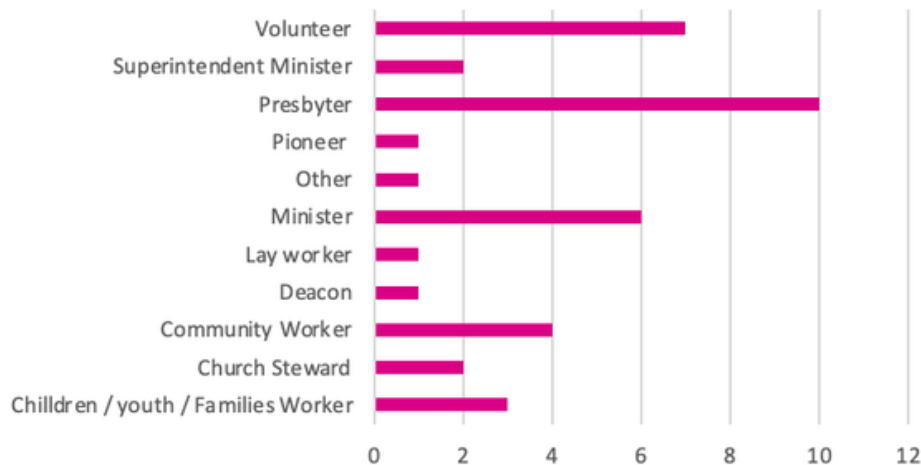
- Children are busy on Sundays
- Ministers are covering multiple churches with no time to make proper links
- Churches are not inviting children because there aren't children there
- Tokenism
- Congregation's expectations of young people
- If there's not someone in a role, the purpose and intention can get diluted or forgotten
- Misunderstanding of policy, rules and procedures etc
- Loss of families after the children 'out-age' messy Church
- The change in the offering to churches from national organisations
- 0-18 years is too big an age group
- A lack of training for volunteers in particular
- Volunteers being tired / overstretched
- Funding being removed from a role or project

# Questionnaire Results

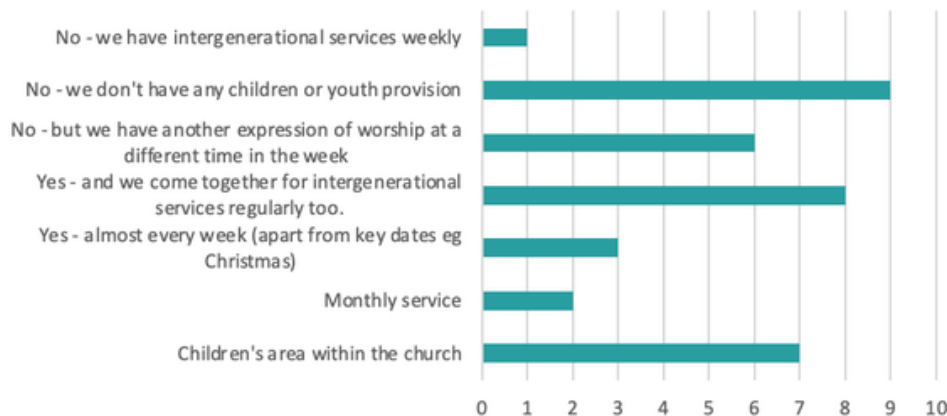
There were 38 responses to the questionnaire from 8 of the 9 Circuits in the District.



## What is your role within the church?



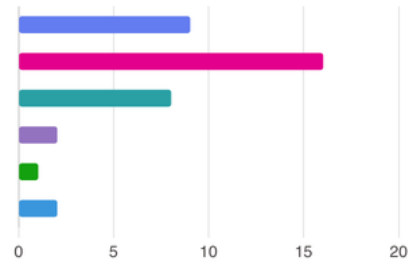
## Do you run groups for children or youth within your Sunday services?





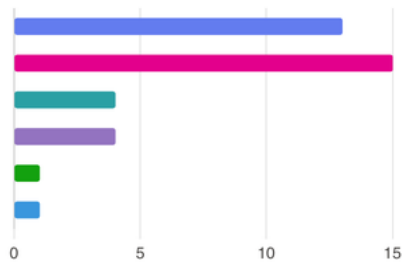
How many children (aged between 0-10) do you have attend your services on a regular basis (at least once a month)?

