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Trustees Annual Report Financial Year End 31st March 2023

Purpose of Organisation

Ballysillan Youth For Christ has been established to work alongside local churches and community organisations to see children, young people and young adults in Ballysillan experience, share and be transformed by the love of God, supporting them in meeting their needs, improving their conditions of life and helping them reach their full potential; socially, spiritually, educationally, physically and emotionally.

Charitable Purposes

- The advancement of education
- The advancement of religion
- The advancement of citizenship or community development

Benefits to flow from purpose

The direct benefits which flow from this purpose include the availability of on going support, improved educational outcomes, improved emotional well being, increased confidence and self esteem, a greater desire to participate, increase in social skills, greater understanding and appreciation of difference and diversity, development of citizenship and leadership skills, promotion of healthier lifestyle including reducing damaging behaviour, learning new practical skills and increased spiritual development in the lives of local young people.

Beneficiaries & Overall figures

- We delivered 20 youth programmes for those aged 7-25, most engaging twice weekly
- We also ran a summer scheme, which included 2 summer camps, a week long kids club and football camp, plus a social action week
- Our community programmes included our counselling service, mums and tots, womens fitness, friendship group, general community liaison work and detached
- Finally, as a “drop in centre” our doors are ‘open’ and additional to our programmes and services we constantly have people, young and old, calling in to say hello, grab a chat, have a cuppa or get some advice.

This year the BlueHouses engaged with:

- 512 young people
- 351 young people aged between 7 and 24 through centre activities
- 200 males, 151 females
- We engaged with 304 young people through regular weekly activities
- The remaining 47 were young people engaged only in summer activities and detached
- The additional 161 were engaged through schools work (88 male, 73 female)
- 271 young people attended drop in
- 86 young people participated in group work
- 13 young people participated in mentoring activities (including educational support)
- 214 young people participated in summer activities, 62 of these at football camp
- Our counsellor delivered 113 counselling sessions to 11 clients
- Our womens work engaged 74 women in total, 31 at fitness programmes and 50 at Mums and Tots, with an overlap of 7 women (41 babies and toddlers engaged)
- Our community liaison work supported 39 families.
- Our Friendship Group engaged 6 senior women fortnightly
- Our 5 full time staff and part time “counsellor and family support worker” were supported by 4 part time staff, 1 full time volunteer and 25 volunteers and 6 young leaders

Through all our programmes we have 6 key differences that we are trying to achieve for young people:

- Enhanced personal capabilities
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Greater level of engagement in peer group and community
- Increased appreciation of difference and diversity
- Development of life and leadership skills
- Faith development

Equally, we recognise that these are not the only differences made in the lives of young people, their families and the local community, and we continue to be open to all aspects of how our work can help young people reach their potential through faith, hope and love.

Main Activities to further Purposes

Junior Programmes

- Junior Drop In

Senior Programmes

- Joinery Club
- Yr8&9 Boys Group
- Music Group
- Senior Drop In (yr10+)
- Yr8&9 Girls Group
- Mixed Wednesday Group/Life Skills
- Year 10 girls group
- Yr8-10 Drop In
- Senior Girls Community Relations Group
- Year 11 Boys Group
- Young Leaders
- Faith Group
- Friday Night boys

Academy

- Life Skills
- Music
- Education

Mentoring

- Girls - lots of sporadic meet ups but nothing formal
- 7 Boys
- 4 Girls and 3 Boys also given educational/homework support

Community

- Detached
- Community Liaison
- Friendship Group
- Summer Breakfast & lunches
- Helping Hands Homeless Project

Schools Work

- Primary RE Lessons
- Football Coaching
- Classroom & Education support
- Homework Club

Counselling & Family Work

- Counselling

- Ladies Fitness
- Mums & Tots
- Running Group
- Ladies Joinery

Programme overview

In August 2021 we had two new workers begin, Jamie, our male youth worker, and Sarahanne, our counsellor and family support worker. With their gifts, talents, vision and passion they have brought strength to our existing work and opened doors to new adventures and programmes. Sarahanne's role in particular has brought greater foundation to the wraparound and systemic approach to working with the whole family, in particular women, and as a result we now have a Mums and Tots group and three women's fitness groups per week which are bringing life, community and so much more.

With the employment of a male worker as well as a counsellor and family support worker in 2021, you could notice the foundations of their work beginning to grow and flourish in 2022, with a strong wraparound and systemic approach to all of our work. Alongside Mums and Tots and the fitness groups a DIY programme for women was also birthed, where the women were not only upskilling, but finding a safe place to share about all aspects of their life.

In July 2022 Lydia joined us as female youth worker, to both support Louise in the work she is doing, but also to release her into new areas, such as tackling educational poverty. This saw the introduction of a homework club, as well as 1-2-1 support both in the schools and the centre. Life skills group was also another huge success, growing young people with high levels of neurodiversity into a safe group who now integrate into drop in.

Having Lydia as 2nd female worker has opened up so many doors. Her 1st and 2nd year group and the blending of two different friendship groups and the distance travelled, especially by those with more obvious additional needs is just insane. In May, Marcy, 12, said "I can be myself here" and then proceeded to talk about the "old her" and "new her" since she started coming to Bluehouses.

The transformation in her as well as some of her peers has been off the scale. I would go as far as saying it has completely transformed their childhood and as a result their adolescent and teenage years will look a lot different to what they would have, which would probably have been sitting in the house on a phone and never socialising. The BlueHouses has "changed their lives".

Our 3rd night of drop in, "intermediates", introduced the year previous year, has really flourished. Jamie highlighted the "cross facilitation" between the very different groups of young people who now attend and call BlueHouses their home. The "distance travelled" by each individual is huge, and differences may seem small in the grand scheme of things, but when you have knowledge of the individual backgrounds and stories of the young people involved these small things are incredibly significant and massive indicators of personal growth and development. In really simple ways drop in is functioning to help young people in Ballysillan overcome adversity - whether its ASD or ADHD, social anxiety, ongoing trauma, family association, poor self esteem. All great Kingdom work - and markers of the love we have for these young people as we bring them closer towards faith in Jesus which we know is the most powerful and important thing we can achieve in their lives.

We also had the pleasure of introducing a new Senior Boys group, growing a group of 15 year olds to meet regularly each week who are normally involved in Anti Social Behaviour. Highlight was a very memorable residential in January!

Other key highlights were the return of football camp in July, a real core element of what we do, as well as a linchpin of our summer programme. In July and August we had youth and community work on for 44 days (25 in July, 19 in August) over 97 separate sessions (morning, afternoon or evening). Within those sessions 122 different group activities/engagements took place.

In December we delivered a carol service and "journey to bethlehem evening". These were both really special evenings, and a privilege to bring hope, joy and Jesus to many. Mason, 13, summed it up about this month and season, but maybe it says it overall. He said "I love how Bluehouses brings God to the community."

As we reflected at the end of 2022 we noted God was moving and we were seeing change. Sometimes it happens quickly, and other times it's the longer game, but across all programmes there was such a huge sense of community. This had been a slow burner across 2022, but a year on from the last real Covid panic, you felt that sense of togetherness through a place of safety was growing again.

This bled straight into 2023 and you could just feel how significant this place had become for so many people. For some that has been over a very short period of time, for others well that has been years. These quotes from January can highlight what we are trying to say here.....

Sylvia from Friendship group..... "It will be 19 years soon since my husband died. To be honest I've never truly got over it. The only thing that has got me through is coming to Bluehouses and my wee group I get to go to."

As Louise, our Senior Youth Worker put it....."What a powerful reminder of the impact being present for people can make...the power of availability and connection".

Our programmes now have 3 delivery streams:

"BlueHouses Youth Development"

Relational youth work to enable people to journey with young people and enable them to reach their full potential
Areas include: Drop Ins, Group Work, Mentoring, Young Leaders, Community relations, Educational Support, Schools work (R.E. lessons, Football coaching), Summer programme

"Bluehouses Academy"

Skill based programmes // Term time 8-10 week courses
Work with small group of young people or 1-2-1 // Relational and practical
Examples include: Cookery, Joinery/Woodwork/DIY, Music, Arts & crafts

"BlueHouses Community Development"

Relational work with the whole community, women, men, parents, families, journeying with them to enable each one of them to reach their full potential
Areas include: Counselling, Community Liaison/Crisis Intervention/Visitation, Parenting Groups, Detached work, Friendship Group, Ladies fitness, Running Club, Table Tennis, Mums & Tots, Community Breakfasts, Gathering, Volunteer development, Summer programme

Trial runs of Academy programmes have proved to be very successful, particularly with cookery and also the music sessions. As a result of all the above across the year we have facilitated 21 youth programmes (not including summer scheme) most of which happen on a regular weekly basis. This work is now even further complemented by additional community programmes.

