

Who Cares? Youth Guidance

Our Story

In recent years Norwich Youth for Christ has made schools work a major focus point. So much so, that we spent nearly 2 years fundraising for a fulltime schools worker. In our first year of employing a schoolworker, we launched 'Who Cares?' in schools. Talk about hit the ground running! The preparation to this launch was a long process as we worked with other local YFC Centres (North Breckland, Integrate and East Norfolk) as well as youthworkers from a variety of churches, trying to conceptualise how this could work and what we could deliver as a result. This group of interested youth workers, became known as the "Who Cares?" Collective.

Together we managed to run it across 17 schools and asked over 4000 children and young people the question, 'What hurts the most?'. In many ways, the responses weren't a complete shock, they were the things young people tell us on a day to day basis. What was interesting was comparing between different schools where there were specific trends and also seeing the overall order. Our top response was death (16%) and the second highest was Bullying (13%). Some of us predicted family challenges would be the top answer and although we expected bullying to factor, we didn't expect it to be so high on the list. It prompted us to really think through what our response should be and where we should put our creative energy.

In the end we had quite a range of resources which has given us flexibility across a number of contexts and schools. You may not want to create so many resources and just focus on one or two. Some of the resources such as prayer spaces or mentoring schemes are broad enough to address a number of the issues. We've listed a number of ideas below under 'Listening' and 'Responding' with links to resources. Feel free to contact us at office@norwichyfc.co.uk or 01603 620678 for any specific questions.

Our biggest challenge, which will probably be yours as well, was just getting schools to commit to the project and then getting the practical tasks done. Whether it was getting the assemblies in the diary or deciding on which lessons to be involved with or just speaking to the right people, it was always tricky to get the small things done. It was never that they didn't want to go through with it, but as much as they loved the project it was never as urgent as the other pressures they faced. Unless you have a really pro-active link person in a school, get used to long pauses between communications and the need to chase them up without becoming harassing!

It's always hard to know the impact of youthwork, but we have certainly built a much stronger base of schools work. In fact, one school decided to hold a Christmas Carol Service on their last day of term and invited us to be a part of it and speak about the meaning of Christmas! We're sure this was as a result of a better relationship formed as part of Who Cares? We hope and pray that you have similar opportunities and ways you can improve relationships and impact your local schools.

The Difference Between a Youth Club and a School

It's worth saying that we also ran the project with young people in church, in youth clubs and drop-ins. This became a bit of a side project for us, but for some churches it was the main way they ran it. With existing relationships with young people, conversations were much deeper as a greater level of trust was already present and it was a more informal setting.

It may seem obvious but there is a big difference between how you might do this in a youth club or church setting and how you do this in a school. A youth club is relaxed, informal and usually you are responsible for the content. Therefore you have a huge amount of freedom in terms of how you use this resource in this context. This is a huge strength and one not to be ignored.

Compare this with a school where it is formal, the focus is on learning outcomes and the responsibility relies with teachers and governors, it's a different ball game. If you want to use 'Who Cares?' in a school, your approach needs to be different and tailored to the school restrictions. We have found that many churches are put off by this pressure to be so professional. But let us encourage you to go for it and learn to work in this arena and remember that God will go with you into this 'foreign land'!

Think through what you can offer and what it will look like. What resources are available in terms of people, time and methods? At the same time, remain flexible, the school may have suggestions or ideas you haven't considered.

The Approach

Pitching the idea to the school and getting them on board is the first crucial step.

Firstly, pray! Obvious we know, but so important. Get a group of people to pray for your school or even organise a prayer walk around the school.

Reflect on your relationship with the school right now. Are you a regular visitor or someone the school isn't even familiar with? If you're a regular and have some level of relationship with the school, it will be much easier as you have some level of trust that you can build on. If you have no relationship and you are starting from scratch, bear in mind that if the school agrees to the project you will need to be prepared that they may not trust you and will want lots of information from you. Try to give as much information as possible in as a timely manner as possible.

If you are going in cold, start with looking for a relationship first. Does someone from your church already know someone in the school? A governor, teacher, secretary, etc? Do you know any existing Christians in the school? Start the conversation with them. They can give you valuable context information. Try to find out who is the best person to talk to. Some schools have deputy or assistant headteachers whose role is to be a community liaison.

Start to put together a letter introducing the project, why you are doing it and the benefits for the school. Schools are very interested in what concerns their students and are required by Ofsted to provide Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural education to all pupils (commonly referred to as SMSC. For more info on SMSC go to <http://www.doingsmsc.org.uk/>). Who Cares can help meet this need within a school. Some schools struggle to provide this or are

very good at the Social, Moral and Cultural side of it but neglect the Spiritual side. As Christian volunteers going into schools we can provide a specialism when it comes to delivering Spiritual provision for people.