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| 0     | 9  |
| 1-5   | 16 |
| 6-10  | 8  |
| 11-15 | 2  |
| 16-20 | 1  |
| 21+   | 2  |



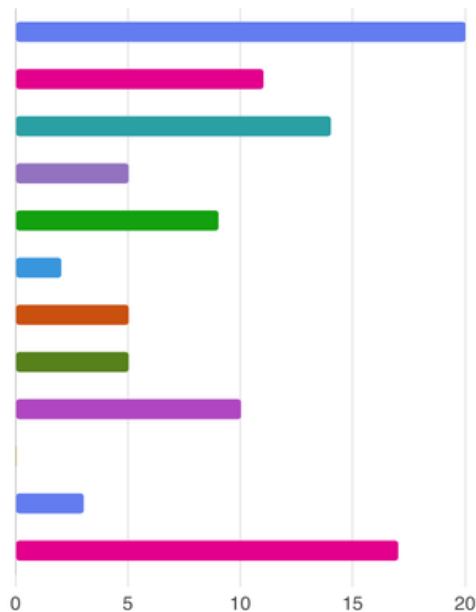
How many young people (aged between 11-18) do you have attend your services on a regular basis (at least once a month)?

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| 0     | 13 |
| 1-5   | 15 |
| 6-10  | 4  |
| 11-15 | 4  |
| 16-20 | 1  |
| 21+   | 1  |



Tell us about any midweek groups relating to children or youth that happen in your building (please list any not mentioned in the 'other' box)

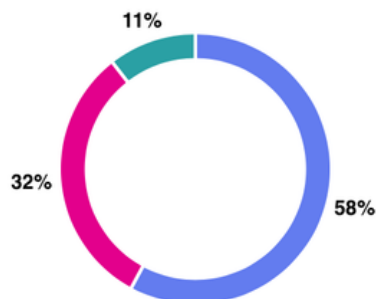
|                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| Toddler group run by the church community      | 20 |
| Toddler group run by another community grou... | 11 |
| Youth club / group                             | 14 |
| Mid week children's group                      | 5  |
| Messy Church or similar                        | 9  |
| Girls' Brigade                                 | 2  |
| Boys' Brigade                                  | 5  |
| Scouting                                       | 5  |
| Girl Guiding                                   | 10 |
| Cadets                                         | 0  |
| Parenting courses                              | 3  |
| Other                                          | 17 |



**“Other” included:**  
Open the book school  
assembly teams,  
Mainly Music sessions,  
extra tuition sessions  
and a children’s clothes  
exchange along with  
other activities.

Do you have an active link with your local primary or secondary school?

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Yes                              | 22 |
| No                               | 12 |
| Not yet, but we're working on it | 4  |





**Do you feel connected into a network of support (either formally or informally) for any work that is happening with children and youth in your church? If so, tell us about it. If not, are you aware of a network?**

- 23%** Were connected into a Circuit network or had links to their Circuit youth enabler
- 23%** Were connected into local eccumenical networks
- 11%** Were connected into a broader methodist network
- 6%** Were connected into external networks (SWYM, PEEPLE)
- 37%** Were not connected in to a network

**Does your church engage with 3Generate?**

- 48%** respondents: No (but some were engaged in other national events such as Satellites)
- 18%** Not yet (but were planning to, or actively encouraging young people to attend)
- 9%** Send volunteers
- 18%** Send young people and volunteers