Key examples of activities linked to charitable purposes

The advancement of religion

We are able to demonstrate our impact in this area by using the following key difference which we track each year:

Difference 6: Faith Development

Indicators

- Young people engaging in prayer
- Young people engaging in conversations about faith and exploring God's Word
- Young people choosing to follow Jesus

What difference has been made?

For many young people who attend the Bluehouses they have little to no contact with a local church, many come from families who don't express any faith, and the only real understanding they have of the Christian faith is

through what they might learn in RE within school. That said, what we have observed over the years is that our young people are incredibly open and extremely curious. Faith and prayer underpin everything within the Bluehouses and our ethos permeates every programme, even though we may not always use our words to communicate this. An example of this faith in action can be seen no more in this quote, referencing a near tragic event at a bonfire in July 2021 - "I totally believe there is a God, especially from what I witnessed on the 11th night. The fact that Marcus is still alive is a miracle and the fact that the BlueHouses is here, was open that night and had lots of people working shows me that God exists" Jake, 15

That said, there are many opportunities each week for us to use both our words and our actions to share the message of the Gospel, and to engage young people in prayer, conversations about faith and exploring God's word, and even helping them to follow Jesus. Relationships with people who love Jesus and opportunities to experience the Kingdom are the two things that have had the most significant impact on our young people's faith development. Our team of incredibly committed staff and volunteers build long term meaningful relationships with young people, and as part of that have the opportunity to share their own stories. The message that speaks loudest however is that young people in our centre are loved and accepted, no matter where they come from or what they come with. Young people consistently describe the Bluehouses as "their second home", "the family I got to choose", "people I can trust" and it is from that place that they are often most open to questions of faith. Through providing opportunities to experience worship, prayer, teaching and serving (to name but a few) young people receive an invitation to go on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and what a life with Him in it might look like.

Of the 512 young people we have engaged with, approximately 331 have experienced significant progress in terms of faith development. This figure includes 221 young people who are engaging in RE lessons on a weekly basis, and a significant number of our very committed regulars who attend drop in, a group work programme and are mentored. We have also observed some progress among another 62 young people involved in these programmes. The 119 young people who have yet to experience progress include 106 sporadic attenders and the additional 13 young people we connected with through summer activities and detached.

At the Bluehouses we have learned from experience that it is wise not to underestimate the "small beginnings" and so it could be that young people find themselves arriving early for a programme and ending up in the prayer time with the leaders, or they find themselves having a chat with a volunteer about their faith, asking for prayer or praying for others in our prayer room. This year a lot of detached work was on the green space beside the centre, where the bonfire was being built - this gave many opportunities to talk and pray with young people who were vulnerable about coping with covid, their family situation, their drug habit and their loneliness.

At the other end of the scale had 10 people involved in a Faith Exploration Group, 14 attending Summer Madness and Summer Camp and asking deep life questions, two 15 year olds meeting Jamie to specifically look at the Bible, 8 involved in a Bible Study, and a 13 year old really exploring where he was with God in an after schools conversation with two of our staff. After our Christmas events and Candy Cane deliveries he quoted "I love how Bluehouses brings God to the community."

Sandwiched in between those 2 ends of the spectrum there might be 1000 tiny steps, formed out of conversations, or prayers, or experiencing the Holy Spirit, or doing something kind for their neighbour (who might just happen to live on the other side of the world) or asking a question, or listening to a volunteer on the 'Hot Seat', or listening to a worship song. Wherever young people are on the journey, we are committed to them, no matter what decision they reach in regard to faith.

How do we know this is being made?

Young people are engaging in prayer and conversations about faith, an average of 30 per week make use of our prayer room, and it is often through mentoring and group work that there is the opportunity to go deeper. To provide a flavour of our conversations this year, we have discussed: family, Health, forgiveness, thankfulness, exams, future, Jesus' death and resurrection, the christmas story, fears, sexuality, church, what is love?, who is your neighbour?, helping others, worship, legacy, the good shephard, the armour of God, hopes and dreams, and all the while wrestling with the doubts and questions that inevitably come up. Encouragingly we have young people who aren't just open to being prayed for, but are courageous enough to do the praying, whether that be for their friends or family, especially when they are sick or simply saying thank you to God for something.

One example of this was at Senior Drop In with KC (and ALM), both 14 and female, about prayer/faith/God. KC spoke so openly about turning to prayer regularly, they shared about answered prayer and we chatted a little about how it's hard when prayer isn't answered as we would like it to be - KC said "yeah like when you pray for certain people to stay alive and they don't." Just a really mature, lovely chat. Great to have space to affirm KC in her decision to pray, encouraging her to keep going and that she isn't odd for doing it, most people pray to something - it's just about sharing more of who God is with her.

Several powerful conversations came with NT, JP and LS, all 17 and male. Lydia, our youth worker noted - "Just an amazing conversation with the guys - what a privilege. They were all sharing that they pray - NT first talking about praying, and that he has seen things change. We encouraged that this was an answer to prayer and to keep praying! Jake opened up about praying for his friend who was in an accident years ago, who died last year. We talked about how that's hard, and prayer is tough sometimes. LS shared that he prayed for his Granda last week in hospital and he's out and doing well. NT opening up about his family situation and his feelings gave us the opportunity to comfort and let him know that we will be praying for him and to encourage him to keep going."

One thing, well person, our young people have prayed for more than anything this year, has been Grace, our full time volunteer, who has been with us for 7 years. She has been diagnosed with cancer. This has led to conversations in every aspect of our work, from mentoring, to group work to drop in. In February we held a special evening for Grace, where she could tell her story. 120 people attended from all areas of the country.

This has opened conversations right across BlueHouses programmes. In Senior Drop In we chatted with a group of 14 about Grace and her cancer. Grace wanted them to know that she is remaining faithful, prayerful and hopeful. This led to a further conversation about miracles. In year 10 girls group Grace's situation brought about a conversation about faith and trust and what that means. How do we trust in something we can't see? How can people remain so faithful and trust when really bad things happen? ALM shared a story about her family that helped the other girls understand.

Other significant moments in the year included:

Senior Drop In - PM, 15, male picked up a bible when he came into the pool room "this is a load of rubbish, you know that right?" Jamie asked him why he thought that - soon Myles came in, PM asks, "Here Myles what do you think of the bible - it's a load rubbish right?" Myles said he thought the stories were made up to justify the moral teaching, how to live well etc, which were good things. The rest of the boys came and we had a full 30 min conversation about what they believed about God, the bible, purpose, life after death - absolutely brilliant!

Summer Madness - Jamie spoke in the YFC venue on the theme of "Encounters with Jesus" looking at stories of people in the bible whose lives were changed when they met Jesus. All our YP were incredibly respectful - they were open that it wasn't their sort of thing, and that they struggled with listening but they all made an effort to engage. MM said afterwards "my favourite part was the real life stories" and some of the boys were moved nearly to tears at times when the stories touched on their own life experiences. RM said "my favourite part was the facts about the history of Jesus, I'd never heard that stuff before." BK agreed to pray for Jamie before the final session which was significant.

Summer Camp - The theme for the week which Jamie unpacked each evening was 'Why I am a Christian' through teaching, as well as providing a good amount of space to respond in small group conversation. Most of our boys engaged really well with this and we had some significant conversations, moments to pray and to answer questions they had.

Summer camp provided one other highlight. A few hours after one evening session leaders were hanging out in the communal space and our boys came in with C saying, "Right are you gonna pray with us or not?". Turns out they weren't joking and genuinely wanted us to pray with them. Jamie lead the prayer, thanking God for each of them by name. T said, "We should do that every night!". It was really special, and set the tone for a really fun, wholesome hour or so of banter with them.

RE Lessons in 2 Primary Schools - the 221 pupils involved creatively explored topics such as Old Testament characters, parables, Easter, Christmas, the Lords prayer, Jesus and the disciples. The questions from these children are amazing, and often mature and astute. One 8 year old boy asked "So if a disciple is someone that follows Jesus, does that mean all Christians are his disciples?"

