



celebrating 5 years of
Thrive Youth Ministries



How wonderful it is to reach the fifth anniversary of Thrive Youth Ministries and to take the opportunity to reflect on all that has happened. For me, it is a constant reminder of God's blessing and goodness as we have sought to spread the Good News of Jesus amongst young people in our area.

What started out in 2011 as a simple way of offering support to youth workers, has grown over the years into an organisation that has worked with over 34 churches, offering advice to many more and investing in leaders who have the opportunities to reach many thousands of children and young people for God.

Many of us will know all too well the alarming statistics that keep being announced regarding how few teenagers there are in church these days and the bleak outlook this potentially has on the Church across the country. I believe Thrive exists because we can't accept these statistics; we won't accept them. It is hard to top the joy of seeing a young person put their life into the hands of Jesus and to learn to live for him. Their enthusiasm, commitment, hope and energy inspires me in my faith and is an essential ingredient of any church that wants to grow.

The journey so far has, at times, been surprising. We started out by providing a website we wanted to use to resource youth leaders as well as getting alongside leaders by offering mentoring support. Today, Thrive continues to offer these things as well as running regular training events and courses for both leaders and young people, as well as bringing Christian young people across the area regularly to build friendships and to worship God. We also now have another team member, Fiona Stutton, who joined us in May 2016 as our Children's Ministry Adviser, as we realised we



**is a local mission
partner of**



Thrive Youth Ministries

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it's been quite a journey...



The founding trustees of Thrive with Andy Castle, taken at our first meeting, October 2011, having signed the papers to bring Thrive into being.

as well as those who have served in the years since. Together, we have grappled with the challenges before us as we have looked to serve God in building his kingdom in our area.

These 5 years couldn't have happened without the generous support of churches and individuals. I am so grateful to each of them for their kindness and generosity. It is a wonderful testament to the provision of God. There have been a few times where the funding got very close to appearing to run out but then we would receive an unexpected gift, reminding us that God always pays for what he orders - we just need to make sure we are doing what he wants us to do.

I hope this booklet will help you have a better understanding of what Thrive has been trying to do over these years to help strengthen churches as they try to reach out and disciple young people. And, of course, as we celebrate 5 years, we want

to look forward, with enthusiasm, to the next 5 years and to dare to dream about where God may want to lead.

Thank you for your support and love.

Here's to the next 5 years!

Andy Castle
Founder and director,
Thrive Youth Ministries

needed to help churches with their children as well as their young people.

Thrive has never been about me. In practical terms, there have been many more involved from the start. I am so grateful to the founding trustees (see the photograph above, taken at our first board of trustees' meeting, October 2011)



investing in youth leaders

In 2011, there was a statistic that greatly influenced the launch of Thrive. The average duration of a youth worker in a church position was just eighteen months. There is no way that we can make a difference on this kind of short-term commitment. Thrive wanted to make a difference and to see if we can do something to adjust this reality.

Mentoring has always been at the heart of Thrive, offering to meet up with a leader on a monthly basis to offer a listening ear, support and to help them grow in their leadership ability, as well as enabling them to grapple with the difficult challenges and issues they face.

Youth ministry can be a lonely place for a leader. You feel like you have one foot in the adult church and one foot in the youth. This can feel like you don't actually belong in either. By offering mentoring, Thrive helps to remind leaders they are not

alone; that we understand and love what they are doing. We want to help those who are leading youth ministry as a vocation as well as helping those who give their time to lead voluntarily. The reality is we need more people in both roles if we are to see the quality and resilience of our youth work improve.

