



review of 2015

- highlights from the year
- a look towards the future
- news on exciting developments



thrive
youth ministries

2015 was an exciting year for *Thrive* Youth Ministries and 2016 looks set to be even better.

After four years working with churches in Warwickshire to enable effective youth ministry, we're really starting to see the fruit of our work. This year, with a honed vision, potential for growth into children's ministry, and more partner churches than ever before, we really believe we will see youth work in the area changed, and more young people following Jesus.

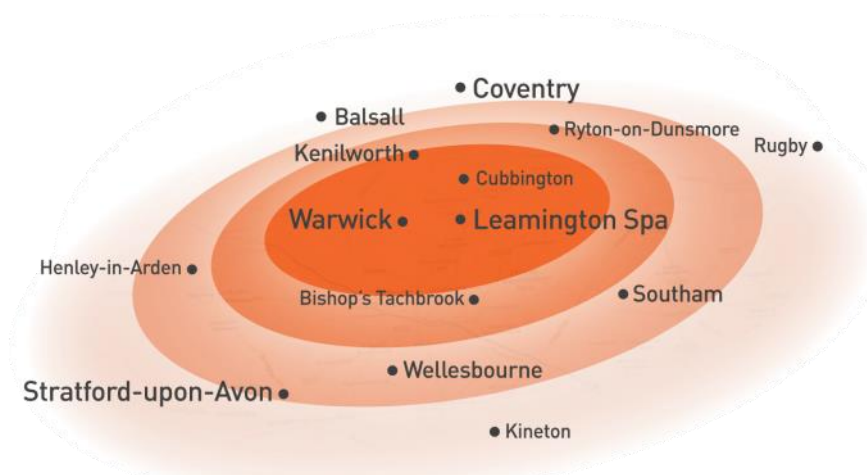
This review features some of the highlights from the last twelve months, and looks ahead to the exciting things on the horizon in 2016.

As ever, **thank you** for your support. We hope you enjoy reading about the difference you're helping to make.

Highlights of 2015:

- the launch of the *Thrive* partner church scheme
- seeing youth leaders supported and strengthened through mentoring
- *Resolution* youth and children's ministers' retreat, offering space for reflection and rejuvenation
- the continued success of the *First Sunday* service, with young people stepping up to leadership roles
- securing initial funding for the appointment of a children's ministry adviser.

Read on to find out more about the impact our work has had over the past year.



Children's Ministry Adviser

A main focus in 2015 was securing funds so we can appoint a Children's Ministry Adviser.

It's a simple truth that, in order to work with young people in churches, there must first be some young people in those churches.

'Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."'

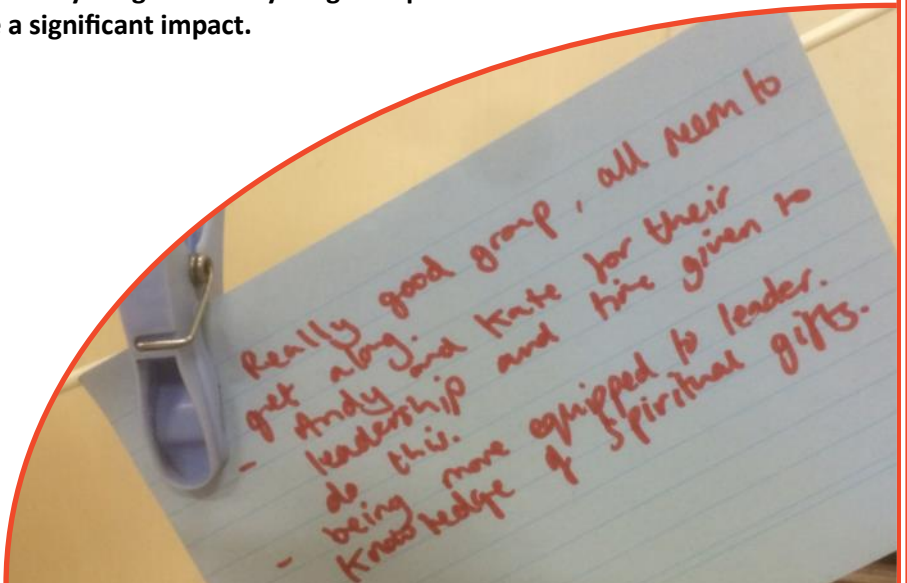
Matthew 19:14 (NIV)

Through conversations with church leaders throughout Warwickshire, Andy Castle, founder and director of *Thrive Youth Ministries*, and the *Thrive* trustees recognised churches are losing their young people before they can thrive for Christ. These churches would love to work

with *Thrive* to develop their youth work but, sadly, they do not have any young people in their churches. They have a children's ministry, with junior churches and Sunday schools each week, but these children drift away as they get older.