Mentoring always throws some awesome chats. One conversation ended up with a 12 year old male ended up with these quotes....“God is gay”, “God is adopted” “Jesus came from a chicken” “Jesus was a good man who helped people” “I believe God made us but it's hard to believe - where did he come from?” Let’s just say the conversation was interesting!

With regards to young people choosing to follow Jesus, we believe many young people believe in Jesus, but with regards to following him, there isn’t a clear openness. Cameron, 12, however, piped up during Intermediate drop in and asked "If bad people go to hell, and they are punished by Satan for what they do - does that kind of make Satan good for doing that?" This flowed into a conversation in which he shared that he was a Christian, but no one else in his family are Christians. I asked him how come he is one or how come he believes and he said I just feel like God is there, there was no doubt about God's existence. He then asked "If Jesus died on the cross for our sins, does that mean that even if you do something bad you get to go to heaven?" and "what is a lukewarm Christian?". Just a great conversation and definitely one to pick up with him as he stands quite alone in his faith, but love that he felt strong enough to share this.

Finally, another significant observation we have made this year is how young people might begin to grasp and live out elements of the Kingdom, even before they have made a commitment to following Jesus. The commitment of our young leaders reflect this on a weekly basis, and other acts of service has involved 66 young people involved in social action projects, including the collection of 27 bags of rubbish and the delivery of 200 flower pots and 2000 candy canes. Our “Helping Hands” Homeless outreach project, also involved, 4 young people aged 16-18.

Key Quotes:

Junior Drop In

"God died for us, treat others the way you want to be treated" MMc

"Thankful that Jesus died for me." TC

“Believe and Achieve” AC

“I’m praying for our wee Ballysillan to stay safe”

Senior Drop In

“What can I say? Heaven is here” Mark, volunteer

“I love that all the leaders want to listen, and no question is too weird. I love exploring my thoughts here” Female, 15

“Never would I thought that the prayer room would be my favourite place” NT, male, 17

Intermediate Drop In

“I love how Bluehouses brings God to the community.” (young person, 13 year old boy)

“I love going to the prayer room. It makes me feel so safe” MH, female, 12

Year 8&9 girls

After seeing street preachers in town MH, 12 said “Yous are good Bible bashers, you don’t yell at us!”

RE

“So if a disciple is someone that follows Jesus, does that mean all Christians are his disciples?” Male, age 8

Mentoring

“Why does something so crap happen to someone like Grace, its mad as she is so nice” CR, 11

Summer Camp

“I liked the stories and historical facts about Jesus in Jamie’s bits.” MA, 15

Ladies running

“ At the end of the day, when it all comes crashing down, God is the only one we can really turn to.”

The advancement of citizenship or community development

We are able to demonstrate our impact in this area by using the following key difference which we track each year:

Difference 5: Development of Life and Leadership Skills

Indicators

- Quality of young people's participation in volunteering opportunities
- How young people describe their leadership ability
- Number of young people achieving new practical skills

What difference has been made?

As an area Ballysillan continues to be characterised by low aspirations, poor educational achievement and unemployment, and frequently young people can lack the confidence to lead or think they have little to contribute. For example, the North Belfast Constituency Report records that Belfast North had the lowest proportion of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs, and the lowest proportion of over 16s enrolled in higher education. Around 50% of people living in the area surrounding the Bluehouses have no or low level qualifications and Ballysillan is one of the most deprived areas in NI for education, skills and training, ranked 47/890 on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure.

The development of young leaders has been something we have focused on increasingly over the past number of years to help young people learn, develop in confidence and skill, to make achievements they can be proud of, and to give them an opportunity to invest in their own community. In terms of the 'distance travelled' we feel that the quality of experience for not only young leaders but young people in general has continued to improve this year.

As in previous years, we have focused on a 3 dimensional approach; to provide opportunities for young people to volunteer, to offer relevant training, and to give young people a voice in identifying their needs and how we as a centre can respond to those needs. This strategy has been underpinned by young people's ongoing involvement in other core programmes which has increased their self-esteem and subsequently their willingness to lead. We have also observed a knock on effect as these young people set an example to their peers, or those younger than them, who then grow in confidence, ask 'When can I be a young leader?' or simply want to be around them. Over the past year we've observed 35 young people experience significant progress in terms of improved leadership skills (13 involved in young leaders programme, 6 at youth committee, 12 through summer football camp, 4 through helping hands). Many of these young leaders were committed to ensuring that our programmes were delivered to an exceptional standard.

Approximately 40 young people have started to experience progress, this includes those who are beginning to be developed through age appropriate opportunities within the programmes they attend. Young people demonstrating leadership by choosing to use their initiative and influence well has been a significant part of both group work and drop in. Examples of these natural leadership moments include:

Mixed Group - JCr stepping up and taking the lead during the cookery session and guiding others on what to do when they weren't sure.

Year 10 girls - KC is a complete HERO! She has a complete understanding of what it means to be an example to others. She helps tidy up at the end of the session and helps out a lot with the organisation of our supplies.

Intermediate Drop In - Cooper and the girls asking could they clean the kitchen!

Junior Drop In - LW played Fifa even though he admitted that he wasn't very good at it, he wasn't afraid to try anyway and encouraged his peers to get involved - he is a great influence on the other boys

Junior Drop In - we constantly observe juniors stepping up and being an influence and leading their peers. The big hall team activities helped young people to step forward, displaying teamwork, taking the lead, organising and encouraging others.

Senior Drop In - MM took charge of his group and was the one constantly asking questions about the quiz and challenges for his team. He took charge and wrote down on the sheets and came and got all the pens and equipment while the rest of his mates sat there

Football Coaching - Reece, when his mood is right, really steps up with leading others and coming up with ideas. Adam is another one this term who has asked to lead part of the session with his "Sunday League, Champions league" game

It is difficult to place a number on those who are yet to experience progress in this area, as it is dependent on age, ability and willingness. For that reason, as in previous reports, we would distinguish between leadership and responsibility or ownership. Of those young people that we currently engage with there are probably a further 20 who could develop improved leadership skills in the future as they increase in maturity and experience, yet every young person we work with has the potential to develop new life skills and take on greater ownership or responsibility.

Giving young people a voice to identify their needs, as well as help us continually evaluate and reflect on how we can improve what we offer as a youth centre has continued to be a crucial part of how we operate, and this continued our newly formed Youth Committee in the BlueHouses. 6 young people were part of this group, aged 11-16 made of young people from our different programmes. Discussions included planning trips, programme activities, tuck shop and fundraising events. Significantly our chairperson is Mason - good leadership, his peers respect him - amazing thing is he is only Year 8.

How do we know this difference is being made?

One way we have observed this difference being made is through the quality of young people's participation in volunteering opportunities. This year young leaders took place with two groups, 5 taking part pre summer and 8 post summer.

Of the 5 who began pre summer, Louise noted "Considering some of them have only started volunteering, I'm impressed. They 'get it' which makes a huge difference to how they need to be managed. They have all stepped up over the past few weeks and taken on new responsibilities. Great to see DS & KM step out of their comfort zone and engage with young people without being led into it by staff. AB developing his confidence in the tuck shop with counting money and BH absolutely smashed it, running the cookery table by herself." Grace noted "I left the room on purpose and watched on from a distance and as soon as I did they engaged with others in the room playing Jenga and getting the kids to draw pictures for Bosu."

In February our second batch (8 in total) of young leaders received training looking at the role of young leaders, their responsibilities, expectations, how to deal with scenarios, child protection and have set themselves some goals for the next term. The 5 existing leaders all completed an OCN in Youth Work.

Our young people are incredibly willing to volunteer their time, which in turn develops their self-esteem and leadership skills, but also has a wider impact on the community as they inspire others. 3 important observations we have made about the quality of our young leaders' participation again this year are:

As young people have taken opportunities to lead it has challenged and changed their perceptions of themselves, showing them they are more capable, creative, or resilient than they realised.

It has had a direct impact on the quality of other young people's participation, engaging marginalised young people or inspiring our juniors to step up.

It challenges the 'status quo' of our area around education and achievement. Young people achieve more and so they dream more, which in turn impacts others.

Here are a few individual examples:

One existing leader is Natalie, who now volunteers twice a week. She is a fantastic peer leader working with the younger girls and such a positive role model. What has been beautiful to watch this year is her ability to find her voice and not be shy in calling people out, when they are overstepping boundaries, especially the boys!