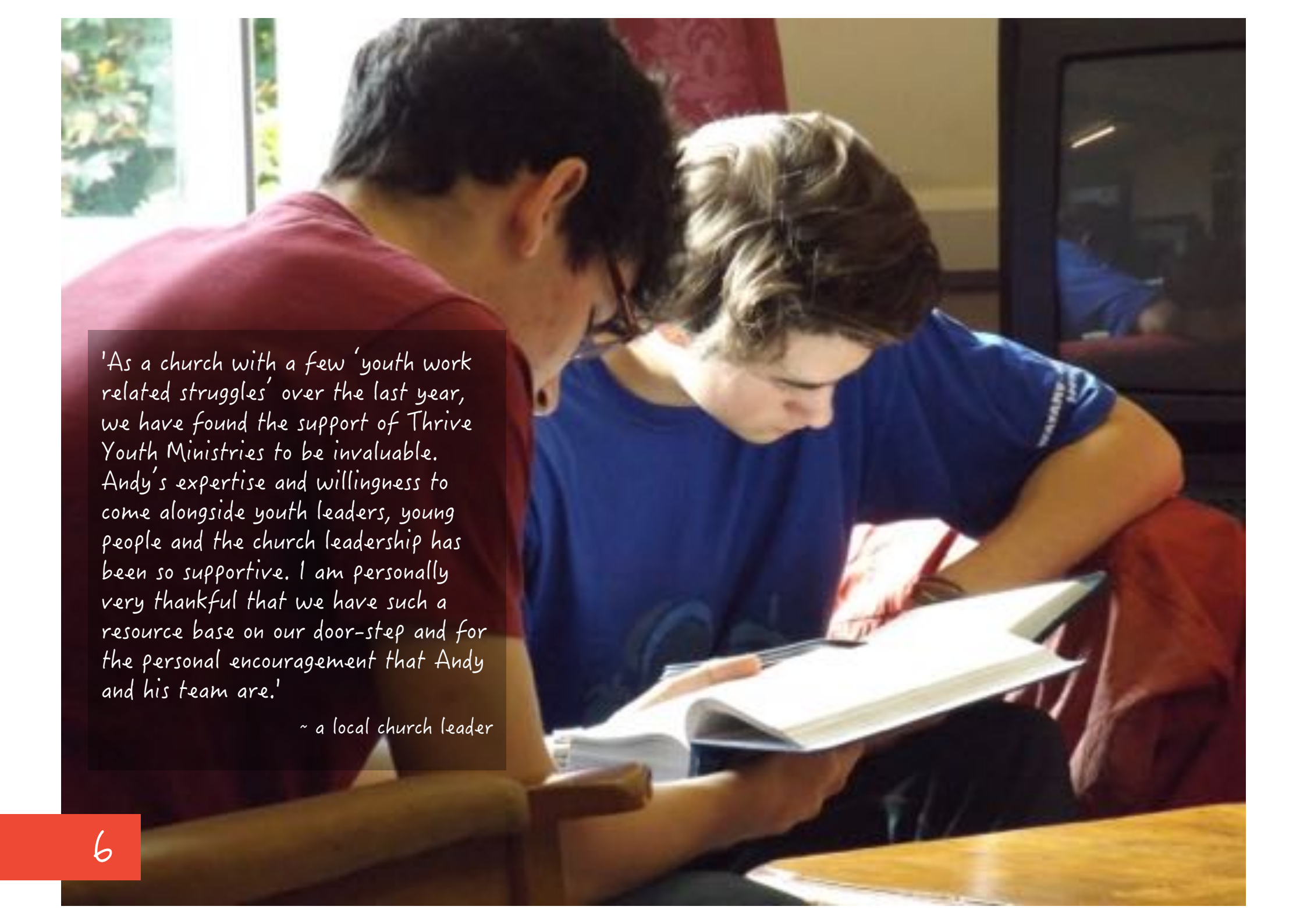
A typical mentor meeting takes place in a local coffee shop. It's important to meet away from the mentee's church or place of work, as it enables them to speak more freely. It's also a way that we can show we value them for what they do and buying a mentee a coffee is

one of the ways we want to thank them for serving young people. We might talk about how things have been over the past month, where they have seen God at work and what has surprised them. We will usually explore two or three key current issues before setting some goals or targets for the month ahead. Goal setting is important as it helps to measure development, but for some leaders, this is not what motivates them and so we make sure our mentoring style is adjusted for each leader. We often end by praying together and asking God to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.



'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.'

~ a local youthworker

A photograph of two young men sitting at a wooden table, looking down at an open book. The man on the left is wearing a red t-shirt and has dark hair. The man on the right is wearing a blue t-shirt and has light brown hair. They are both looking intently at the book. In the background, there is a window with a view of greenery and a red patterned curtain.

'As a church with a few 'youth work related struggles' over the last year, we have found the support of Thrive Youth Ministries to be invaluable. Andy's expertise and willingness to come alongside youth leaders, young people and the church leadership has been so supportive. I am personally very thankful that we have such a resource base on our door-step and for the personal encouragement that Andy and his team are.'

