

## **REPORT OF THE YOUTH COMMITTEE**

### **GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2019**

Since last General Assembly the main focus of the Committee, aside from our continued concern and desire to see the children and young people of our denomination flourish in their relationships with Christ, their churches and each other, has been to undertake a consultation with Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries in order to assess, evaluate and implement a new overall vision and strategy that will play a major part in guiding the Committee's thinking and trajectory over the next few years. The Committee would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who are involved with children and young people of our denomination – your support, guidance, leadership and encouragement of the young people of our congregations is greatly valued.

### **GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018 YOUTH COMMITTEE EVENING**

The Committee very much appreciated the willingness of the General Assembly to allow the Committee to take part on Thursday evening last year as part of the Scottish Government's "Year of Young People". The Assembly had the opportunity to hear from many young people in our denomination via live interviews and pre-recorded video clips, as well as hearing from volunteer youth workers. There was also opportunity for the Assembly to receive a report on the PIED Strategy.

### **CONSULTATION**

As mentioned above, the majority of the Committee's time has been taken up with the consultation process which has been underway since last General Assembly – but this has been a very important commitment because of its potential impact on the future of Children's and Youth Work within the Denomination. The Committee undertook the consultation because of the deliverance passed by last year's assembly which said: "The General Assembly agree that the post of Children and Youth development Worker be continued for a further year beyond the current contract period allowing for a thorough consultation with Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries and the development of a strategic plan for Children and Youth Ministry." The full Consultation Report is found in Part 2 of this report.

### **PIED STRATEGY**

The PIED Strategy continues to offer a structure of ideas whose purpose is to encourage churches to plan and think about their current children and youth work endeavours. Praying, Innovating, Enjoying and Discipling remain core convictions that can be very helpful when considering starting up something new – will it be enjoyable? Will it result in young people being disciplined in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is there an innovative idea that could spark a new club or group or contact? Will whatever is in the pipeline be prayed for, before, during and after it has happened? As always Richard is available to chat to regarding PIED Strategy, and again the continued inclusion of PIED in the Reshaping for Mission Group is worth noting.

### **CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORK**

We are grateful to Richard Knott not only for developing PIED Strategy, but also for his willingness to help any congregation, Kirk Session, Presbytery, minister, elder and/or youth worker with any queries they may have regarding PIED strategy or any matter relating to children's and youth work. Richard has continued to visit churches, ministers, youth workers and presbyteries over the past year, as well as keeping us up to date via an e-newsletter and Facebook updates. He has also kept up the encouraging Spark events and camps, as well as undertaking several placements in various churches throughout the year, including Chryston

and Crook of Devon. Richard has also continued to be part of the Reshaping for Mission group, assist with safeguarding training, as well as having involvement in several ecumenical and para-church organisations.

## **RESIDENTIAL EVENTS**

It was another encouraging and enjoyable Spark Weekend Away that took place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2019, with both young people and leaders saying they had a great time of fun and teaching, however numbers attending were once again disappointing. There was also a Youth Assembly Event planned for the end of 2018, but due to confusion over dates and lack of uptake this event had to be cancelled. At the time of writing this report Richard, the Committee and several young people are looking forward to a Primary School Camp planned for May 2019. It should be noted, however, that due to the Committee's current financial situation as well as the difficulty in securing numbers for residential events, the Committee is intending to review current residential commitments and to explore all options available.

## **EASTER SCHEME**

2018's Easter Scheme was in support of Open Bible, the work of SU in Ukraine. The total amount raised was £10,211. The Committee would like to thank the Denomination for their generous support of the worthy work of Open Bible. The 2019 Easter Scheme is for the work of Stand By Me in Ethiopia, which was also supported in 2015.

## **CONSULTATION REPORT**

### **1. Aims of Consultation**

**Listed below are the main aims and desires the committee sought to fulfil.**

1. To conduct a thorough consultation with Kirk Sessions and presbyteries.
2. To develop the Youth Committee's strategic plan for children and youth ministry.
3. To present a full report to the General Assembly in 2019.
4. In the report to present conclusions and suggest options of strategy and vision to the General Assembly 2019 based on said conclusions.