Nathan is currently training to be a young leader - wow, just wow! This young man's story is really tough. He has and continues to be through a lot. From the Nathan you met a few years ago, the one causing trouble, involved in ASB, including to our building, to him leading at Intermediate Drop In, is just incredible. MW, who is 12, amazing, but also one of the most difficult young people to work with (again for many reasons), just loves Nathan. Nathan has enabled MW to settle more in drop in as well as help him develop in certain areas of his life. They both bring

each other life. Nathan's words "I just want to give back a little of the love and care you guys continually show me."

Football Camp also gave space for Reece to get involved. Reece initially engaged with us years ago at Junior Drop In, and Louise described that experience as "In the nicest terms Reece was extremely difficult and had no understanding of boundaries". Shift 5 years on and he is leading and managing a team at football camp, championing them around their stations and then volunteering to help at Intermediate Drop In.

Some group examples include:

Through our summer Social Action project (38 involved) 70% said they learnt the importance of helping your community, 75% said they learnt that they could make a difference. Other key outcomes included increased skill levels, feeling like a team player, improved leadership and felt they belonged in the community.

Helping Hands Homeless Project was run by Laura, one of our incredible part time staff members. The project involves 4 older young people and covered Homeless Awareness Outreach, including practical hands on support to those in Belfast. These guys distributed food and health packs as well as sleeping bags and roll mats.

One group that took leadership learning to another level was our music group in partnership with Oh Yeah Music Centre. 4 young people hosted a gig in the BlueHouses and the journey included booking acts, marketing, promotion, front of house and stage management. All 4 tried something new and excelled themselves.

We must also note that Mums & Tots saw 5 local women from the community come on board and volunteer each week. These women also drew together a team of people to help at our community fun day in July which saw over 400 people attend. These women noted - "It is just brilliant helping out, knowing you can make a difference, and being part of bringing people together and growing community."

The importance of new skills:

It is not just among our young leaders that we have observed development this year, and it is worth noting that the start of their leadership journey began many years previously. The development of new skills is something that we try to help every young person achieve as we help them to reach their potential. A few examples of practical skills, which has grown to even greater scales this year, include:

Drop in continues to be a place to learn baking, pool, table tennis, darts, craft and jewellery making. More so this year there have been specific projects over a longer period of time, such a cookery (Note 2 boys chose Home Economics as a GCSE off the back of our cookery lessons) and joinery (12 sessions to young people involving 12 young people). For many this was the first time they had held a tool let alone make a planter for their parent.

Most notable this year however has been music including 12 deejay taster sessions, 8 piano lessons and even a young person learning to play the saxophone. One of the lads who was learning piano basics loved showing off to his peers and then his parents bought him a keyboard so he could learn at home. 6 boys (from the year 11 lads group) have participated in a course to write and record their own song with Danny Ball who is a professional music producer. Over 5 sessions the boys learnt

How to write songs form scratch

Improved their confidence singing, rapping

Showed creativity writing their own lyrics

Sense of pride when they received the final produced version of their track

How to produce beats from Scratch on Ableton Live

what it looks like to work in the music industry

Frequently we are asked the question of how we manage to keep connecting with older young people, with some other youth work providers experiencing a drop off of young people at a younger age. Our young people tell us that they keep coming to the Bluehouses because they have found somewhere where they experience belonging, where they have been invested in, and because of that they want to give back. For us as staff, it's an absolute honour to observe them staying connected, giving back, and sharing all that has been poured into them by pouring into others. Here is an example of those that have chosen to volunteer and in their own words why.....

"I volunteer because the bluehouses have done so much for me" Brooklyn, 16, young leader

"I volunteer because I want to help other people" JP, 17

"I volunteer because this is the place that has made me who I am, helped me when I needed it and shown me so much love" NM, 17

"I volunteer here as its the place that helps me with all my worries and troubles and I want to be someone who can do that for others" MB, 19

"I volunteer because I know by doing that it will help others but also it will help me develop"

Other significant quotes:

"Brilliant to see Demi continue to grow in confidence and take charge in the hall for her group and dictate that she would do all the writing down and who would take part in the challenges. Great to see her become more confident and show her leadership skills." Laura, part time staff

"Demi has been great recently helping out as a young leader, it was great to see her working with the girls tonight." Grace, Full time volunteer

"I feel honoured to be in this space - I recognised jasmine from when she was a baby - all these generational things are incredible - this space is answered prayer so be encouraged - in this community you are massive -and you build so many bridges." Lesley, volunteer

"It's the little things that are great - a friendly fist bump from David (Sloaner), a polite thank you from Drew, a big smile from Melrose" Lesley, volunteer

"It is nuts to think that I am volunteering here now. I have to admit it makes me feel so good knowing some young people want to come and spend time with me, that I can help them. It's actually nuts"

Other further examples of this charitable purpose:

Friendship Group

This group of ladies meet fortnightly in the centre for community, fellowship and lots of food and laughter, facilitated by the amazing Louise. Alongside the traditional quiz or game of bingo the ladies enjoyed a christmas creativity session, a fancy hat fashion show for the Jubilee, Jubilee celebrations themselves (with dresses and fancy hats), a few episodes of the Crown, Christmas lunch and a trip out to Lisburn for the day. The ladies enjoyed a morning browsing the markets, checking out all the charity shops and to finish we enjoyed fish & chips together. What always strikes me is how incredibly grateful these ladies are for what the Bluehouses do for them. In reality it is only a very small thing but it means so much to each of them.

Key moments from the year featured the queen, both her jubilee and her death and a highlight for Louise was listening to all their stories of growing up watching the queen and sharing their memories and stories. The traditional highlight of the year is our Christmas Lunch and this was no different this year. And what an afternoon it was. Lovely to spend time celebrating these incredible ladies and giving thanks for the past year of fun and memories. It was particularly special for Sylvia as this time last year she missed her dinner because she was hospitalised with covid. She shared about how she would pray everyday and would be reminded about God being her anchor. She was moved to tears when Grace gifted her with a hand drawn framed picture of an anchor and Hebrews 6:19 "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast."

Conversation is a massive part of what happens in this group and this year, outside of the queen, the biggest topics were community life, family life and the latter end of the year, faith and vulnerability. One afternoon we had a brilliant conversation about challenges in our lives and how we overcome and cope with those. SMC shared "It will be 19 years soon since my husband died. To be honest I've never truly got over it. The only thing that has got me through is coming to Bluehouses and my wee group I get to go to." What a powerful reminder of the impact being present for people can make...the power of availability and connection.

Regarding faith Valentine's day was a great opportunity to remind the ladies how incredible and loved they are with cards and special gifts. We gifted the ladies with a bunch of daffodils and a little card with 1 John 1:5 "God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." LMc shared about her son getting saved and about people asking her to come to church. She shared about how she felt like she had fallen out with God in the past because of things that happened but now God is calling her - God speaking to her through others. The ladies shared about their experiences of church and what church they 'belong' to. Sylvia shared that her favourite bible verse is John 3:16. Ladies shared about the cards and verses I had given them with some daffodils. They have also placed them in different parts of their houses where they will see them and be reminded everyday. They also said they would be praying for Emily when she goes in for her hip operations. A very special time..God is moving with these ladies!

We can't go without mentioning the thoughtfulness and kindness these ladies show. In March Emily blessed us with the most incredible pavlova which we all thoroughly enjoyed. It was also Pete's Birthday and they had to get him down so they could sing Happy Birthday and give him some Pavlova!

How much we love these ladies never changes but this year really reminded us and highlighted how incredibly special they are. When asked what does the Bluehouses mean to them and why they come, they responded...Community, enjoyment, feeling welcomed, makes me feel good, you can be yourself, I'm not lonely. What lovely words of encouragement from the ladies and amazing to hear how special the bluehouses is to them.

Community Liaison

Over the years our engagement with the community beyond youth work has increased. In more recent years this includes programmes such as Friendship Group and detached and also simply building relationships with local families and running events such as our Community Fun Day or Family Day away. For a long time this has been a very organic aspect of our work through the Bluehouses but as our staff team has grown we have been able to invest more time, effort and energy. David takes on a significant role within community liaison which includes developing relationships with local families, other agencies and charities, and working alongside the police, Probation Board and Youth Justice.

Over the year David significantly supported 39 families, making 85 homes calls and connected with 182 individuals over that time. The support he offered dealt with issues surrounding mental health, drugs and alcohol, debt and gambling, benefits assistance, helping to provide families with food and basic necessities, and job or employment advice. This is not an exhaustive list, but provides a snapshot of the type of needs being addressed and support being offered. The summer brings a significant time of ASB and through David's relationship with different parties he was able to be the negotiator between young people, residents and local authorities as issues arose regarding the local bonfire, especially after the tragedy of the previous year.