~ a local church leader

partnering with churches

American pastor, Bill Hybels, describes the local church as ‘the hope of the world’ as it is God’s plan for seeing his Kingdom grow on earth. At Thrive, we want to enable the church to fulfil its calling, which is why we don’t do youth work for a church.

We want to come alongside churches and help them develop and deepen their youth ministry, whilst at the same time always communicating that it remains their responsibility not ours. Research suggests that we fail young people when we recruit people from outside the church fellowship to carry out youth work on our behalf. There may be a perceived growth in numbers of young people, but the reality is when that leader leaves or the young person grows out of the youth work, there is a high chance that they will walk away from church and faith.

Thrive is committed to the long game on this. We realise change does not happen quickly but it does not mean that we shouldn’t pursue it. Youth ministry will only be truly healthy in a church when the fellowship is genuinely committed to reaching out and discipling young people.

Give us two or three leaders and we will come alongside a church, show them how to lead well, resource them with whatever materials they might need and to coach them as grow in their roles. But we won’t do it for them.

As a result, we developed a church partner scheme where a church commits to growing in their youth leadership. The scheme involves the church being committed to ten key leadership principles including creating a vision and strategy for the youth ministry, having a committed leadership and sufficient funds to enable growth. The church also commits to having a key leader mentored by Thrive as well as meeting up annually with the church leader to assess future plans and needs.

Our vision is for every church in our area to have a thriving youth ministry. Young people aren’t an optional extra to our churches, they are fundamental to our growth and our future existence. We are trying to help churches realise that God has given them all they need to develop this ministry. They need to see what that provision looks like and to grow in confidence and ability. The reality is that Thrive spends a lot of time cheering on leaders and trying to build up their confidence in their abilities.

developing young leaders

Thrive doesn't want to do anything which the local church can do itself. We want to complement what is happening, not replace. One way we do this is by offering training in leadership for young people. As well as providing oversight for initiatives such as the First Sunday monthly youth worship event, we have led several leadership courses.

We are currently hosting our sixth youth Growing Leaders course. Over the last six years, there have been over 50 young people, coming from over 10 different churches, taking part. We've also run a course for worship leaders twice, seeing 25 different young people learning how to lead others in worship.

The photographs on this page are of each of the six youth Growing Leaders programmes.

Investing in young leaders is a vital ingredient for Thrive. We want to do all we can to both impact the Church today and increase its potential impact in the future. Investing in young leaders, does both these things.



By helping young people to think through the leadership ability they have, as well as their leadership potential for the future, we are helping to raise equipped Christian young adults who might take God's love out into their future workplaces, as well as being strong leaders within the Church itself.

'Growing Leaders is the most useful course I've ever been on. Every session showed me something new about myself and about how to lead effectively, and all with a fantastic group of people who became some of my closest friends.'

~ participant on a youth Growing Leaders course

Andy Castle has co-ordinated all of these courses but they can't happen without the shared leadership of other leaders in the area. Kate Wallis, the youth minister at St Paul's Church Leamington Spa, has co-led all six programmes of the youth

Growing Leaders course, as well as hosting a youth Growing Leaders Refreshed weekend, providing further investment in the growing alumni from the course.

The Worship course has been run by Andy working alongside Gemma Willis, youthworker at the time at St Mark's Leamington Spa. For the second programme, Andy was joined by Ruth Ditch, a local volunteer youth leader and dance instructor, and Toby Harper-Lawrence, who was doing an internship with Thrive.

It's our hope that by running these programmes, we help raise the expectation amongst Christian young people that God not only has a plan and a purpose for their future, but He wants to build his kingdom through them now, today, in whichever churches and youth groups they are in and whatever schools they find themselves.





thrive youth

Thrive Youth is an exciting new project for 2017. It looks to build on the heritage of First Sunday, monthly youth worship events that have taken place at Leamington Spa Baptist Church over the last ten years and beyond.

At the heart of Thrive Youth is a desire to enable Christian young people to gather together, to create unity across the churches and for them to realise that to be a teenager and to follow Jesus is not unusual. Many churches only have a few young people in their youth group. Gathering youth groups together enables them to build

wider friendships and enables there to be a larger core number gathering to celebrate God's goodness.

Thrive Youth has three distinct streams to what it is trying to do:

* **Celebrate** - a chance to gather together five times per year to celebrate God's goodness in a youth-appropriate, relevant and

contemporary style

* **Events** - four times per year there is an event, with the primary purpose of building friendships across the churches, as well as providing opportunities for those outside the churches to be invited along.