### **2. Background and Context**

**In order to compile this report and to understand the process undertaken, the responses received and the conclusions drawn, some background information is needed to set the consultation and following report in its correct context.**

The Youth Committee has quite a long history of employing youth workers of various descriptions, however it would be fair to say that up until 2015 there had not been quite so much attention given to an overall, cohesive strategy which spanned the entire denomination and sought to provide tools to develop children and youth ministry from the ground up for every church. Previously the committee had focussed specifically on providing a "youth worker" role, but this was only ever on a part time basis and with a limited remit, so when in 2015 the previous appointment came to an end, the Youth Committee's response was to give serious consideration to what should happen from that point on. In short, the committee spent a significant amount of time considering their overall strategy, vision and trajectory.

After careful consideration the strategy the committee decided to implement was to change from employing a part time denominational "Youth Worker" whose job it was to run camps, summer missions and disciple young people, to employing a full time

“Children’s and Youth Development Worker” with a wider remit of developing a strategy for youth across the whole denomination. Therefore from 2015 onwards, the main strategy of the Youth Committee was to create, for a period of up to three years only, the strategic role of “Children and Youth Development Worker” whose job it would be to train volunteers, develop strategy for congregations, support youth workers and congregations, and have some limited practical involvement in children and youth ministry where possible. The Committee decided 3 years was a suitable time period to commit to, both to see whether this was the correct strategy to employ, but also for other considerations including limited financial resources. Funding was agreed for 3 years using the funds at the committee’s disposal, and help from the general trustees was granted because it became clear the committee did not have sufficient funds to cover the 3-year period. It was anticipated that after 3 years the strategic role would have been accomplished, which was the expressed decision and recommendation of the youth committee found in the 2018 report. In short, the committee’s strategy between 2015 and 2018 could be summarised as follows: “The committee seeks to encourage, train and equip local congregations to undertake youth ministry where they are situated. In order to accomplish this aim the committee will employ a Children and Youth Development Worker to develop a cohesive youth work strategy and to be the main point of contact for congregations.” It should be noted that the committee saw the role as being markedly different from that of “Youth Worker” – the new role was focussed much more on “development” and “strategy” rather than hands-on “youth work”.

In 2018, with the 3 year appointment of Children and Youth Development Worker coming to an end, and with the committee’s opinion that the role of developing a strategy was drawing to a close, the committee recommended that the role not be continued past January 2019. This was not to say that youth work would not continue past this date, but that the youth committee would prayerfully consider the way forward, building on what had been done, and with consideration of current finances, seek the way ahead. After debate however, the assembly agreed the following: “The General Assembly agree that the post of Children and Youth development Worker be continued for a further year beyond the current contract period allowing for a thorough consultation with Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries and the development of a strategic plan for Children and Youth Ministry.”

For this reason, the committee has spent the last 12 months undertaking a consultation that looks at the whole strategy of the committee – which must, by definition, encompass the role of Children and Youth Development Worker because that role was the essential focal point of the strategy the Youth Committee employed between 2015 and 2018. As it currently stands, then, the Youth Committee’s strategy cannot be fully divided from the role of Children and Youth Development Worker. Both must be considered if the old strategy is to be altered/stopped and a new strategy developed in its place. It is therefore because of the above context and background that the committee undertook the consultation and now presents the following report.

### **3. Method and Parameters**

**Below is a summary of the method employed by the committee and the parameters set by the committee whilst undertaking the consultation.**

1. The youth committee spent time considering the best approach to take.
2. It was decided to carry out a consultation via a questionnaire given to every kirk session, who were encouraged to seek the input of anyone involved in youth work and attended their congregation. An abbreviated version was taken to each of the 3 presbyteries for their input, achieved via a presentation given by either the convenor or vice convenor of the committee and followed by key discussion time in groups, fed back by written response. Finally, an invitation was extended to all general assembly committees to provide their input via the Coordinating Forum.