In an effort to capture the difference being made by having a supportive presence within the community, and through the programmes that are currently run by staff and volunteers there are a few stories worth sharing.

Christmas Gifts Appeal

In the run up to the festive season David asks for some support providing presents for families in need. This year:

- 18 Families received Food Hampers
- 18 Families received Vouchers
- 4 Families Received a Christmas Ham
- 14 Families received Toys for Children
- 8 Families taken out for a Christmas Shop
- 5 Families received Gas Vouchers
- 5 Families received electric Voucher
- 2 Baby Hampers for newborn babies
- 56 selection Boxes given out to Young People

In one situation, one single parent first refused to take the voucher because they said the hamper was enough. Eventually she took it and broke down saying "You have no idea what this means, it has made my Christmas."

We also managed to deliver over 2,000 Candy Canes this Christmas which was amazing and across all the projects we had 28 Different young people helping to make and or deliver the candy canes to the doors in Ballysillan.

Social Action

Over the year we would run a few social action projects, significantly in the summer and at Christmas time. The summer involved another clean up. Involvement included:

- 35 young people and 3 mums involved over 4 days
- 27 bags of rubbish collected, 5 gardens cleared, removal of an abandoned trailer
- 200 potted planters delivered to residents

Feedback from all those involved included:

100% enjoyed it

“I’ve enjoyed working as a team to help my community”

“I’ve learnt you have my children’s backs no matter what and whatever happens you will sort it out”

“I’ve learnt the importance of helping in the community” RM, male, 14

“I’ve learnt the importance of helping others”

“Community is being together doing stuff”

“We should help others because it’s what Jesus done”

“I help because BlueHouses do it for us so we should do it for others”

Summer Community Breakfast

On 23rd July we hosted our summer community breakfast off the back of football camp and Exodus team week. It was a wonderful morning, having the hall filled with the team, staff, parents, young people and even the older friendship group ladies. It was a space to enjoy food, chat and enjoy community. It was also Becca’s birthday and it was nice to celebrate her - the Exodus Team lads even gave her the bumps, which was a lot of fun. Over 40 attended from the ages of 7 to 80.

Christmas Family event

This was a fabulous night as we turned the table tennis room into Santa’s grotto and lots of games, activities and festive treats in the hall. We were fully booked for all slots and had 20 families through the doors (44 adults & 51 children). Santa was a very busy man all evening welcoming our families.

Helping Hands Homeless Project

Run by our amazing part time staff member Laura this project engaged 4 young people, age 16-18. Helping Hands is an opportunity to raise awareness of Homelessness and identify the reasons why people become Homeless. It provided practical hands-on experiences with the Homeless in Belfast City and created learning opportunities, experiences and developed new skills.

One highlight was working with The People's Kitchen, an impressive indoor soup kitchen that provides and serves hot meals, clothing, food parcels, toiletries etc. It's an absolutely brilliant Homeless outreach providing vital help and support to the Homeless of Belfast. This was an incredible first-time experience in serving the Homeless in an indoor environment. As a team we found this in many ways to be an even more challenging and moving experience than the outdoor street outreach.

One this evening we met Aoife who we served food and provided a sleeping bag etc too back in June. Aoife recognised us as a group that prayed for her and told us that she is now off drugs and on specific medication. She also shared that back in June the night we prayed for her, the heaviness and weight she was carrying had lifted. She said she felt that since that evening she experienced much more peace. I remember as a team providing and praying for Aoife. I remember telling her that God hadn't forgotten her. That God loved and cared for her and that he sees her pain. As a team we talked a lot to Aoife and listened to her painful story. Aoife is a heroin addict who has had a very troubled childhood and lived in foster care with painful memories. She has a young daughter who lives with her sister. Aoife loves her daughter so much and wants to be able to stay off drugs so she can have a relationship with her daughter.

Afterwards I asked the team their experience of The People's Kitchen to which Andrew said “Initially I was scared and out of my depth. By the end of evening I was relaxed and happy to be there.”

Counselling and Family Support

In August 2021 we strengthened our team, our community liaison opportunities and areas of expertise by employing Sarahanne as our counsellor and family support worker.

In her first full year of employment she has grown on the foundations she put in 8 months previous. In that time the work with women has flourished. These programmes have 74 women in total, 31 at fitness programmes and 50 at Mums and Tots, with an overlap of 7 women (41 babies and toddlers engaged). This in turn has opened up counselling opportunities and sessions.

The key areas of her work have involved:

Counselling

Our counsellor delivered 113 counselling sessions to 11 clients.

Bar quoting the stats it is not possible to share any depth or insight into these situations and scenarios. Quite simply though the support given by Sarahanne is proving to be a lifeline to many and helping people find a voice and a new found freedom and hope.

Ladies Fitness (Powerwalking & Fitness Classes)

The women love getting some space away from the stresses of parenting, work etc. Fitness provides some healthy outlet coupled with some snacks and chat really works.

This year 31 women attended fitness programmes which across the year included Boxercise, Zumba, HIIT, Circuits, Hot Pilates, Power walking and then the running group as training began for the Belfast marathon.

Different classes obviously bring different styles and engage different people. Boxercise in May for example brought ladies who enjoyed the physical aspect of this class. They were very vocal about how they found boxing to be therapeutic and how it helped relieve stress that they had been carrying. This sport does push you to your physical limits and it was wonderful watching the women grow in confidence with each week, some of them purchasing their gloves and pads so they could practice at home. Conversations around the table flowed and the women shared about how they had always struggled with physical exercise as they were always regarded as unfit, as far back as school. They shared how coming to these classes has not only increased their physical fitness but has made them realise what they are actually capable of doing.

Zumba was a complete contrast in terms of the physicality expectations and the women who came along to these Thursday evening sessions thrived in the party atmosphere, dancing to the music, singing along and enjoying the experience together! By week four the ladies who clung to the back wall were in the thick of it, dancing away and loving every second of it!

HIIT with a male instructor - felt like a huge risk as I wasn't sure how the ladies would respond to a male instructor and also how they would handle the intensity of the class, but my fears were quickly distilled half way through the first class. Ric took the class with sensitivity to each individual women's fitness ability and created a safe, warm, fun environment for them to workout. Seeing some of the quieter women take part in the relays at the end of the evening, having a laugh and giving it their all was lovely! Involvement, pushing themselves out of the fitness comfort zones and enjoying plenty of laughter whilst they took part really was a reflection of the safety and connection that they now feel as part of this wee group.

Getting fit and the benefits of physical exercise are only part of the reason we hold these classes. Connection, belonging and sharing Jesus with these women is the primary reason. Heather took the Zumba in May but also shared God's truth at the end of each session. E has been a regular attendee of all our fitness sessions to date. She is well known in the community as the joker and, at times, uses this as a defence mechanism. Following one of Heather's chats about wearing masks and not being true to who you really are, she turned to me and said "I wish I could bottle her up and put her in my pocket so that she was there with me all the time. I need to hear this". Again, another amazing opportunity to listen, encourage and share some truth with someone who is actually desperate to see change in her life.

The running group which began in February as training for the marathon was another example of where it is more than fitness. There is so much more opportunity to have deeper conversations with the ladies while we run and then space for group chat while we enjoy some light refreshments in the centre afterwards. The running group is a

smaller but this has enabled a more intimate environment where the women feel safe to share more personal things with one another.

Some examples of differences:

Empathy and self esteem

E has been coming to fitness from the beginning. The girls that she initially attended with have not been as regular and so often E has come without them. She has had a lot of issues with her ageing parents, teenage daughter and her health. Initially she was wary of the 'new' faces that came along on Wednesday mornings and Thursday evenings. These women have brought so much kindness, wisdom and humour to our groups and I have watched them draw alongside E to the point that they were all invited to her daughter's 18th birthday party! Seeing E come out of her shell, find new friendship and community has been such a blessing!

Greater Level of Engagement in Peer Group and Community

The ladies have taken ownership of both programmes and all chip in at the end of sessions setting out the tables, teas/ coffees and refreshments. They chat, share, laugh and encourage each other and it's often a struggle getting them to leave (this is a good problem to have!). There really is such a sense of community. C brought her favourite soft cheese and crackers and shared how she would be lost without our wee group as it's her space to laugh, moan and chat with people she feels safe with.