* **Action** - the third stream provides a termly opportunity for the young

people to learn how to put their faith into action. This might be by gathering to pray together for their communities, looking at doing a social action project together or by gathering in school groups and choosing a way to bless their fellow students in their school that month.

We want to help Christian young people know that faith is not a private 'between God and you' faith, but faith is something where God wants to pour out his love onto us so that we, in turn, look to share that love with those around us. Setting Thrive Youth up with these three streams will enable this to happen better.

We've created a planning team, meeting monthly, to develop the different streams. Comprising of a mixture of local youth leaders and young leaders, there is a committed team who are seeking God and looking to develop Thrive Youth effectively.

We launched in January with a wonderful weekend away, where over 90 young people and youth leaders gathered together for a mix of fun, activities and teaching.

We want Thrive Youth to be open to all churches and for all young people aged 11-18. To know the latest plans, keep an eye on the website (www.thriveyouth.uk) or follow our Instagram account @thriveyouthuk





When we started Thrive, we developed our website to be a 'one-stop shop' for youth leaders. There are plenty of excellent resources and teaching materials available on the internet; the challenge is finding them. Thrive's website was designed to act as a big signpost to the best of the net. Alongside this, we wanted to use the website to act as a shop window for all that Thrive offers the local church.

Over the five years we outgrew our first website and launched our current site in 2014. In addition to providing the aforementioned, it also has a dedicated leadership blog, updated most weeks on key leadership issues.

One of the major advantages of having the website is that when a member of the team meets with a leader, they don't need to spend lots of time discussing resources, they can just point them to the website. This releases them to talk about deeper issues such as developing vision and strategy or how to improve the overall discipleship of their group.

The website also keeps supporters up to date with our news column. It also gives easy access to sign up to receive our regular e-bulletins, whether that's for supporter news, prayer updates or youth work news.

Since our latest website was launched, we have seen users from all over the world access the content, with an average of one thousand different visitors accessing the site each month. In fact, for the purposes of this booklet, we have discovered that there have been a total of over 29,000 different visitors to the website.

The website is one of the few ways we have of enabling many youth leaders with the same material. We create it with a hope that it will help further build God's kingdom amongst young people across Thrive's local area, as well as across England and the UK, and who knows how much further afield it might help.