**What outreach would you love to see happen with children and youth in your area?**

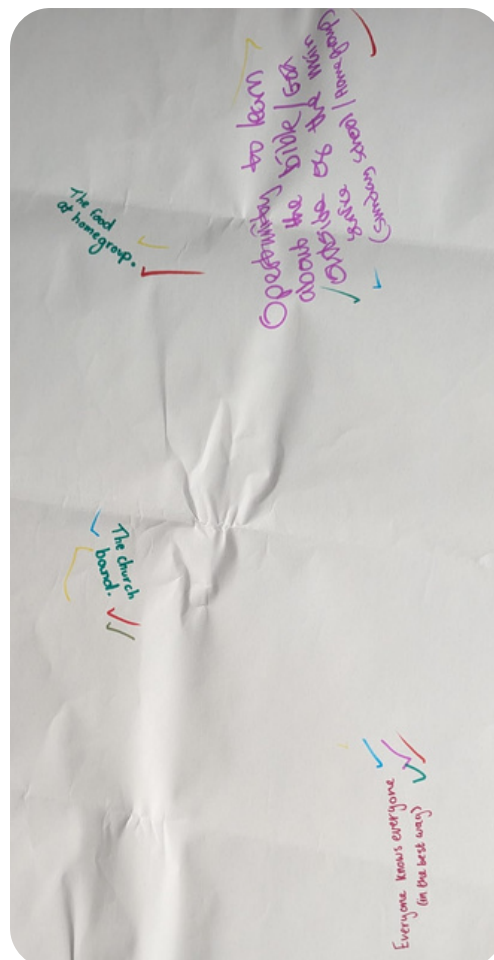
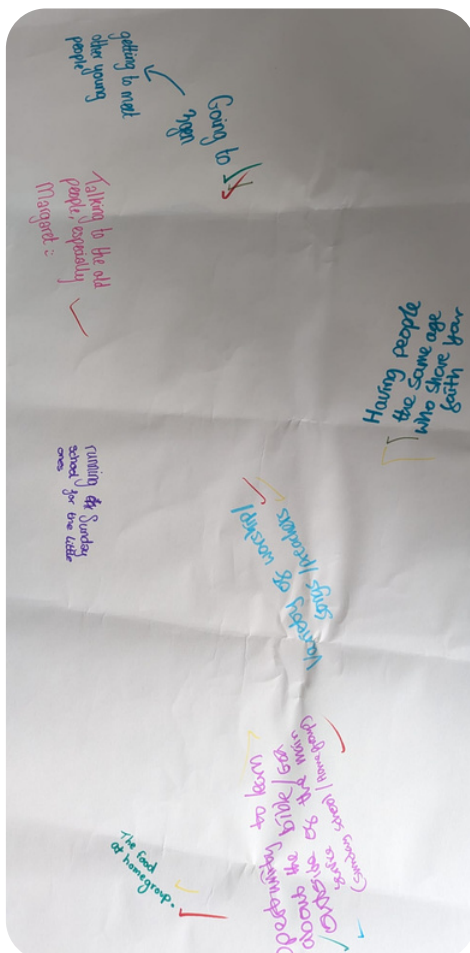
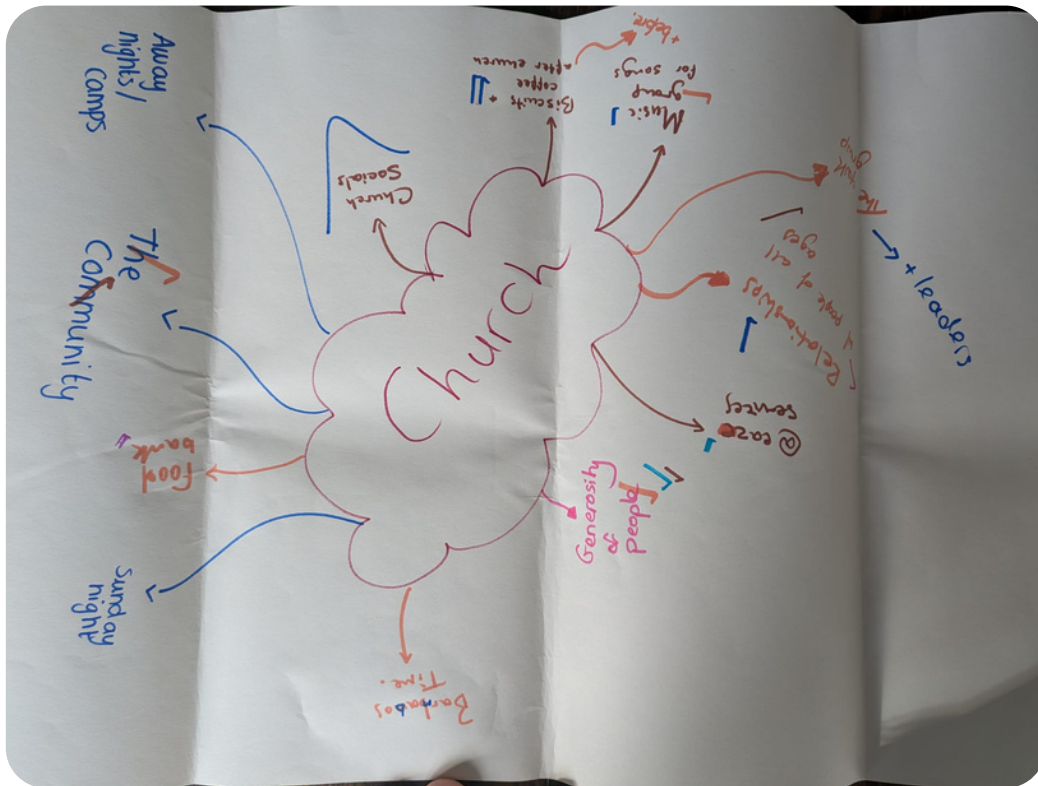