Some significant quotes from these sessions:

"I am always in agony after these classes but I wouldn't miss them for the world!"

"I could sit and chat here all day. I just love being around this place."

"I have really surprised myself! I honestly didn't think I could run!"

"At the end of the day, when it all comes crashing down, God is the only one we can really turn to."

"I really want to keep running after the marathon - it has given me a new lease of life!"

Running Club/Mentoring

This programme has naturally evolved into a 1-2-1 session that comprises mentoring, counselling, fitness and friendship. M and I took to the roads of Ballysillan twice a week and decided to set ourselves a target of running in the Lisburn 10k in June, her first ever road race - we did it! It was such a special day and the experience of seeing her face as she crossed over the finish line and getting to run with her was a complete joy!

M has grown in confidence, in self awareness and has begun to find her voice- so encouraging!!

In May she offered to join other Mums in the area and sit on a planning board for our family fun day and also took part at the actual event. This was a massive step for her as she had previously shared with me about her fear of being in large crowds and her reluctance to engage with others in the community.

Time spent with M is quality, instilling confidence in her ability and boosting her self esteem, providing her a safe space to open up and confide, listening and offering advice as when it is needed - the dynamic is more than therapeutic.

Mums and Tots

Over the year we ran 27 sessions, engaging 50 mums and 41 children. As well as the "normal" weeks (if you can call any week normal) we held many themed sessions and events including Easter, Tots graduation, Pumpkin party and Christmas.

Our Tots Graduation was such a great opportunity for us to celebrate the little ones and their mums that we have had the pleasure of building relationships with over the past year. Some of the mums were emotional saying goodbye to us and thanked us for making their Friday mornings so special too! One mum shared how she felt she would be lost without Tots and was going to try to come along to our fitness so she can stay connected.

Key themes and words that encompass this group are belonging, community, support, acceptance and connection. One example of all of these was a mum who had no previous connection with the BlueHouses or the Ballysillan community. On her last week at tots she shared "I am really going to miss coming here each week! You have no idea what a life line it has been for me after the year I have had." She was very emotional. She brought a bunch of flowers for each of the volunteers and spoke openly about how this group had been a lifeline for her. The ripple effect of kindness and love was so evident as she was met with hugs and encouragement from the volunteers and her new friends that Friday morning!

Community (and volunteers): We had really struggled to get people who were available to volunteer on a Friday morning and I can now see how God's hand has been on this as He has brought people from the community itself! Pauline, Lee, Elaine and now Tracy, have all offered to step in as 'helpers' and the impact has been so positive. Not only do they know the women but myself and Victoria are able to invest in each one of them as we grow in friendship serving together. My desire is that groups like Tots 'belong' to the community as opposed to them coming along to what 'we' offer. It is from this stance that I believe we can see God at work, rebuilding, restoring and giving purpose and hope to individuals who, prior to this, may have felt redundant. This is what a community should look like.

I have been completely taken back by the variety of women who have attended our Tots and how age, stage or personality hasn't held these women back from connecting with each other, in fact, I would say that the diversity has enhanced the connection.

The interconnectedness of the families in this community is off the scale in terms of who is related to who and it is still taking me time to connect the dots. Sadly, with this comes family rifts, fractions and ill feeling amongst those in the community. Two women who have both been badly hurt and as a result did not communicate with each other for years both attend Tots. They have shared with me on separate occasions their journey and the hurt that they have experienced as a result of the other. I have been able to listen and encourage them towards reconciling. On our celebration night I watched them laugh together, dance together and share how they were going to set aside their differences and move into 2023 without resentment. Special.

Support

It has been such a privilege to be able to draw alongside these women each week. To be able to sit and chat while the little ones play and for them to realise that they are indeed safe, that they can let us in and we can encourage, support, and ultimately show them the love of Christ. J is a Gran who brings her grandson along. She has opened about her daughter, sharing how she had to leave an abusive marriage. I had the opportunity to listen, comfort and counsel her each week at Tots. Following our conversations she asked if it would be possible for her daughter to come and see me for a chat. I met with her daughter and she is now attending 1-2-1 counselling sessions with me. J shared how it felt so good to know that she had someone else who could offer her daughter advice and support as she has been struggling to carry the emotional weight of it all.

Ladies DIY

Themes: Belonging, Community, Support, confidence, friendship and upskilling

This grew from a group of ladies asking could they do similar to the young people - our volunteers Victor and Trevor were happy to oblige!

Every week they gather and have made a variety of things ranging from planters and outside benches to love seats. The women are loving the whole experience and, in the words of Victor "They are all very good at the woodwork!".

Each session ends with a lovely cuppa and a selection of buns to enjoy while conversations flow around the table. The women have shared how much they have enjoyed this aspect of the programme as they have been able to ask Trevor and Victor lots of questions running from DIY questions to life! Watching the women interact with Victor and Trevor, both while they work and over a cuppa and a bun is just lovely. Both these men have taken on a fatherly role with the four women and it is just precious listening and watching the interaction between them all. The women freely ask Trevor and Victor deep questions about life and their belief in God and then sit attentively listening to the wise advice as they share from their own experiences. These four women really value this time and are very precious about protecting it.

Key Quotes

"I have missed you two so much! I love our chats, they always leave me thinking about a lot of things." T sharing how much she has missed chatting with Victor and Trevor.

The advancement of education

This area does not have one of our specific key differences directly assigned to it but we are able to demonstrate our impact in this area by using examples of our programme delivery.

Demonstration of Advancement of Education can also be found within the evidence for our 6 key differences.

Girls Good Relations Group

Sample: Apr - Jun 2022

Themes: Cross-community relationship building, Trying something new & Stepping out of your comfort zone

Key aims: To develop good relationships with young people and staff at Clonard Youth Centre.

They are so easy to work with and the level of commitment is outstanding. If they can't make it they tell me, if they have an appointment in three weeks time they tell me. They have even started messaging me and letting me know if they can't make drop-in sessions. A real sense of ownership, relationship & respect.

In April, we welcomed Victoria Gordon (Temple Spa) along to facilitate a celebration pamper night for the girls. A lovely chilled and relaxing afternoon together to celebrate the success of the project over the past few months. The girls enjoyed hand treatments and were guided through a facial. They all had their own mini products which they could then take home and treat themselves again another time. We also did an encouragement activity by passing cards around the table and writing notes, highlights, memories and encouragement to one another. Very special to see the cards completely full by the end - very significant for each of the lovely ladies. Even though the official funded programme has finished the group are still keen to meet and maintain the relationship and connections.

In May we simply did hang out where we played board games together and another where we began making scrapbooks, documenting our group, the activities we've done and the highlights and memories. No huge or significant differences to report - it has just been so simple. Time together, friendship & food. We played the Mr Men personality board game which was lots of fun, great to encourage each other as we played and call out things we saw in each other. The girls absolutely loved making the scrapbook and there was lots of laughter as we cut out photos and shared quotes and memories, especially from the residential - "there's sand in my bum!" lol

Key quote/quotes:

End of project survey responses -

What are the top 3 highlights of the project?

Residential - 91%

Getting to meet new people from different backgrounds - 54%

Making new friends - 73%

Spending time together - 46%

Visiting each others centres/areas - 18%

Trips - 18%

Being part of this group has helped me have a better understanding of people from different backgrounds and communities - 100% Agreed

Being part of this programme has helped me...

Have fun - 82%

Build relationships with new people - 73%

See how difference and diversity is a good thing - 64%

Be more confident - 63%

Try new things/share new experiences - 36%

Find out things the two groups have in common - 27%

If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of only your own religion, or in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?

Own religion only - 18%

Mixed religion neighbourhood - 46%

I don't know - 36%

Do you think opportunities to take part in community relations programmes (with people from different backgrounds) is important? Yes - 100%

Did you enjoy the Bluehouses/Clonard Project? Yes - 100%

Would you be willing to take part in future community relations programmes? Yes - 100%

Highlight/s for you as a leader:

The level of friendship that has developed between the two groups

Feeling of unity and family

Everything - I feel very privileged to work with this group

Number of young people engaged with: 11 (6 Bluehouses // 5 Clonard)

Number of boys: 0

Number of girls: 11

Age Range: 15-16

Max attendance: 10

Minimum attendance: 10

Bluehouses Academy: Life Skills Group (Louise)

Sample Jan - Mar 2023

Tuesdays: 5:30-7pm

Themes: Life Skills - Cookery / Mental Health Awareness / OCN Level 2

Key aims: To develop vital life skills to become more independent young people and have the understanding and ability to make more positive choices and positively contribute to their community.