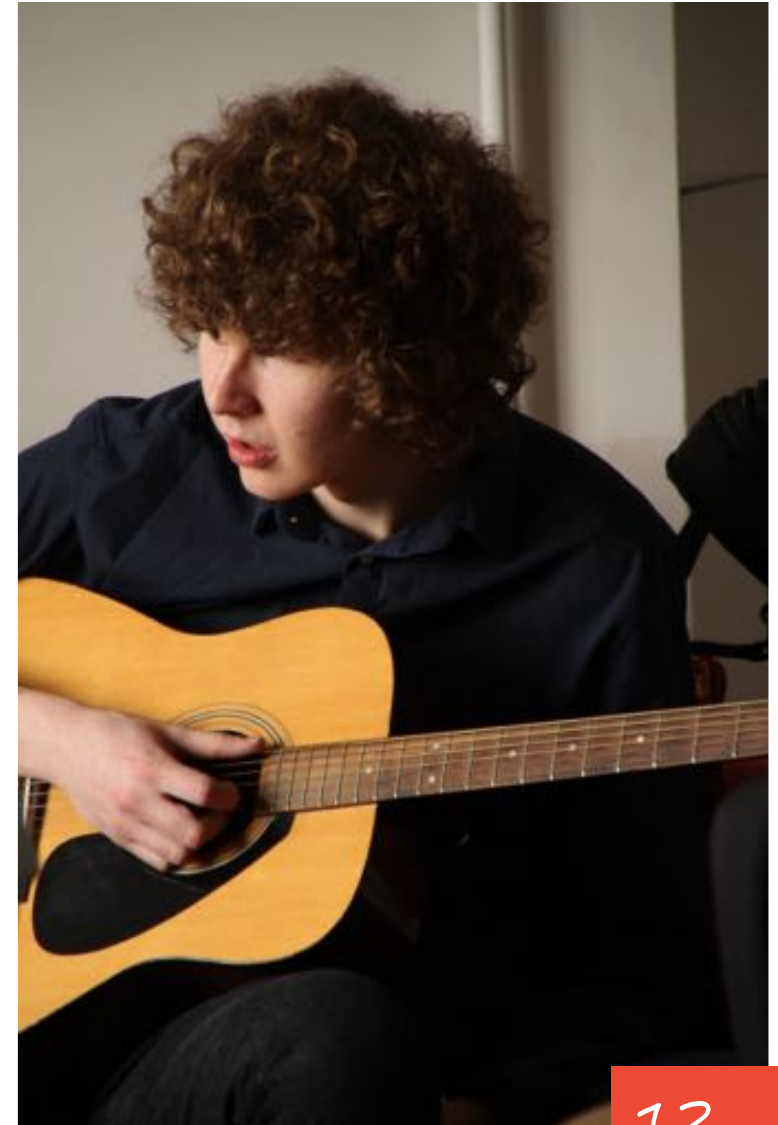
creating online support

Most read blog posts on our website

Our current website was launched in 2014. We thought it might be interesting to see which of our leadership blog posts had been read the most times. Here is what we discovered, our top 10 most read blog posts so far:

1. 10 ways you can help young people worship God
2. 5 ways to attract more young people to your group without even trying
3. 10 characteristics of a youth friendly church
4. Dealing with difficult and disruptive behaviour
5. All you need to host your youth prayer night
6. Simple ways to integrate young people into your church
7. Don't look down on young people, look up!
8. 5 reasons why a youth weekend is not an optional extra
9. How to lead engaging small group discussions
10. How to attract young people to your group intentionally

You can read these posts and more by visiting our website www.thriveym.org.uk and clicking on 'blog' or by searching by name using the search box.



expanding into children's ministry

One of the most significant developments, over the first five years of Thrive, has been our expansion into supporting children's ministry. The appointment of the vastly-experienced Fiona Stutton in May 2016 to the role of Children's Ministry Adviser has seen our work with churches significantly diversify.

As we shared the vision for Thrive, where we want to enable every church in our local area to have a thriving youth ministry, we started to realise that, for many churches, this is way beyond their possibilities. In fact, most churches don't have any youthwork provision. But they do often have children with whom they are trying to nurture faith.

It occurred to us that for us to see our vision realised, we would need to work with churches where they are and that means helping them develop and deepen their foundations with children's ministry, so that these children would grow up within the church and eventually form some kind of youth work within the church.

Fiona has worked hard, supporting churches and their children's leaders, both volunteers and vocational workers. She has developed a termly hub meeting, seeking to gather together all those involved in children's work to share ideas, inspire each other and to pray together, as well as developing various local area hubs for employed leaders in Leamington, Coventry and Rugby.

Fiona has over eighteen years of children's ministry experience in a variety of different church contexts so is

ideal for getting alongside struggling leaders. She also has a passion for puppetry and loves helping churches discover how they can use puppet presentations as part of their outreach to children.

It is interesting to see the opportunities that puppetry has for linking the generations as it an activity that often teenagers enjoy being involved with, as they perform their presentations to the children. Perfect for those

churches who don't have many young people but three of four, who might come together to work on such a project.

Statistics suggest that most people who come to faith do so by the end of their teenage years, and the majority of innovative outreach activities happen during the secondary school years. Our hope is that our involvement with church children's ministry will mean that churches will not be able to shy away from youth ministry as there will be a need for creative discipleship as their children become young people, or emerging adults.



leaders gather at our Coventry Children's network



Training youth leaders has been part of Thrive's vision since the start. Alongside building confidence in youth work, enabling leaders to have the necessary skills to lead effectively has been essential.

Over the years we have offered training in a variety of areas including building an effective youth leadership team, growing a thriving youth group, how to have meaningful conversations with a young person and building a vision and strategy for youth ministry.

Sometimes training has been open to all local leaders and sometimes delivered to one particular church. We offer training on whatever topics churches are most needing to be covered. Our experience shows that when we raise a subject with a group of leaders, there is always loads of discussion and these conversations are often the most helpful element of the training.

It's a real privilege to be able to sit with a team of leaders and to offer inspiration to help them be



more effective in reaching out and discipling young people.

Since taking Fiona onto the team, our training has expanded into our work with children's leaders as well. In 2017, she has created a varied training programme covering issues such as how to deliver engaging assemblies and

making the most of Messy Church.