You can see the appendix for our examples for a template letter

Follow the letter up with a phone call to ensure they got the letter and whether they are interested. If so, suggest a meeting to get together and discuss next steps.

When you meet with them, have some idea's prepared and as we've said, think through as much as you can and prepare some information on paper that you can leave with them. Have a list of the suggested idea's that you think will work but explain these are only suggestions as you would like their input as well.

Think through the potential questions and your answers. Some of our most common questions were about the specifics of running the listening or responding phase and of course the dreaded safeguarding question! See below for a clear view on how we handled that one.

If at any point, the school don't want the project, ask for feedback. They may not say everything they feel, but at least it shows you're open to hear their perspective. Use the opportunity to discuss their issues and needs and find out if there is any other way you could serve the school with your community resources. Emphasise that your faith means you care for the community and want the school to do well! Many schools have no idea you are rooting for them!

Safeguarding Issues and Confidentiality

In every school, this question came up - how would you handle safeguarding issues? 'Who Cares?' has the potential to bring up disclosures of abuse and 'hurts' which are considered to require an immediate response. Discuss with the school how you will handle these scenarios and reach an agreement together. However, there are some things that you should bear in mind first.

The survey is pitched as an anonymous survey so that people can be completely honest. Should a young person write about something that could be regarded as a safeguarding concern, it is important that students are not 'tracked down', e.g. by handwriting or trying to discover who it was.

If a student wants to take the opportunity to share a safeguarding concern anonymously this can be seen as a healthy outlet for people in this situation and maybe one of the first steps towards making a full disclosure by telling someone and revealing their identity.

We would strongly encourage the use of 'signposting' within the school, communicating to the whole school which people in the school they can talk to if they are facing abuse or talking about local or national agencies who can help for example ChildLine. This could be done by yourselves or the school such as within assemblies, form times or a letter home.

When completing the survey, a young person can choose to write their name and therefore disclose their identity. In this case the young person is **clearly making a disclosure and opting out of anonymity**. In this case, the schools Safeguarding Officer should be **informed at the earliest opportunity** and the card or raw data can be photocopied or passed on. You should liaise closely with the school on such issues and follow your own safeguarding procedures.

Data should be owned by yourselves and not the school. To ensure that we honour the anonymity that is key to 'Who Cares?' and it is important to protect the identity of students. Therefore school staff will not be given the raw data (cards - if used, or actual responses in original wording) as this could lead to students being identified. Teachers may end up trying to identify students through handwriting etc.

Schools can receive a statistical report on the results and we recommend sharing statistical data with the school to help them respond to students' needs, and to develop the relationship between the school and yourselves. This can be a major plus for doing the project in the school so make sure you emphasise this point! This is a big advantage for a school to have an outside agency run a survey and then collate and give back the statistical information to the school, hopefully with some level of breakdown (e.g. male/female, year groups, etc).

The agreement between yourselves and the school should reflect these points and be clear in relation to passing on concerns and any follow-up required.

Part of the agreement with the school may be to share any anonymous safeguarding issues (without passing on raw data which was received in the students answer) For example in the situation that a student writes "my dad hits me". The school could be advised that a student has written about physical abuse in the family. The school or yourselves can then ensure that all students in the school are reminded who and how to discuss these things if they want to talk to someone about such issues (e.g. in an assembly or tutor time).

Phrasing the question and additional information

In Secondary schools we followed the same format as with the adult version of 'Who Cares?' and kept the question the same: '*What hurts the most?*' or '*What's the one thing in life you find hardest to handle?*'

However for primary schools, younger children didn't understand the question so well. They would often answer in physical terms, such as a broken leg! So we phrased the question differently; '*What makes you feel sad inside?*' or '*What's the one things at home, school or anywhere else that upsets you?*'

In both cases, the follow-up information that was required was whether they were male or female and which year group they belonged to (rather than what their age was). This was helpful for the schools to know any trends in year groups.

Listening

We took a variety of approaches because we found that every school needed to be tailored somewhat, depending on what stage our relationship was at. Below are a number of suggestions, pick one, some, all or none (and come up with your own way!):

Launch it!

Try and get some up front time to launch the project, explaining what it is, why you're interested and what may happen as a result of their answers. Ideally this would be in an assembly, but could be tutor time or a PSHE lesson.

Assemblies should be creative and engaging, see our examples in the appendix.

We decided not to ask the question in assemblies as we felt students would be looking at each other's answers, and the time constraints may also mean they could rush an answer and cards could go astray. Assemblies were only used to introduce the project. This helped create greater engagement at other times.