3. All responses received by the committee were then collated into one manageable document
4. Individual names and/or congregations have been removed to protect anonymity.
5. Occasionally comments have been abbreviated to save space but have not been altered in any way concerning meaning, content or tone.
6. The Consultation has been divided into Presbyteries.
7. In the “General Observations” section of this report, responses have been divided into 4 main categories: Information/Resources; Children and Youth Development Worker; PIED Strategy; General Comments. These highlight the key areas dealt with in the consultation.
8. The Conclusions and Suggested Strategy Options are based on the full width of comments and responses received.
9. Care has been taken to ensure all opinions have been heard and taken into account.
10. No comments received have been suppressed or doctored. There was a very wide response of views received regarding all 4 key areas mentioned above, ranging from the overwhelmingly positive to the decidedly negative, and everything in between.
11. For the sake of brevity the role of “Children and Youth Development Worker” has been shortened to “CYDW” throughout the report.

#### **4. Summary and Statistics**

**Below is a limited list of statistics regarding responses received during the consultation process – the decision to provide limited statistics was made due to the fact that any further statistics (for example a breakdown of positive, neutral and negative comments) would become a subjective exercise and therefore of potentially limited value.**

1. There are 52 congregations in the United Free Church of Scotland; 14 in the Presbytery of the East, 25 in the Presbytery of the West and 13 in the Presbytery of the North.
2. Out of 52 Congregations 29 Kirk Sessions responded to the consultation, meaning 56% of Kirk Sessions responded.
3. In the Presbytery of the North 38% of Kirk Sessions responded; in the Presbytery of the East 64% of Kirk Sessions responded; in the Presbytery of the West 60% of Kirk Sessions responded.
4. Out of 52 Congregations, 34 have children and young people present in their congregations whilst 18 do not. Of the 34 congregations with children and young people 76% responded to the consultation and 34% did not. Of the 18 congregations with no children and young people 20% responded and 80% did not.
5. There are 3 Presbyteries, North, East and West of which all 3 were consulted and participated in the consultation process.
6. Of the 8 General Assembly Committees (including Reshaping for Mission Group) that were invited to participate, there were no responses to the consultation at the time of preparing the report.

#### **5. General Observations from Consultation**

**We have broken responses into 4 main categories: “Information/Resources”; “Children and Youth Development Worker (CYDW)”; “PIED Strategy”; “General Comments”. Great care has been taken so that a fair, balanced and accurate summation of the very broad width of opinion expressed is presented in this report.**

Whilst recognising the subjective discipline of labelling certain comments as “positive” and others “negative”, there were a larger number of positive comments overall covering the 4 headings above, but also a significant number of negative comments that would be unfair to ignore. It should also be noted, again whilst acknowledging the somewhat subjective nature of such observations, that there seems to be a significant difference in the number of positive versus negative comments expressed depending on which Presbytery referred to. The Presbytery of the East is, on the whole, overwhelmingly positive regarding Information/Resources, CYDW, PIED Strategy and General Comments, the Presbytery of the West comes over as fairly balanced between positive and negative, and the Presbytery of the North leans more towards negative than positive. The significantly differing “flavours of opinion” found in each presbytery might be difficult to quantify precisely, but cannot be simply ignored. That there are major differences of opinion found between the 3 presbyteries is an irrefutable and potentially significant observation.

### **Information/Resources**

- Opinion seems to be divided. Some find information/resources excellent, whilst others are critical of its presentation and usefulness.
- There are excellent regular emails, newsletters and training ideas, including links and suggestions. This came across clearly in the responses.
- Camp, Spark and Events information is clear and well presented.
- Young people enjoy Spark events however they are remote to Presbytery of the north.
- The provision of local training has been found to be very helpful by churches starting up children and youth ministry, with several churches benefiting from resources suggested, including Godly Play.
- Information provided is appreciated by some churches even when they don't have young people.
- Lots of advertised events/resources are not suitable for churches not in the immediate area, and some have utilised the CYDW resource, whilst others say distance makes this very difficult.
- People seem unaware of what resources are available from the committee.
- Much of the information promoted could have been found simply by searching online without any help from the committee.
- Resources are suggested, but without filtering or guidance on who/what it might be appropriate for. There seems to be a lack of appropriate targeting.
- Some churches don't find offered resources helpful and choose to use their own.

