

## Engage Schools end of year report

13th July 2023

Dear friends,

I'm encouraged about the impact Engage Schools is having. There's an obvious 'shop window' that supporters and schools can easily see, and I feel as if I'm achieving results with a reasonably high-profile, united event strategy in schools and with Stir Gathering.

Behind the scenes, there's a more careful, nuanced ministry happening, which I interweave with larger area thinking and relationships that might not necessarily bear fruit for a while.

Take, for example, the high-profile Lat Blaylock conference. We had Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock and Telford Schools together in Charlton with Ruth Watkins and Alisha Foentjies. This one project cemented a long-running relationship with Charlton school, affirmed Ruth's role in Charlton, and introduced Alisha to a key staff member in HLC, among other things, reported below.

Behind the scenes, however, I've been working on a relationship with a ministry called Kick, which specialises in sports ministry. The vision with Kick is to introduce them to schools and to usher in a new vision for sports ministry across the area. After nearly fourteen months of relationship building, we've successfully matched them with Telford Park, who will have a full-time worker from September paid for by the school.

These are just two examples, but I hope what I'm doing is clear.

Last September, for example, I brought Darin and Joy Stephens to Telford to introduce the Stir course. Over this year, three groups have started using their material, and Tim Carter invited them back to present the material to the entire church.

The main thing I'm doing is using my time to build meaningful, trusted relationships with key people and churches. This approach is slowly bringing more people into the school work ministry and opening up new doors in schools like Langley, who have not spoken to any of us since 2018, when I had my first meeting there.

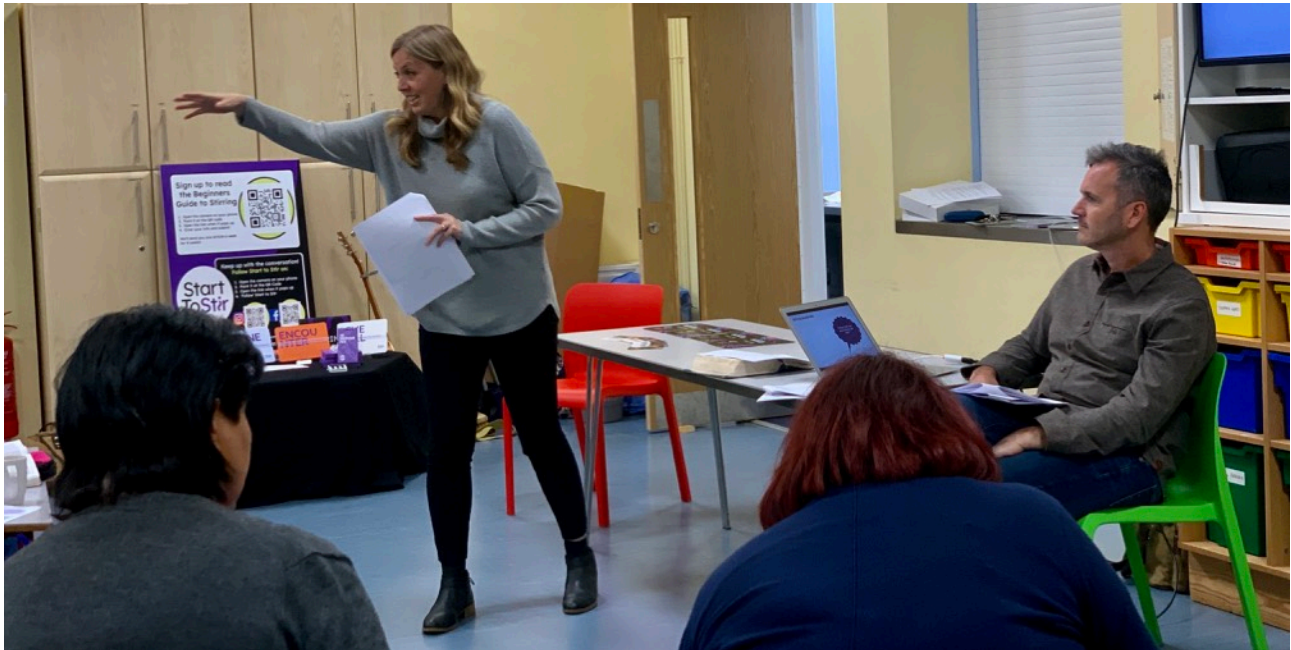
Finally, let me add this comment. I believe the only way we're going to succeed in reaching all the schools in Telford and Wrekin is by continuing to support a united, relational school strategy. Furthermore, the only way we're going to build a healthy community of Christian young people is to do the same.

Personally, I'm committed to Engage Schools and the Stir Gathering event. I'm also committed to bringing tried and tested ministry models, leaning on relationships from further afield to make a more significant impact here.

John



Events: Start to Stir Evening  
Date: 26th September 2022  
Location: Dawley Baptist Church  
Numbers: 19 people  
Wem  
Albrighton  
Central Telford  
South telford  
West Telford  
Highley



This was such an important and encouraging start to the Catalyst Youth Trust year. At this point, Darin and Joy as very close to our success and I loved having them to come and share their Stir vision with us and our friends.

Feedback:

"I really enjoyed it and found it very informative and was blessed by it. Thank you for inviting me" Meena Ledger

Events: Stir Gathering  
Date: 16th October 2022  
Location: Holy Trinity Wrockwardine Wood Church  
Numbers: 25 young people  
Bridgnorth & Highley  
Dawley Baptist  
Perton  
Wolverhampton



Stir Gathering was not a numerical success this term. In fact, I'm really disappointed that so few churches came with their young people. Of course, it could simply have been the wrong date, location or time, I don't know, but I will work on that for the future.