It is clear more needs to be done to help young people remain rooted in their faith so they can go on to fulfil their potential as disciples, as leaders.

In 2016, *Thrive* hopes to now be able to appoint a Children's Ministry Adviser who can work with churches to develop their children's work, and give children the opportunity to grow into young disciples in churches where *Thrive* can make a significant impact.



The Youthwork Network

Youth workers can often feel as though they're on their own. Churches may not have a strong youth ministry, or youth groups may meet apart from regular church meetings, and it can feel like working in isolation, with little support.

To help with this, *Thrive* holds Youthwork Network meetings once every half term to allow youth workers the space to share with each other their successes, best practices and frustrations. Most importantly, it's a chance to feel like they're not on their own.

Andy said: 'Everyone has a busy diary and it can be difficult to find time to meet with peers. But, sometimes, we can be too busy not to do it. We can't hope to achieve everything on our own so taking an hour to meet together, pray and share, can be just what is needed to go on and achieve more.'

Synergy is a key word: a group working together to produce more than the sum of its parts. Meeting with the Youthwork Network can produce this synergy. And the fact it's through a third party in *Thrive*, allows it to remain separate from church life, enabling openness and honesty.

'Youth workers are vital to the long term health of the Church. And so, the long term health of youth workers is equally important.'

The Youthwork Network meetings will be held throughout the year. Please contact Andy if you'd like to come along.



Thrive Partner Church Scheme

In 2015, we launched the partner church scheme. Churches are at the centre of our vision as we look ahead. Without the support of churches, both 'on the ground' and financially, we can't hope to see more young disciples of Christ. So, we've been looking at how we can develop our relationships with those we work with to ensure our resources have a significant impact.

We want to **build partnerships** with churches, working with a key person to look at what needs to change in their church to improve their youth work – and then to begin to make those changes. We want churches to be actively aspiring to embody the characteristics of a thriving youth ministry. And we need churches who will commit to supporting *Thrive* through regular giving as we work together to reach young people for Jesus.



In 2016, *Thrive* hopes to increase the number of churches signed up to the partner scheme as we believe it's one of the best ways of growing and developing effective youth ministry. Through recognising the vital characteristics a church needs to achieve this, and with regular support from *Thrive*, churches can help young people to be part of church life. We can then start to see them becoming more engaged, and growing Christ-like disciples and leaders.

By supporting *Thrive* financially, partner churches will be helping our work to continue, enabling more churches to benefit and, ultimately, more young people to come to know Christ.

If you'd like to know more, please contact Andy (andy@thriveym.org.uk) to discuss how he can work with you to achieve this vision.

Keep an eye on the *Thrive* website for regular updates: www.thriveym.org.uk

Characteristics of a Youth-Friendly Church

These 10 characteristics seem to be found in every church which is investing well in the next generation. The stronger a church is in displaying these characteristics, the better their youth ministry. A youth-friendly church may not excel in all 10, but will be aspiring to grow in them all. These characteristics are wrapped in the understanding and reliance on God, his leading and his providence.

- 1. Clarity of vision and purpose.** Having a clear idea of why and how you are trying to reach and disciple young people is essential for growth.
- 2. Agreed discipleship strategy.** It is vital to have an agreed plan for fulfilling the vision for youth.
- 3. Well planned programmes.** Well-planned programmes are essential for offering a life-giving, exciting and relevant youth ministry.
- 4. Committed leadership.** This is both a committed youth leadership team and church leadership, committed to seeing this area of ministry thrive.
- 5. Authentic worship.** One of the main reasons young people leave church is they don't experience 'authentic worship'. This is both about worshipping God in a way that is real to them as well as seeing others worshipping in a genuine way.
- 6. Intergenerational relationships.** Relationships across the ages are essential for a young person to feel loved, valued and wanted in a church family.
- 7. Youth contribution.** Young people need opportunities to develop their talents and gifts by contributing to the wider church life.
- 8. External outlook.** The church must have a focus on reaching out to the community and not merely focusing on keeping those they already have.
- 9. Engaged prayer support.** Everything the church does needs to be brought before God in prayer. There needs to be a clear way of enabling the church to pray for the youth work.
- 10. Funding for youth ministry.** Ideally, this should be a clearly defined budget for each year. This ensures that there is a clear expectation that the church will invest in young people.