### **Children and Youth Development Worker (CYDW)**

- Opinion seems to be divided throughout the denomination. There are many positive responses detailing ways in which they have benefited from the CYDW role. Other churches feel they cannot benefit from the role of CYDW due to remoteness and distance, and would like more local youth work involvement.
- Some churches very much want the role to continue, seeing it as a vital tool for the development of children's and youth ministry within their congregations.
- A large majority of positive responses appear to come from churches that have had “hands-on” input from the CYDW role. Most churches that have had “hands-on” input have found input very helpful as they've embarked on potentially new children and youth ministry endeavours. This includes training, resourcing, visiting, initial participation in the form of a set-time placement to see the work established.

- Encouragement, advice, inspiration and involvement from CYDW role has had a very positive impact on numerous churches. Several have commented on the experience and how the CYDW goes out of his way to assist.
- During the last 3 years the CYDW role has incorporated new aspects, including safeguarding training and this has been found to be helpful.
- It would appear that in person “hands-on” involvement is viewed as being an important and intrinsic part of the CYDW role; this is reflected in the variation of responses by different presbyteries. The presbytery of the north, which has had least ‘hands on’ benefit commented least favourably on the CYDW role; this is contrasted with the more favourable comments on the CYDW role from the presbytery of the east, where a significant number of churches have received ‘hands on’ assistance from the CYDW worker.
- Some have not found the input of CYDW helpful for a variety of reasons, including not much help given at summer club, suggestions that were not taken on board due to experience of existing volunteers, advice that was inappropriate for the local context and culture, and an apparent lack of understanding of the needs and abilities of some children attending camps.
- Some commented that they were already doing youth work prior to the CYDW role and had had no real need of CYDW input.
- Others have not found the role to be beneficial. Reasons include a negative response by some churches to the resource Godly Play, saying it lacks didactic teaching and is too subjective; other comments include an unease regarding the theology of the current CYDW which curtails their participation in denominational events.

### **PIED Strategy**

- It is very clear from the consultation that a significant number of churches have benefitted from the PIED strategy. The consultation provides lots of examples of positive initiatives, including but not limited to various prayer ideas e.g. “prayer buddies”, “all age/whole church philosophy” and structured programmes.
- There were numerous responses detailing the ways in which congregations have implemented the PIED Strategy, including examples of prayer having great results, innovating new ideas, often with input from the CYDW role, enjoyment and discipleship, with examples of new teaching ideas, clubs and programmes. For numerous churches these developments have flowed out of engaging with the PIED Strategy, including crucial input from the CYDW.
- However, opinion seems to be divided throughout the denomination. Although some churches found the PIED strategy helpful, especially where new work is being developed, a number of churches found nothing new or helpful to assist in the PIED strategy. Churches with established children’s and youth ministry found the PIED Strategy redundant. Several commented that they were already doing everything mentioned within PIED and it was in no way a catalyst for their ministries with children and young people.
- Others don’t even consider PIED Strategy to be a proper “strategy” and see it instead as a list of self-evident traits found in any healthy church.

### **General Comments**

- Opinions appear to be divided throughout the denomination, with some very supportive of the committee’s current strategy, and others finding several issues of fault including

but not limited to distance, lack of engagement with local congregations, and an overall impression that the current trajectory of the committee's strategy is flawed and not helping all congregations as it could/should be.

- Having access to someone with theological training and the time to invest in local congregations is appreciated.
- Several stress very strongly that the CYDW has played a significant and essential role in the development of children's and youth ministry in their context.
- Another opinion expressed is that the CYDW role may need reconfiguring, but they do not want to see the role "dropped".
- Some find the amount of paperwork too extensive and intrusive.
- Another opinion expressed is a desire for more proactive visitation from the CYDW, more involvement by the CYDW in denominational life, with the worker becoming part of the "U.F. family" by being part of a local congregation.
- The view was also expressed that in its current state there was no meaningful benefit from the CYDW role, and that the role should change to include more practical input and focus on discipleship to become helpful going forward.
- The view was also expressed that "hands-on" assistance would be more beneficial at a local/Presbytery level than a broader "strategy" role at Denominational level.