**What is currently stopping outreach (with children and young people) from happening?**



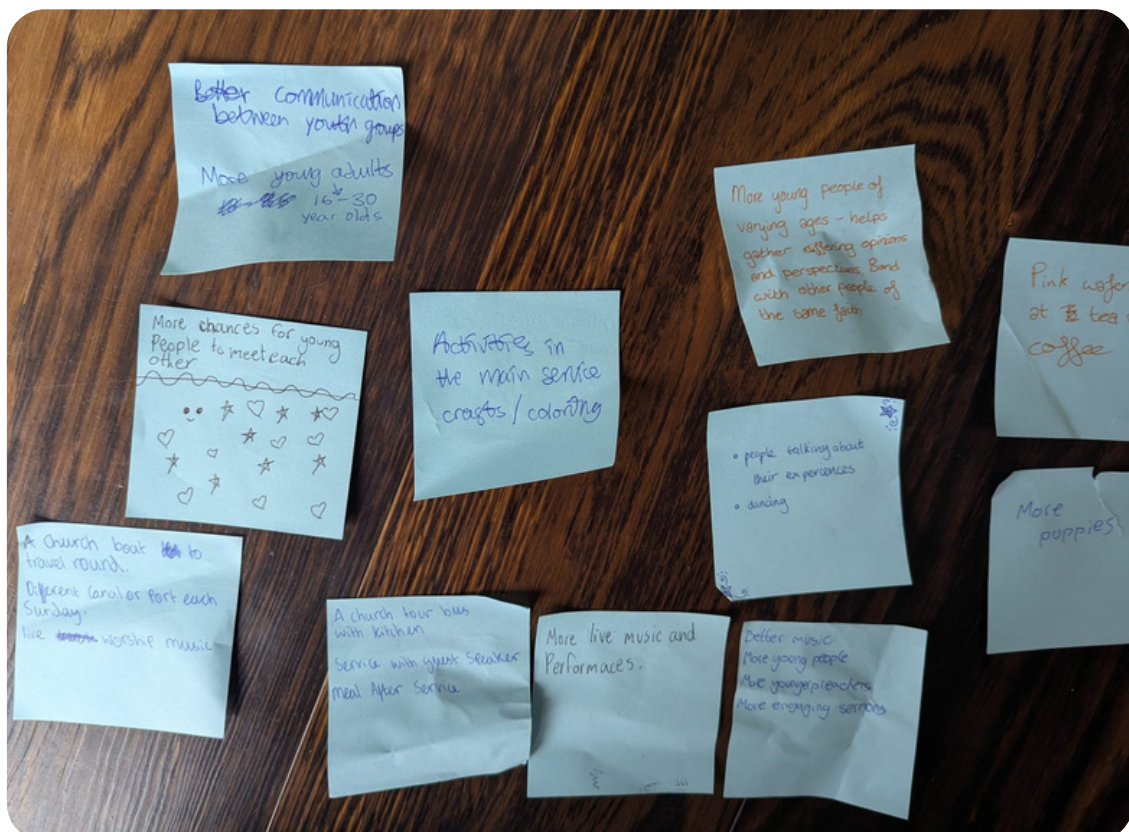
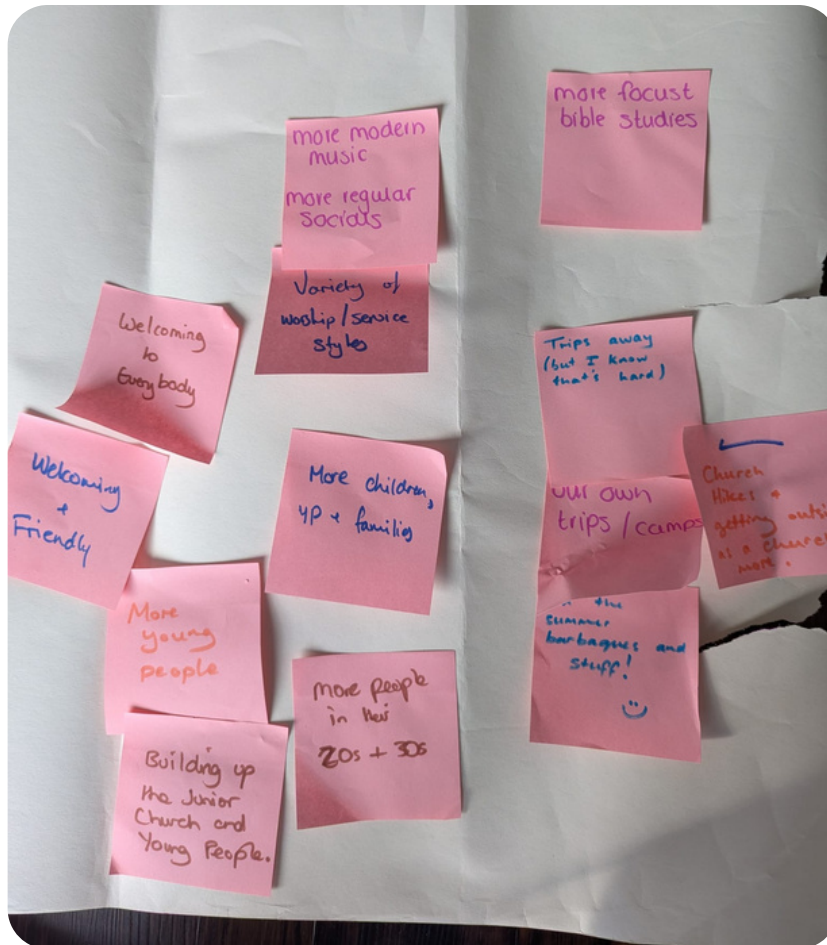
## Site Visits to Youth Groups