Written and Online

We used two forms of collecting young people's views; filling in a card and dropping it into an envelope or box and typing an answer online. Here are some pros and cons to both:

	Pro's	Cons
Handwritten	Engagement with a person Ability to give some immediate response if they are looking to have a discussion Able to signpost to future events/delivery that will look at the top hurts	Takes more time Need to type up data entry afterwards.
Online	Quick and simple Able to hit big numbers at once (e.g. we used this in classroom scenario) Able to point people towards it online No further data entry required	More open to abuse, e.g. young people writing silly answers Not so personal

It's hard to say which is best although in the end our preference was for the handwritten option as this gave a more personal touch and more interaction. However, the online entry was certainly a valuable way of collecting responses.

Lessons/ form/ tutor time

Either for the first 10 mins of the lesson or for some or all of their tutor time, we were able to ask the question and get students to write their answers.

In some cases, rather than asking ourselves, we were able to organise the teachers by leaving guidelines (see appendix) so that they could do it as an activity within their lessons. This enabled the whole school or year group to do it at the same time.

Peer led

In one school, the 6th form students from the Christian Union were able to take the lead role. This meant they introduced the project and went from class to class and ask other students

the question. This in turn allowed the 6th formers to take a lead role in the follow-up responses.

Detached

Possibly our favourite way of doing the project! This was just walking about in the lunchtime break, talking to students and giving them the opportunity to participate. It takes the most amount of time but led to the highest amount of interaction.

Prayer space in school

Many groups now run prayer spaces in schools. These have been a highly fruitful way of engaging young people in prayer and prompting thoughts and discussion about spirituality.

For more information, see www.prayerspacesinschool.com

Prayer spaces have a number of 'stations' to help engage students in different ways to express prayer. Therefore, simply add in a station which asks the question 'what hurts the most?' with the cards and an anonymous post box. A nice way to ask the question within a quiet reflective space.

Youth groups

Very simply, as part of a youth club night or Sunday group, we just took a few minutes to introduce the project and give young people the opportunity to answer the question.

Sometimes this was to a very small number of people, even as few as 5 or 6. But the answers could either inform the implementation of a special project or just the usual programme for the next 6 weeks.

Youth Worship Gathering

We run a termly worship event for young people which a number of churches around Norwich bring young people to. The evening was themed around the content of 'Who Cares?' which included a general talk about how God cares for people and gave opportunity for young people attending to fill in the cards. The top two responses were used as the content for the next two worship events. If you don't run something like this, is there another organisation or event that runs something that you could approach to link this in with?

Fete or community event (Jamboree)

Many churches run fete's or community fun days and this is a great opportunity to ask the question. One church, asked the question as part of a prayer space within a Scout Jamboree!

A Brief Pause!

While the listening phase was ongoing, the Who Cares? Collective continued to meet together to discuss how things were going and start to consider the projects we could deliver. Now the listening phase was over, we took a moment to pause and reflect on what had been said. This was a crucial part of the journey, reflecting on what we could actually do to deliver good news amongst some difficult situations. We would encourage everyone to take some time to do this with both thought and prayer.

Reporting back to the school

Now that the listening phase is over and we had collated the young people's opinions, it was a good time to go back to the school and report the findings. We presented the statistics in a

professional format (see appendix...) and created a 'menu' of different services we could offer. We aimed to be flexible and create a range of options with different commitment levels. So at the top end, a big project for the whole school and at the bottom end of the commitment scale, doing a series within a lunchtime club for a few. Our hope was always that a school would go for the bigger projects, but being realistic that some schools would not and we still wanted to offer something they would be comfortable with. Some schools went for the big projects, some went for the small projects. Again, it's all about what stage of relationship you are at with a particular school.

Responding

Again, a variety of responses and ideas, some are broad and others are specific. The following is a mix of projects we ran in schools and churches. All resources connected with the response phase are in the appendices.

Prayer spaces

This is a really good way to respond and can be broad enough to address all the hurts. Because of this, it's a good one to think about using from the outset of the Who Cares? Project. It also helps meet the SMSC criteria for schools (see <http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/resources/55>).

The prayer space was themed around 'Who Cares?' and each 'station' focused on a hurt but introduced the theme of Hope. So the overriding theme was then about bringing hope into these difficult issues.

Anti-bullying Roadshow

Our thanks go to YMCA Norfolk who allowed us to re-invent this project they used to deliver many years ago! The Anti-Bullying Roadshow is a morning of drama, short talks and workshops that can be delivered to large groups (we have delivered this to a group of 160 but ideally you're looking at no more than about 80).