## **6. Conclusions**

1. There is no overall consensus across the whole denomination at both congregational and presbytery level regarding the youth committee, resources, strategy or current role of CYDW. In fact the role of CYDW and the committee's overall strategy, including PIED, seems to have divided opinion between those who have benefitted greatly and those who have not engaged at all for a variety of reasons.
2. There are many positive comments regarding the youth committee, resources, strategy and CYDW, but also a significant number of criticisms.
3. The balance of positive and negative comments on resources, strategy and CYDW vary depending on Presbytery, and also regarding what the current children's and youth ministry is doing in the local context. Those who have benefitted from practical assistance and hands on help were far more positive. The clear conclusion therefore is that "on the ground" practical involvement, assistance and input is therefore highly valued, and where it is lacking, there is a desire to have it.
4. It is concluded that the CYDW role is helpful to those wanting to start new work and able for geographical reasons to have regular input, who agree theologically with what is being offered, who are not currently engaged in youth work, and who require hands on practical assistance. This would go some way to explaining the vast array of differing opinions found within the consultation responses.
5. It would appear that the job of strategist within CYDW role has been helpful but that this is now no longer the case and that what is being asked for instead is local, practical youth work input at a congregational level.
6. There is a strong desire from some congregations and also at presbytery level for the advice, input and help of a youth worker who would be within travelling distance of all congregations and therefore able to give hands on, practical support and stimulate discipleship in a presbyterial context.
7. At present the above has only been a minor part of the committee's strategy and the CYDW job description.

8. The conclusion is that the CYDW role has effectively come to an end, and that rather than a Children's and Development Worker with the aim of developing strategy and overseeing children's and youth work nationally, a different role, job title and job description is required.
9. It is concluded that the results of the survey should fundamentally shape any future strategy adopted by the committee, including any employee thereof.

## **7. Proposed Strategy**

In taking on board the breadth of opinions expressed by Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries found in the Consultation, the Youth Committee recommend the following steps as a way to answer both the acclaim received and criticism levelled at the current strategy, and formulate a more suitable strategy that fulfils the requirements expressed by Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries:

1. The committee strongly advises that any strategy going forward must prominently feature practical, local input into children's and youth work ministry, provided by suitable, gifted, local and trained personnel.
2. The committee therefore wishes to implement a significant alteration to the strategy employed between 2015 and 2018, a move away from "big picture" children and youth development including strategic thinking and planning, and a move towards local, practical input in children's and youth ministry that is tailored for the specific context and culture individual churches find themselves in.
3. It is the opinion of the committee that in order to effect the necessary change churches seem to be requesting regarding the trajectory, strategy and vision of the Youth Committee, the committee must focus less on strategy and more on practical local involvement. In order to accomplish this shift the current role of CYDW should not be continued beyond 2019, allowing resources to be redeployed in new, more practical and locally focussed ways.
4. Whilst acknowledging the request for a more practical and local strategy for youth ministry and deployment of resources, the committee also recognises the positive responses received mainly but certainly not limited to the Presbytery of the East, and suggests that a way forward is to employ (a) regional/presbyterial youth worker(s). Doing so would have a number of advantages, including reducing the scope of the role so that more time can be freed up for individual churches and practical involvement; reducing the geographical area the worker is responsible for which would have a further positive influence on time available in local contexts; the job description of this new presbytery youth worker role would focus more on local input rather than big picture strategy; this new role could further develop positive PIED strategy endeavours that have already begun.
5. There could in theory be up to 3 presbytery youth workers, one for each presbytery. By nature of this design these roles would be part time, possibly 14 hours per week, allowing each presbytery to partake if they so desire.
6. An obvious potential set-back for this plan is finances. The Youth Committee does not currently have the resources at their disposal to employ 3 presbytery youth workers even on a part-time basis, but it should be noted here neither does the Youth Committee currently have the resources to continue the post of CYDW beyond 2019. Whatever happens, it is likely the Youth Committee would have to seek help from the General Trustees. The only other option would be to have only one part time presbytery worker, a cost that the committee could currently meet. It would then be a decision on where best to utilise a part time youth worker post that would best honour



the request for meaningful local involvement – something that cannot realistically be done by one person across the whole denomination, not full time and certainly not part time.

In the name of the Committee

NATHAN R OWENS  
PHIL STEED  
MARTIN C KEANE

Convener  
Vice-convener  
Clerk