Key session activities:

This term we delivered 11 sessions with this group.

2 cookery - Chicken Kebabs & Pizza

2 facilitate by Action Mental Health

7 OCN Level 2 Mental Health Awareness Sessions

Key Outcomes/Differences achieved: stats from google forms using 6 key differences

Enhanced Personal Capabilities

‘Confidence and self-esteem’

Significant progress from JCa being more comfortable attending a session by himself. He ended up being the only one who turned up to the kebab cookery session (others had exams and the girls got stuck on a bus that broke down in the snow). Don't get me wrong, it was hard work to get conversation out of him but he fully engaged with Lydia and Louise and was brilliant at making the kebabs. He often stays quiet in the background but in this instance he was forced to step out of his comfort zone a bit more. For one of the OCN sessions he was by himself, to be fair, he embraced it and was happy to work on his OCN booklet and chat away. Since he was the only one he was pushed a bit more to communicate more.

DL showed more confidence in stepping up and challenging her brothers. They can make comments and try to put her down but she's now starting to stand her ground with them.

Starting to see LT become more of herself and not just loud and sometimes annoying. She's softened and more of her personality is starting to come through. I praised this and encouraged more of it.

JCr speaking up and sharing her opinions and thoughts without worrying about what others thought.

‘Empathy’ - Developing a greater understanding of how mental health problems impact others and a greater knowledge of the symptoms and daily impacts of their lives. JCr shared about LT breaking her foot and having to wear a boot and stay in the house - clear empathy of it being difficult for LT being stuck in the house with her parents all the time.

‘Resilience’ - DL come straight from tech each week and tends to be late. She makes such an effort to rush up as soon as she can and come laden with her bags and guitar. She doesn't get flustered and shows great resilience in

just getting stuck in and catching up on what she has missed. CG, LT & JCr landed into the Bluehouses on 17th completely drenched and knackered after having to get off the broken down bus and walk to the centre. They showed great resilience at getting warmed up round the heater and doing their best to get involved. In the past LT would turn this type of scenario into a drama all about her but she was great and understood that it impacted other people too.

At the weekend JCr threw her phone across the room in frustration and she smashed the screen. She took it well and was in good form about it, sharing how she had learnt a lesson in life and that she just needs to deal with it and carry on. She won't be doing that again.

Improved Health and Wellbeing

'Young people engage in conversation about their well-being' - This term has been about focusing on mental health through sessions with Action Mental health and doing our OCN Level 2 Mental Health Awareness. Young people have engaged in conversations about what is mental health?, different types of mental health problems and how these can impact your life. CG shared about her mum and how she struggles with her mental health and takes medication. Conversations through the OCN learning about how our posture, body language, eye contact and tone can communicate different things about how we feel and how we can use that information to help others.

'Young people's understanding of health & well-being' (mental, physical, sexual) - How can they promote positive mental health? What can they do to help each other? Positive to hear all of them express that they understood where they can get help and support with their mental health.

Greater knowledge and understanding of mental health beyond feeling down or anxious. We have explored signs, symptoms, impacts and treatment of Anxiety, Depression, Bi-Polar, post traumatic stress disorder and psychosis. Impressive and encouraging to hear how many different mental health organisations they knew about before they did their research on them. Good to know young people know where they can get help.

Greater Level of Engagement in Peer Group and Community

'Participation in programme activities' - Level of engagement across the month has been great and continued to develop across the term. They are happy to be mixed up and work in different groups and all will contribute with their own thoughts and opinions.

Genuine interest in the OCN has maintained engagement, commitment and buy-in from the group. There is super participation in group discussion and small group activities. Nice to see LT share her thoughts and speak out in front of the group, stepping out of her comfort zone more and when encouraged will speak up and share more.

The OCN course has helped them work together, share thoughts and ideas in a more mature and considered way. They have engaged well, made great contributions and developed together more as a group.

'Positive peer relationships' - It really helps that the group are good friends and are a group that spends lots of time together outside of Bluehouses too. I think doing the life skills and OCN and having a more structured programme has helped the group develop better team work, self-awareness and have better relationships.

Increased appreciation of difference and diversity

'How willing are young people to engage in programmes that test their values and beliefs' -

Challenging misconceptions they have about mental health and exploring lots of scenarios and complexities that lead to people suffering mental health issues. You can't just 'suck it up and crack on.' Good to use Kahoot to help them engage in these serious and important conversations in a fun and relatable way. Chat about JCr smashing her phone led to a discussion about how we handle our feelings and emotions.

Louise challenged them on not listening to instructions - which ended up with them all having to redo a section of their books as they had just copied off the notes word for word which they were told not to do and they would be sent back by the assessor - which they were! Lessons learnt!

Development of Life and Leadership Skills

'Quality of young people's participation in volunteering opportunities' - JCr continues to be a group leader. She has been the natural leader all along, helping to organise the group, show positive influence and not be afraid to challenge others. The most impressive thing about it is, she doesn't even realise she is doing it. So significant to see CG take a bit more responsibility within the group and take charge of the discussions and writing on the flip chart paper. CG really stepped up in March and showed great leadership. She would remind people to listen and would

be first in to help put stuff away and set up for drop in. - a huge step up for her as she is usually the one causing the distraction for the rest of the group.

'Number of young people achieving new practical skills' - Skills in how to promote positive mental health. JH overcame her fear of touching the dough making pizza.

Faith Development

'Young people engaging in prayer' -

'Young people engaging in conversations about faith and exploring God's Word' - CG asked "are we going to summer madness again this year?" This started a chat with the group about potential opportunities to go and about other youth that they go to and how they are "too about God and not very fun". Interesting chat!

CG was gutted she couldn't go to summer madness as she is away with her other group.

Off the back of the smashed phone. JCr asked, "Why doesn't God stop you from doing stupid stuff?" Great questions - led to chat about how God wants us to learn and develop and he wants the best for us. AL asked "Are all the staff/volunteers at Bluehouses Christian?" a good opportunity to talk about what difference that makes and the values we hold as an organisation that loves Jesus and wants others to experience that too.

Highlight/s for you as a leader:

Seeing them all stay for drop in, having totally found their place and space. Very excited about starting our OCN soon.

Group work and working together on OCN - being open to discussion, sharing experiences and valuing others opinions.

Group work and seeing how much effort they have put into their booklets

The boys reflecting on Juniors and all the years they've been coming to Bluehouses.

Number of young people engaged with: 8

Number of boys: 3

Number of girls: 5

Age Range: 15-18

Max attendance: 8

Minimum attendance: 1

RE Lessons: Ballysillan Primary & Carr Glen

Sample: Jan to Mar 2023

Carr's Glen

P7 classes at Carr's Glen continue to be a complete privilege and joy each week. We have absolutely loved the level of engagement, willingness to participate and the depth of questions and exploring more.

Topics & Themes:

We started the new year with our resolutions challenge lesson, exploring how we can make 2023 awesome for someone else - the challenge to take the time to look past ourselves and see how we can make a positive difference for others.

We moved on to Old Testament characters looking at the life of Moses, Ruth, Samuel, David & Nehemiah and how they teach us how God wants us to live our lives.

At Valentines, we explored Love and what it means to be loved by God. We finished the term off with our Easter lesson.

Confidence:

- Lots of drama and acting in our lessons this term. Everyone wants to volunteer and be involved. Great to see those with weaker literacy skills having the confidence to speak out and read lines in front of the class - lovely and important to encourage and champion this.

- Lovely to see some of the quieter young people coming out of their shells during the games in the hall at Bluehouses and cheering on their teammates. At the end of our Samuel lesson we decided that we would get the pupils to pray rather than just Louise or Bean closing in prayer from the front. We passed around an object and each took the time to pray and pass it on - a significant moment and seeing their confidence to participate in the activity rather than just passing the object on straight away.

- There is one boy who sits at the front but never really volunteers for anything. When asked for Easter drama volunteers, his hand was straight up. He played the Donkey (not the most glamorous role) and he was amazing. The class were cheering and clapping for him and he had such a huge smile on his face.

Leadership & Teamwork: Super teamwork from both classes. We had a memory verse competition to see which class could work together to say it the best.