Sometimes we have worked with our partner, Scripture Union, to deliver training. We did this to promote the Sticky Faith research material, revealing why so many young people grow up within the church but walk away from faith as an adult.

training and equipping

Scripture Union's Steve Hutchinson joined Fiona to deliver a very engaging training evening on how to run a successful holiday club. Fiona provided lots of ideas and inspiration, whilst Steve shared how SU has been committed for many years to enabling effective holiday clubs to take place. The holiday clubs represented had a combined total of over 600 children, so the opportunity for influence was vast.

That's one of the deep privileges of Thrive. Whilst we work with relatively few people, the number of people that each leader works with soon adds up to something very significant. In 2016 alone, we calculated that we worked with over 500 leaders, from many different churches, but the total number of children and young people they lead will be far greater.

'I have been on a few training courses and I have to say this was one of the best and so well thought through and well organised, the material shared was all relevant and the way it was presented was understandable and easy for any size church to pick up, with excellent new ideas.'

~ participant at a Thrive training event

Resolution is an annual spiritual retreat Thrive runs for employed youth and children's workers, as well as schools workers. Having time to invest in themselves is an essential part of keeping a leader healthy, and yet it is so easy to neglect this need. Each year, we take a group of leaders away for 24 hours and give them space to connect with their Heavenly Father, to seek his guidance as well as spending time connecting with each other and encouraging them for the journey of leadership.

It is always a privilege to lead **Resolution** and to have the opportunity to speak directly into the lives of these leaders, who are committed to seeing the next generation of young people come to know Jesus for themselves.

Looking to the future, we want to offer more training in addition to offering spiritual retreats for volunteers as well as those who are employed. Raising an army of youth and children's leaders who are passionate and also have the necessary skills is a key goal for Thrive, if we are to see our vision realised of every church having a thriving youth ministry.

the next 5 years...

And so to the next five years. What might they look like? Our overarching aim is to keep being obedient to whatever we believe God is asking us to do, as we seek to strengthen His Church in this area of England.

If you read recently published research, you will no doubt realise that the Church's work with young people is significantly failing them. Statistics suggest that the Church is only reaching 5% of children and young people in our society, leaving 95% completely unreached. Moreover, the 5% seems to be getting smaller as children often leave church when they get given the option.

Over the next five years, we want to work with more churches with their children's work, exploring how they can strengthen their existing contact with children and to be creative in starting new means of outreach.

We want to help churches start

new ways of reaching out to young people in their communities, in whatever way seems appropriate to the church, and its resources. Our lead will always be to seek God, to ask Him what He wants us to do through that church. He has a plan for us all, for each individual church, and for each young person to know Him. We need to ensure our starting point is always asking Him and we want to help churches do the same.

Our hope is that this area of Warwickshire breaks the national trend, and we might become a beacon of hope to the Church across the rest of the country. We already invest in existing youth workers and leaders. In

the future, we want to invest in those thinking of going into youth ministry. We want to help people explore this vocation, by developing a scheme where those sensing God's call into youth ministry, might be able to spend some time with Thrive testing their call. Following this, we are currently exploring the possibility of partnering with a national Christian youth ministry degree course. Thrive could then act as a catalyst for change by resourcing the local churches with committed, developing leaders to help them be more ambitious and courageous in reaching out and discipling the next Generation for Christ. Will you stand with us?



your support is vital



News

Keep up to date with Thrive's news via our monthly supporter e-bulletin and via our supporter's blog on our website.

Visit our website and you can subscribe to the supporter e-bulletin there.

Pray

We believe that nothing happens without the transformation only possible by God's Holy Spirit. Please would you pray for us? We send out a monthly prayer e-bulletin to our prayer supporters. Visit our website to subscribe or get in touch if you need us to send you a paper version.

Give

www.thriveym.org.uk/supporting-thrive

Thank you!

The reality is that Thrive can only continue to serve the Church through your financial support. Whether you can give £3 or £300, we make sure every penny is put to the best use:

£3 enables us to buy a youth worker a coffee as we support them. It shows love, appreciation and a listening ear

£30 covers the cost of a visit to a church to offer advice & support and suggest practical suggestions & direction

£100 enables a young person to take part in one of Thrive's training courses

£300 covers the cost of planning & delivering a training event for youth and children's leaders

news * pray * give