By partnering with *Thrive*, churches will grow in these characteristics and see their youth ministry develop and thrive as a result.

Thriving Through Mentoring

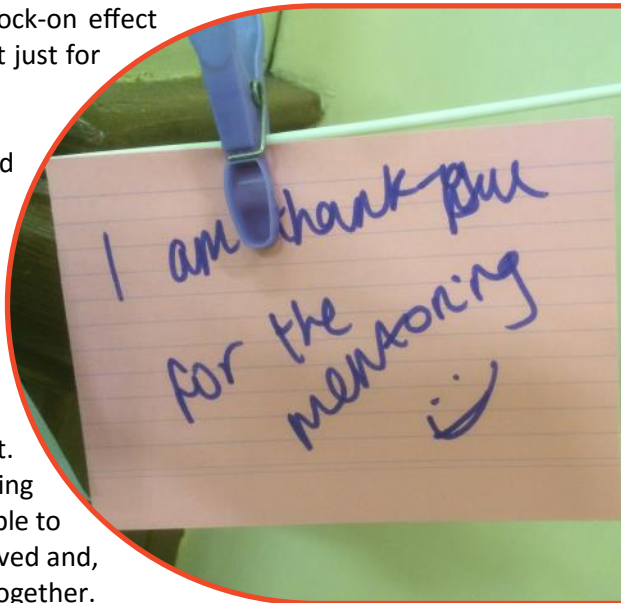
In 2015, *Thrive* supported youth workers through mentoring. Many youth workers feel isolated. Without an adequate support network, often people stay in roles for little over a year, burning out before they've had a chance to make a real impact on young people in their churches and communities.

To help change this, Andy currently acts as mentor to ten leaders in youth ministry. One of those leaders is Lou Thomas, Youth Minister at St Michael's, Budbrooke.

Lou said: 'Andy has been a fantastic encouragement to me in my role. It's great to have someone who not only listens but understands and can offer practical advice.'

Andy said: 'Mentoring is all about enabling a leader to grow in their gifts and abilities so they can fulfil their role to the best of their ability, and go on to help others to grow as well. The knock-on effect can have a massive impact – not just for the person being mentored.'

Lou added: 'Andy understood early on that I'm someone who needs confidence! When my team asked me to take on some up-front speaking, he encouraged me to go for it. He was able to help me see it from a different angle, and consider why they might need me to do it. By taking on the task of speaking from the front, my team were able to see I'm willing to really get involved and, as a result, it brought us closer together.'



'Andy is a great listener and always remembers the details from session to session. He's kept me focused and helped me find new ways of working with my team.'

Resolution: Spiritual Retreat

At the time of writing, we're preparing for this year's 'Resolution' spiritual retreat, taking place on 22-23 February.

The aim of Resolution is simple: to take like-minded ministers away, for just over 24 hours, to enable them to hear from God for the year ahead, both in their ministries and personal lives.

Each year the retreat has been a highlight of *Thrive's* calendar. What better way is there for leaders to start the year than to have spent time connecting with God and seeking his plans for the year?

'Useful time "away from it all" to refocus on God with good and clear teaching, support and guidance.' - 2015 attendee

This year, we return to The House of Bread, near Shipston-on-Stour, a wonderful Christian retreat centre with a real prayerful heritage. Each participant gets a bedroom to themselves (vital for a good retreat), most of which are en-suite.

If your church has an employed youth or children's worker, whether full or part time, do encourage them to come along. Resolution happens every February. It would be great if the church could enable them to come and to pay for their place. It's a great way of showing loving care for their staff.

To keep up to date with future Resolution retreats, visit:
www.thriveym.org.uk/resolution

Last year we explored how we can grow in confidence in the Living Lord, focusing on David's encounter with Goliath and his resources of five smooth stones. We also explored the challenges and pressures of leadership on our personal lives and looked at ways to live a more blended lifestyle.

This year we will spend some of our time exploring the balance between our work for God and our worship of God, a tricky balance for any Christian leader.



First Sunday

First Sunday is a service for young people, led by young people, held at Leamington Spa Baptist Church each month. The September 2015 service highlighted the important role the service plays.

The service had music from the regular young leaders' band and a talk from a former *First Sunday* leader. This return of one of their peers offered inspiration for the young people, showing where the road ahead might lead as they continue to grow as leaders and disciples.