## What do you love about church?



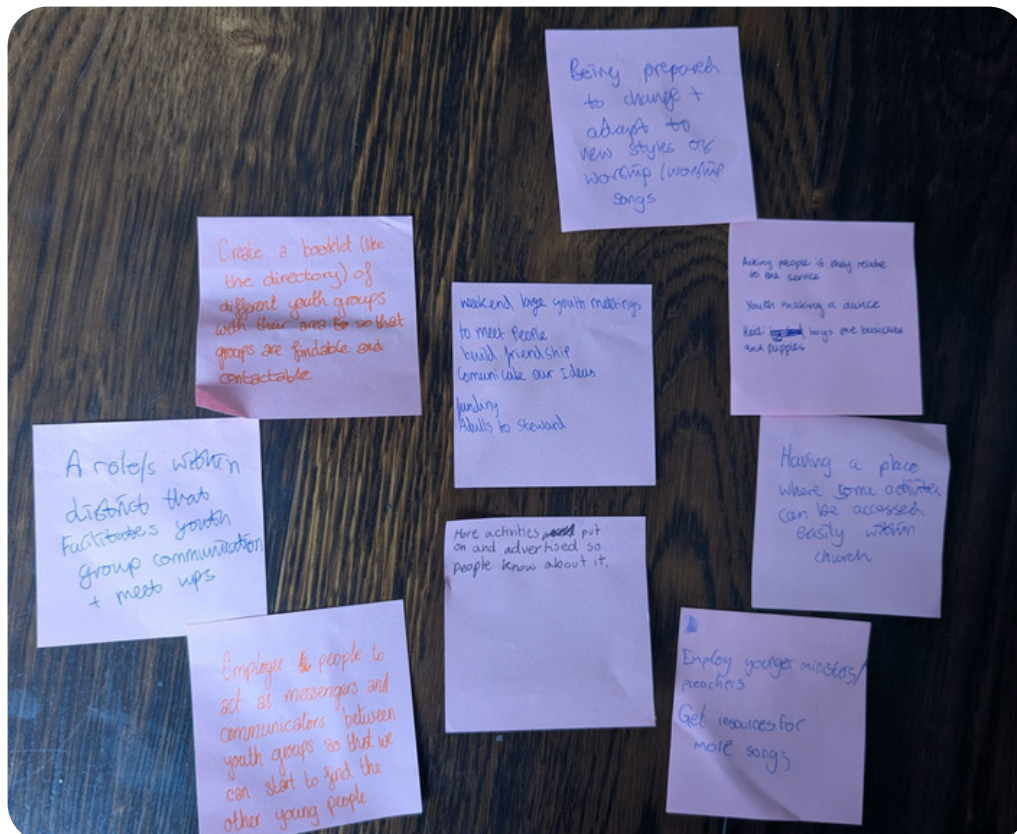
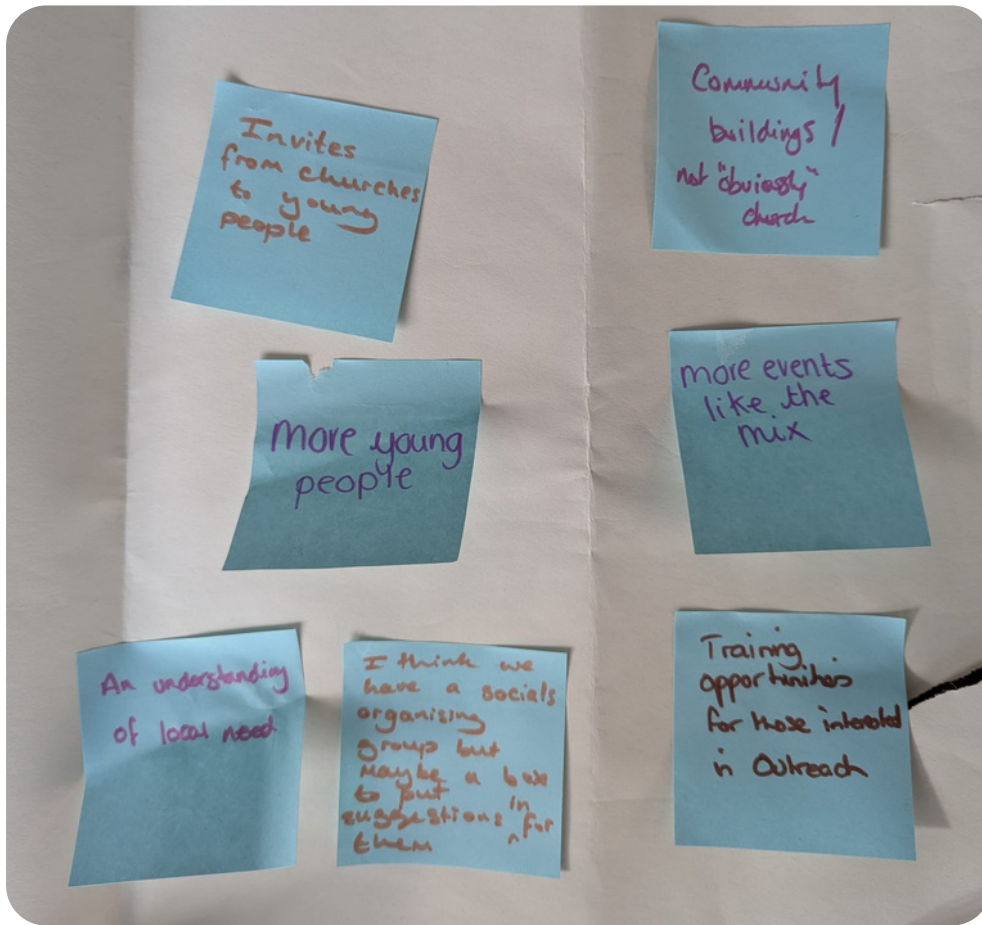
## Site Visits to Youth Groups

If you were in charge of church what would it look like?