Testing values & beliefs:

- The challenge to think about others and how we can make a positive impact for others in 2023. Young people shared ideas such as helping to make dinner, making mum a cup of tea, picking up litter, sharing something with someone and always saying thank you. Significant to see young people challenge and encourage each other.
- Looking at Ruth and what it means to be a true friend. A challenge of how we love and treat each other.
- The lesson on God choosing David to be king helped explore and challenge the human value we place on looks, clothes, how smart we are, how strong etc. Nice to hear young people recognise these things and call them out.

Faith Development:

When talking about Easter and how Jesus brought new life and relationship with God, one girl asked "If we die, how can we have new life?". Brilliant opportunity to explain this to the whole class - everyone was silent and listening. Amazing to have them openly asking questions and wanting to go deeper in their understanding.

Ballysillan Primary School

- Continued great relationship with the school, where pupils and teachers alike are happy to have us present.
- Have been journeying through the theme 'Jesus and the disciples' exploring the life of Jesus through the eyes of the disciples, teaching different miracles, parables and working towards connecting the dots between disciples in the Bible and real life disciples today.
- The relationship we have developed with the classes is really strong and influences how they engage with the lesson. However slightly trickier to engage the P7 class in our lesson with most remaining quiet, dramas generate the most engagement with them.
- We held a Q&A session of their big questions ranging from creation, science, death, heaven/hell, forgiveness and suffering. Their questions were so mature, and the conversation surrounding these was so astute!!

Key highlights/quotes:

- "So if a disciple is someone that follows Jesus, does that mean all Christians are his disciples?" - P5
- The P5 understanding of the parable of the sower - we asked them to interpret what they thought Jesus was saying in this story to his disciples and there was a genuine grasp of it.
- Conversation with one P6 about God taking our troubles after the story of Jesus calms the storm.
- Each class grasping an understanding of what made Jesus a different teacher to other rabbis, and how his disciples were different too (He chose the ordinary!)
- the session on the Lord's prayer we explained the different lines in the prayer, and had a go at letting them explore that practically with 3 prayer stations. One was pegging your sorries on the washing line, 2 was eating a piece of bread and giving thanks and the third was a map of Ballysillan where they wrote prayers aligning with "your kingdom come" on the map. Was really amazing to get 3 classes engaging in prayer!
- discussion around what God's kingdom would look like, loved their answers such as "no bad things", "no sickness", "happiness".
- their grasp of Jesus being the servant king in washing the disciples feet.

Education Mentoring

Sample: Jan to Mar 23

Louise: BH

Started back with her GCSE Health & Social Care in February.

3 sessions this month working on her Health & Social Care and exploring the physical, emotional and social impacts of diet, exercise, work and lifestyles choices. We also looked at the different types of relationships we have in our lives and the impacts of those as we grow up. Greater level of motivation and enthusiasm from BH this month which has been positive as not going to school and having some sort of rhythm and routine has been quite negative for her, even though the school experience itself was the issue. These sessions have now finished - the EA home learning team finally got a plan together. BH will not be entered for her exams this year. She is now planning on going to Tech and doing her maths and English at the same time.

Louise: JP

JP has been expelled from Boys Model and it takes time for them to secure him a new placement in another school or alternative education. The head of year, a Christian lady, is amazing. She has a huge heart for disengaged pupils and has a real youth work approach to teaching. She was genuinely gutted that things led to JP being expelled but unfortunately they were left with no other option. The school asked if we could provide interim arrangements to help JP has a weekly routine and continue to have learning opportunities. It was arranged that he would engage in the following sessions...

Mondays - Education (Maths & one additional subject each week - Geography, History, Spanish etc.)

Tuesdays - Mentoring/English with Jamie (This has since stopped)

Wednesdays - Year 8&9 Drop In

Thursdays - Practical Education (ICT, Cookery)

JP engaged well at the beginning, especially attending his Monday sessions - he completed two sessions on coasts and how waves are formed. We even made labelled 3D waves. A good start but needed to gain more momentum to build commitment and buy in.

Bean: Ballysillan Primary

Bean only managed seven sessions with NR and one with KH this term. Both boys worked very hard getting all their class work and homework done. They thrive in the one to one environment where they are encouraged and have things explained to them. When they get frustrated for not understanding something they automatically do not want to do it but when we break the problem down and explain it with something visual their attitudes change and they always get the right answer in the end. The teacher said that there have been big improvements in the quality of NR work and even his presentation of work because I do not allow him to scribble and make him put his work neatly into a folder. NR really looks forward to getting to spend time with Bean and getting all his work done. He comes into the lesson saying do you think we could get to the top of Doodle maths today as the teacher is really impressed with me. You can tell he seeks the approval of others and loves praise

Education Support: Ballysillan Primary School (Louise)

Sample: Jan to Mar 23

This term, 19 sessions have been facilitated in the school with P3.

In January I started two sessions per week (Wed and Thurs mornings) in the P3 class in Ballysillan. At first I wasn't sure about this age as we usually start working with children from P4 but given they will start attending Bluehouses from July it is great to make connections now and will hopefully encourage more to come along over the summer. It wasn't long until I was making connections of who was whos little brother or sister and it turns out I know most of the class.

Being in this class again highlights the need educationally in the area. Around 35% of the class are at P1 ability but the top few are at P4 level. Such stark differences for teachers to navigate. It's heartbreaking to see pupils still not able to complete basic numeracy and literacy. My focus has been doing small group support and group reading with the most needy. Excited to see where this goes.

I've built great relationships with the teacher, classroom assistant and the young people. I worked out that the Bluehouses have connections with about 70% of the class through older brothers and sisters, which is great. The focus for February was on small table work with the lower ability pupils and doing 1-1 reading with the weaker readers. Constantly reminded each session of the overwhelming needs in the class and the ability gap within the class. It has also been helpful for me to learn, develop and gather ideas for moving forward with the homework club.

In March we focused on small group reading and spellings. Reading levels are extremely low and trying to read with 5-6 young people takes a long time and can be hard to keep everyone focused when it's not your turn to read. Super relationships are developing and it makes me so excited for the summer and welcoming them into our Junior programmes and homework club in September.

Other key differences and key achievements (as a result of the activities)

We have observed many positive changes over the year, and often these soft outcomes are hard to quantify.

Here are 4 further differences that we have focussed on during the year which highlight the impact being made to the beneficiaries.

Difference 1: Enhanced Personal Capabilities

Indicators

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Empathy
- Resilience

Difference 2: Improved Health and Well-being

Indicators

- How young people describe their well-being (engage in conversation about their well being)
- Understanding of health and well-being
- Ability to make healthy choices

Difference 3: Greater level of engagement in peer group and community

Indicators

- Quality of young people's participation in centre programmes (e.g. sense of belonging, commitment, volunteering)
- Positive peer relationships - how young people describe their peer relationships, how they work together
- Positive relationships with others in the community (e.g. residents, parents, teachers)
- Young people making a positive contribution in their community

Difference 4: Increased appreciation of difference and diversity

Indicators

- How willing are young people to engage in programmes that test their values and beliefs
- How young people talk about people from different areas/cultures/backgrounds
- Respect for difference

For specific information on these 4 differences please contact peter@thebluehouses.org

Mitigating harm flowing from purpose

Throughout the year training takes place for staff and volunteers covering the areas of first aid, child protection, health and safety, risk assessment and fire safety. This ensured that they could ensure best practice and anticipate and prevent accidents, helping the benefits of participation in activities to be achieved by the charity's beneficiaries.

Private Benefit

No private benefit has occurred (incidental to public benefit).

Statement of compliance to have regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit requirement statutory guidance

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to the beneficiaries.

Financial Position at Year End 31st March 2023

Total income for the period under review was £275916 and revenue expenditure was £267009.

Reserves totalled £1,015,082 of which £874438 was held in the form of fixed assets.

There were £87751 of unrestricted funds available at the balance sheet date for general use.

Charity Trustees

The trustees of Ballysillan Youth For Christ are:

Mr Mark Smyth
Mr Chris Kinghan
Mrs Heather Dickey
Mr Simon Hetherington
Mrs Doris Dickison

Appointing Charity Trustees

No person or any other body is permitted to appoint a new trustee

Governing Document

Ballysillan Youth For Christ a company limited by guarantee and hence is governed by its articles of association which set out its objects, powers, membership, responsibilities of management committee, and information on finance, trustees, indemnity, dissolution and alterations to the articles of association. It was adopted on 22nd June 2017.

Report approval

This report was approved by the board on 09 January 2024 and signed on its behalf by

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature appears to read 'D E Dickison' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Doris Dickison
Secretary