Andy said: 'it's exciting to see the circle closed: a young person, developed into a leader, and now leading others. Of course, that leader's development hasn't ended, but they've moved on to a point where they are now helping others to become more like Jesus, and that is such an encouragement.'

The heritage of First Sunday can be seen in these young leaders.

Through this initiative, young people are developing deeper relationships with Christ, which is exactly why **Thrive** exists.

Two Castles' Run

Tom Stone, Jon Stone, Ross Caws, Bill Evans, Simon Whitley, Lisa Whitley, and Kirsten-Lee Davies, took part in the Warwickshire Two Castles Run in June, running for *Thrive*. These seven helped put our charity in front of thousands of people. That deserves a huge thank you.

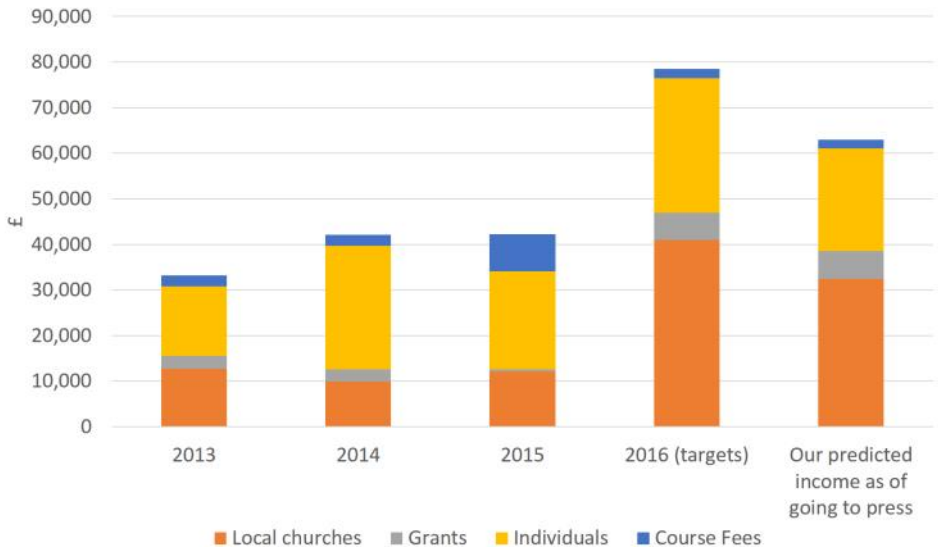


Tom Stone was one of the young leaders involved with the First Sunday youth service.

Thrive can't exist without supporters like these. Raising funds, or simply raising our profile, is vital to our ongoing ministry working with churches in Warwickshire to reach young people, and enable them to thrive for Christ. So, thanks to all our runners who helped more people see *Thrive*.

Finance Update

At *Thrive*, we are most grateful for the continued support of friends, both locally and further afield, as well as the help we receive from local churches. The reality is we cannot do what we are doing without this vital financial support.



Our income needs to increase significantly in 2016 as we believe God is calling us to employ a second member of staff. From Easter, we intend to employ a Children's Ministry Adviser to help us better support local churches and to fulfil our vision of seeing every church in Thrive's area with a thriving youth ministry.

We have spent time during 2015 fundraising for this increase. So far, thanks to some new regular giving from individual donors, a generous gift from a church and matched funding from Scripture Union, we are currently £15,500 short of our target for the year. This assumes that all planned giving is fulfilled over the course of 2016.

Thrive is associated with Scripture Union, who are in complete support over the appointment of a Children's Ministry Adviser. As a result, they have committed to match fund new regular donations towards *Thrive*. If you don't already give regularly to *Thrive*, **please consider setting up a standing order**. Further details can be found at www.thriveym.org.uk/supporting-thrive or get in touch via email: andy@thriveym.org.uk.

A Look Ahead to 2016...

It really feels like we've come to a 'crunch time' in the life of *Thrive*, and we hope to see God doing some great things this year.

Already we've had a fantastic youth weekend away in January, and there's the spiritual retreat coming up. We are organising a trip to Soul Survivor, so if your church wants to join us, get in touch.

Thrive is also running a course for worship leaders, looking at what worship is and developing leaders who can be 'lead worshippers', not just lead musicians.

And, we'll be appointing a Children's Ministry Adviser to enable the growth of children's ministry in churches. With more young people remaining in church, a thriving youth ministry can be nurtured, helping to develop Christ-like disciples, and building a strong future for the Church.

Thank you for your support and work over the past year. We look forward to working with you in 2016.

Andy and the Thrive trustees



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