The focus is around a 30 minute drama which follows the story of Adam having an accident (with some pizza!) which makes it onto YouTube. Cat, seeing the potential for popularity, makes it her mission to stage further problems and upset for Adam. Adam becomes more miserable and eventually at the end of the play disappears, leaving the audience to wonder what has happened.

Using games and activities, we explore what bullying is, how it affects people and what students can do about it. One of the most engaging aspects to this, is for students to be able to interview characters and suggest ways certain scenes can change. This includes students taking part and changing the story. The end of the morning finishes with a revisit to the play. Adam has not disappeared, he has gone to speak to a teacher about it and things start to change. The message is strong and clear, it's everyone's responsibility and we can do something about it.

As part of the event, we share that we believe everyone is worth something and even highlight a bible verse about this.

You do need a team of competent people to perform the drama, but you are welcome to use our script and resources. Contact us for details.

If you're not sure you could perform this yourself, you could try and approach a dramatic group and see if they would perform it, leaving you to just run the workshop elements.

Bus

Another organisation, the Wymondham Youth Project, uses a converted double decker bus as part of its outreach on Friday evenings. Knowing it was unused at other times of the day, we asked if they would loan the bus to us. They agreed and in a few schools, we were able to take the bus as a drop-in at break times and lunchtimes and after-school. Usually we pitched up for the whole week. It was another broad response, introducing students to the top ten hurts and encouraging conversation. In one school, we worked in partnership with the school chaplaincy team who were on board all week.

At times, we also mixed this with the prayer spaces, using the bus to host the prayer stations.

Remembrance evening

As death was the top 'hurt', we felt we had to offer something specific in response. We put together a remembrance evening which was hosted at a school. This was an event for pupils who have been affected by loss in any way but was also a community event and students could attend along with family and friends. In the run up to the week, we had a remembrance tree, which was a wooden tree on display in the school. Everyone was invited to put up post it notes (in the shape of leaves) of people they wanted to remember.

The evening itself included the tree, collective worship, poems and a brief prayer activity. We promoted it with the schools as an event which will *"give them a chance to remember loved ones in a positive atmosphere and celebrate the good they played in their lives. We will provide a safe and healthy environment for pupils to express and deal with the emotions of loss. The evening or after school event can be tailored based on the context of the school and can include contributions from the school"*.

The turnout wasn't as good as we had hoped for (there were some issues with advertising the event), however for the few that did turn out, it was a positive experience and one of the school staff told us afterwards that the event helped them to realise they were still affected by the death of a loved one.

Groupwork sessions

These sessions were for small groups, usually used within church groups. We also used some of them within the context of a small youth club.

CU response

Some schools didn't want us to run a big project but instead wanted provision as optional for students. Working with the Christian Unions (some of which we were involved with already), we were able to plan content in line with the top 'hurts'.

Videos on Youtube (used in RE lessons)

We are fortunate enough to have links with a talented filmmaker, whom we organised to create some response videos. We decided to use testimonies of young adults who had faced similar problems and share how they had overcome or battled with that issue. The volunteers were asked to write their story on one A4 page, which consisted of what the problem was, how it affected them and what hope did they find. We asked them to reference a bible verse in relation to this as well. One was on the topic of 'death' and another was on the topic of 'disappointment'. We posted them on YouTube and encouraged people to share the videos on social media. We also used these videos in a number of other settings, for example in assemblies, group work and CU sessions. One teacher even asked if she could use within her RE lessons.

The video about death is about the loss of someone's father. We took the opportunity to promote this on Father's day by paying for some advertising space on Facebook. I think we only paid about £10 but around 200 people watched it. The videos have now had over 1000 views and can be found on the following links:

Azarias' story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQmFfaPTU4E>

Elli's story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka6-EcultBs>

Assemblies

A series of assemblies that covers the top ten issues.

PSHE/RE Lessons

Full lessons looking at the issues from a development perspective (PSHE) or in light of the Christian faith (RE). We didn't end up delivering any of these, but it was worth offering!

Youth Worship Gathering

As stated in our Listening phase, we used our youth worship gathering as a listening and responding exercise. We focused on the top two issues that came up within this audience (rather than the whole project) which were loneliness and stress. Over the next few worship events, we used this as the theme and our speakers for the evening spoke on these issues.

Conclusion

We've bombarded you with ideas and ways you can listen and respond to the needs of young people. This reflected the vast range of ideas that came out from some very creative youth workers who started by sitting down with lots of coffee and cake and thinking 'is there a way we could do this?'. I encourage you to sit down with other creative youthworkers and ask the same question. Dream some dreams. Step out in faith. Have a go. I look forward to hearing all about your adventure!