## Site Visits to Youth Groups

### How could that change happen?





# **Bristol Methodist District Scoping Review Proposal January 2026**

## **The Bristol District of the Methodist Church Developing A District Strategy for Children and Young people (under 25s)**

The Bristol District of the Methodist Church is looking for someone to undertake a scoping review of the work that is currently happening across the District specifically among those who are under 25 years old. It will identify areas of strength and good practice that would benefit from further support, identify any areas where there are realistic opportunities for new work and the areas where there is little or no opportunity for development. The aim of the review is to facilitate the development of a District vision that leads to a strategy that will be implemented over a 3- 5 year period.

### **Some denominational background**

The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. The Church exists to: Increase the awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love (Worship) Help people to grow and learn as Christians, through mutual support and care (Learning and Caring) Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice (Service) Make more followers of Jesus Christ (Evangelism).

The Methodist Church is committed to Justice for all, Dignity for all, and Solidarity with all.

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/what-is-distinctive-about-methodism/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/the-inclusive-methodist-church/>

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/children-youth-family-ministry/>

### **The Bristol District**

is divided into nine areas – eight Methodist circuits and one Methodist/URC United area. There are 150 Churches, served by 45 ministers. There are also a number of Schools.

The fundamental role of the Bristol District is to be a supportive, facilitative energy across the circuits, churches and groups. The committees, officers and employees of the District embody a sense of the Connexion being present in the local situation through the District in addition to and alongside that being offered by the circuits. The District aims to provide support to circuits and churches to help them fulfil their vision and achieve their goals.

### **The Outcome**

At the end of the scoping review the District Policy Committee and Synod will have information and insight to enable them to begin answer to two questions:

1. What is our District vision for children and young people's work?
2. What strategy do we need to employ to turn the vision into reality?



# Bristol Methodist District Scoping Review Proposal

In order to achieve these outcomes, you will undertake an informed mapping exercise of the District and address some of the questions below. This list is intended as a starting point not a complete list. I have used the term under 25s to give the widest possible latitude at the beginning of the journey.

1. How does / how can the District support circuits and churches where there is strong or flourishing under 25s work? Or where there is little or nothing happening?
2. Where are there realistic opportunities to develop work with under 25s where it does not exist at present? What financial or logistical support would help to enable this?
3. How does / how can the District encourage the networking and sharing of practice between those who run groups: for toddlers? For children? For teenagers? For young adults?
4. How does / how can the District encourage networking between young people and between youth leaders?
5. How does / can the District help Circuits and churches to give follow ups on national and local youth activities eg 3Gen?
6. How can the District encourage church leaders of uniformed organisations?
7. How does / how can the District support circuits and churches as they encourage under 25s to be active people of faith through the transitions from being a toddler, to a young child, into adolescence and adulthood?
8. How does / how can the District encourage and equip groups working with under 25s who experience the challenges of inclusion through physical and mental health, disability, gender, race, sexuality etc?
9. Can the District hear the voice of the child, the youth, the young adult?

## **Additional questions:**

- How can the district encourage churches to strategically reflect on how their building spaces are used/could be used for work with children, families, and young people.
- How can the district support circuits to explore employment opportunities for youth ministers or lay workers with a focus on children and families ministry?
- How can the district support local churches to connect with their local schools?
- Alongside uniformed groups, what other non-church run work with children, young people, and families is being done in our buildings?
- How can the district support circuits and local churches in developing intergenerational communities?
- How could our Sunday services and expressions find new ways of connecting with young people?
- How can the district support, train, and encourage presbyters to be engaging with children, young people, and families?
- How can the district support families as a whole in their faith development and involvement with the life of the church?