



Vincent Fairfax Family
Foundation

CHRISTIANITY
CONSULTATION
OCTOBER 2019

Priority outcomes

Young people gain knowledge of and interest in Christian faith.

Young people have positive, engaging experiences that encourage their participation in Christianity.

VFFF's goal

Young people* are able to make life choices informed by an understanding of Christian faith and belief.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, VFFF introduced new funding guidelines that focus our Christianity funding on young people.

In October 2019, VFFF consulted with faith based organisations to help inform how this funding might amplify the initiatives that are exciting to young people and be informed by what young people are interested in.

The following presentation slides summarise this consultation and what the findings mean for future VFFF Christianity funding.

- *What are the exciting Christianity initiatives that young people are actively participating in?*
- *What do these look like? Why are they successful? How can more be done?*
- *Where are the examples of young people proactively shaping these activities?*
- *What about in rural and regional areas? Who is leading the way regionally?*
- *What needs to be done well to deliver effective youth ministry in churches?*
- *Consider your top three ideas to provide young people with positive experiences that encourage their continued participation in Christianity.*

WHAT WE ASKED

WHAT WE HEARD

WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKING FOR IN CHRISTIANITY ACTIVITIES?

- **To build a sense of connection and trusted relationships and to benefit from someone investing time in them** *'create the sense of possibility'*
- **An opportunity to take faith-based action, grounded in the notion of 'service' and often linked to social justice. This can take a local or international context.** *'If I join what difference can I make' 'thoughtful, generous engagement with the world'*
- **An opportunity to debate, ask questions and explore faith with both peers and other generations** *'Spark the sense of purpose, tackle hard topics, don't dumb it down' 'the safe, exploratory space to consider ideas with friends' 'build intergenerational spaces and don't silo the age groups' 'intergenerational ministry is growing and it needs to expand further'*
- **Activities that provide them with responsibility, autonomy and ownership and where their views are respected** *'their voices need to matter as equals' 'responsibility and authority has to be vested in young people' 'acknowledge and value what they contribute' 'help them run the show' 'they need to see that their voice matters and that they will be listened to'*
- **Activities that meet them at their point of interest/in their world – at community facilities, at sport, school, university, and that they can attend with peers.** *'the opportunity for 'the tribe' to come together and build a sense of belonging' 'understanding the gospel in the context of their world'*
- **The chance to interact with role models and get peer support, often from someone a few years older.** *'every four years you need someone new to invest in you' 'forge a relational connection with someone who is a bit ahead of them'*

WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN?

A mix of:

- **Events – to provide new reference points, alongside their peers**
- **Local and international ‘service’ – in and beyond their communities**
- **Camps – to provide new, fun activities, building a sense of community alongside their peers**
- **Local churches and in-community youth groups**

‘It’s all about new experiences plus ongoing connection and gathering points’

‘Provide the shared experience through catalytic events, provide access to leadership that models beliefs and values and the active, real experience for a young person to serve their local or other communities’.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

- **Activities grounded in traditional top down authority** *'Simply telling them what to believe won't work'*
- **Silo'ed approaches (such as one-off programs, denominational and by age)** *'break down the tribalism'*
'churches have boundaries that were built for another time'
'young people are post denominational'
- **Institutional settings, traditional teaching models** *'young people focus on the bottom up, not the top down'* *'it needs to be a long way from preaching a sermon to a large group'*
- **Making decisions for young people, starting with a set agenda and forcing the activities** *'keep it real'*

WHAT WE HEARD

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY IN INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES

- **Churches and ministries have to build community – a place where people can gather.**
- **Need to promote involvement of young people from a young age** *'there is a disconnect between when kids get to lead at school versus their role in churches'*
- **Alignment between the Senior Minister and the Youth Minister is essential** *'it often breaks down'*
- **Culture of the leadership team** *'has the whole church got a passion for and commitment to young people and the freedom to give young people a go' 'if its fit around other church activities it's destined to fail'*
- **Alignment in strategy** *'what is the strategy for young people and how does it link to the whole church strategy' 'good intentions aren't enough' 'make it part of the church DNA'*
- **Functional commitment to working with young people** *'time and money not theoretical' 'churches need to be able answer the question – how are they planning to meaningfully engage with and support young people spiritually and in other ways'*
- **To succeed, the whole Church trajectory is key – need to be on a growth trajectory financially and in other ways** *'a genuine prospect of longer term employment for the Youth Minister' 'part-time workers yield part-time results'*
- **Training and development to develop youth minister capabilities and the capabilities of volunteer leaders** *'the thriving ones emphasise effective training'*
- **Running programs is the easy part** *'many Senior Ministers just want to run programs' 'focus on the people not the programs' 'have to be creative in the offering – move beyond Friday nights' 'need to get beyond running the kids club and youth club to truly engage and support local communities'*
- **Highly reliant on having the right Youth Minister** *'some see role as a stepping stone not the end point' 'need to find those that think beyond their Church'*
- **Who are they training up to deliver the work** *'it only grows if young people invite their peers'*
- **It's tough to build it from nothing** *'local church engagement may not provide the crowd' 'very few Youth Ministers have the entrepreneurial energy to start things from scratch'*

THE RURAL AND REGIONAL CHALLENGE – WHAT'S A GOOD ROLE?

- Rural and regional young people want connections and training – provide them with the opportunities to attend large gatherings *'see a different world – help overcome the barriers for them'*
- Need to find the trusted local leaders, those that empowers others around them and are more willing to work together
- Provide a relational commitment to rural and regional churches and young people *'keep turning up'. 'build credibility and move beyond words to actions'*
- Tap into the regional networks and build their points of connection

WHAT WE HEARD

IDEAS: WHAT ELSE DID WE HEAR?

- **Investing in developing young leaders to mentor others (and via the activities that young people are interested in).** *'help young people to see someone like them 'out the front'*
- **Provide young people with a new experience outside of their immediate reference points (events, road trips, camps).** *'it's the safe entry point to build connection'*
- **Provide the communal spaces and the content that enable young people to engage, be supported and be coached by more experienced people.** *'ongoing shared commitment of support for young people'*
- **Support those who connect the parts - the events, the local churches and other ongoing ways to participate.** *'Who is bringing the various players together' 'not all events have thought through 'the after' 'who is helping young people integrate faith into their everyday life – I don't see a lot of it'.*
- **Support online initiatives** *'the online world is where it's at and we need to catch up' 'the online world isn't harnessed yet'*
- **Fund thought leaders and practice leaders to shift practice** *'need a multiplication factor, some kind of network'*
- **Provide young people with the opportunity to take action and serve** *'they need to be able to play a meaningful role'*

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BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: WHAT IT MEANS FOR VFFF

- The Christianity funding goal and outcomes developed in 2018 are well targeted, provide the right strategic frame and should be retained.
- It is important to retain a cross-denominational focus in Christianity funding, recognising that young people increasingly connect across denominational and other boundaries. It would be too restrictive for VFFF to solely fund in a single denomination.

- We recognise many similarities with the core aspects of our *Thriving People and Places* granting:
 - beneficiaries/community at the centre *'youth-led'*
 - the value of multiple connection points and pathways *'support those who connect the parts'*
 - the importance of working with others *'healthy churches need to partner with others'*
 - breaking down siloes *'build faith communities of practice'*
 - the value in overcoming participation barriers in rural and regional settings *'young people cannot access these experiences and get so much more out of it when they do'*
 - There are many highly successful youth ministries in churches and attendance at a local church undoubtedly remains the main way that people consistently practice their faith. However, this consultation has highlighted the challenges for youth ministry in churches and the numerous factors that need to line up for it to be effective in an individual setting.
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WHAT IT MEANS FOR VFFF

- These findings demonstrate that taking a church by church approach is challenging from a granting perspective. The best role for VFFF to play is to support those Christianity organisations that work alongside multiple churches, providing a complementary role to the work of churches and introducing a multiplication factor for churches' work with young people.
- There are many examples of organisations working this way and with a focus on the activities that young people are looking for:
 - Organisations that deliver large scale youth events or activities
 - Organisations that meet young people 'in their world'
 - Organisations that act as faith explorers for young people
 - Organisations building the capability of churches to engage with young people
 - Organisations that provide a variety of integrated activities and connection points
- VFFF will therefore not prioritise new funding requests from individual churches.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR VFFF