In terms of impact, I would have to say that this was the most successful Stir Gathering we've held. It's clear to me that our young people benefited massively, and there was a really meaningful response to what God was doing in the worship and talk.

In convinced that Stir Gathering as an event is one of a few crucial ways we'll see our young people grow in faith in Jesus and experience his presence with their peers.

Events: Fit4Life  
Date: 19th - 21st October  
Location: Hadley Learning Community  
Telford Park School  
TMBSS (Bridgnorth)  
Numbers: 780 young people



This year we kicked off our schools mission in Telford with two days of health and fitness with a message of transformation through Jesus. Fit4life are the ministry we had come to Madeley Academy at Easter and this trip was possibly even more impactful.

The first school we visited was HLC (Hadley Learning Community) which was a real thrill. Telford Elim Church have had some success in HLC pre pandemic but have struggled to get the communication right with them since. Thankfully, Engage Schools has been able to assist that process with a project that landed at the right moment.

Mr Downes, the RE lead said: "That was a really positive experience. Thank you for provided our first RS enrichment!"

The following day we took Fit4life to Telford Park School, where Dan the instructor met with every student in the day. I don't know whether Telford Park just needed the encouragement or whether it had been a particularly difficult time for them, but I was surprised by how much joy the Fit4life visit bought the students and staff.

Lindsay, the RE lead said "Thank you Dan. It was the best day and everyone was buzzing." She later sent me a card which said "Thank you for bringing Dan and for all of the work you've done (for Telford Park) over the last few years. I really appreciate it. We are bringing the magic to the students!"

Finally, I took Dan to TMBSS in Bridgnorth. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances he didn't meet with any students. However, he did spend time with the staff sharing about fit4life and his faith in Jesus. In the end, that TMBSS morning turned into a staff enrichment session, which they were extremely grateful for.

Rebecca Watters said "Thank you so much for thinking of us, and for spending time at the centre. It made us feel really special"



Events: Stir Gathering  
Date: 12th February 2023  
Location: Oasis Church  
Numbers: 65 young people & many more leaders  
Bridgnorth & Highley  
Dawley Baptist  
Perton  
Wednesfield Christian Centre  
Hope Church  
House of Prayer  
Wrockwardine Church  
Oasis Church  
Pentecost Church



On the 12th February 2023 we hosted our fourth Telford based Stir Gathering Event with National Evangelist Grace Wheeler preaching. Grace preached on the call to follow Jesus and the cost of being a disciple. By all accounts, this was a fantastic evening with a hugely diverse group of young people from across Telford and the region.

In some ways I feel that this was a landmark event, bringing in people from pretty far and wide who are catching the vision for what we're trying to achieve with Stir Gathering. There's still a long way to go in terms of establishing a movement of young disciples, but this Stir Gathering experience showed the potential of what we can achieve when we're together.

One of the most important elements of this event was that it was hosted by the Oasis Church. There were many things I thought were successful during the evening, but the most significant was that we able to experience the culture of the church and let some of our organisational control go.

During the evening many young people gave their lives to Jesus, and a similar number responded to the cost of deeper discipleship.

"What a brilliant night John, 2 of the young people I took raised their hands to give their lives, plus a parent volunteer ( who's been coming to ladies Alpha) and I caught up with some of the lads who used to come to HTA. Loved it and Grace was so powerful in her word." Ruth Watkins

"That was the purest expression of unity in a youth event I think I've ever seen!" Grace Wheeler



Events: Holy Trinity Academy Staff Retreat  
Date: Friday 17th February 2023  
Location: Cloveley Hall



On 17th February, I was really pleased to be invited to lead a seminar for staff at the Holy Trinity Academy staff retreat day. There were other seminars, but mine was based on a reflective activity called 'Heart Psalms', which comes from a book called *First Love*, written by Brad Ringer.

I talk about Heart Psalms in my book, stuck in the mud too. It's a really helpful, prayerful activity, which I find cuts through our tendency to speak to God as if he has no idea what we really need to talk about.

I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity and would happily do it again.

### **Taken from Stuck in the Mud**

A great mentor of mine from the States talks about how, if we love Jesus, then our 'first love' needs to actually be Him. He and his wife taught Louise and me that our hearts need to be opened up before God, like David opened up his heart. It's excellent teaching, but more interesting for this illustration is how they teach it. Generally speaking, they do it in groups.

One of the best parts of the 'first love' teaching is a practical activity called heart psalms. This is a 'heart psalm' that I wrote a couple of years back in a session with them.

Lord, my heart before You is growing. I'm so aware that You're moving in the lives of people that I love and I'm worried that I don't have enough of what I need to give to them.

You are God, I am not.  
Your love is wonderful, mine is not.  
Your plan is perfect, mine is not.  
You're a good Father,  
I'm too inconsistent.  
You are faithful,  
I'm distracted too easily.  
You are good, and your love endures forever.

Events: An Evil Day Conference  
Date: 20th March 2023  
Location: Charlton School  
Numbers: 82 Students & 12 staff  
Charlton School  
Hadley Learning Community  
Holy Trinity Academy  
Abraham Derby School  
William Brookes School  
Bridgnorth Endowed School



On Monday 20th March Telford Christians Together and Bridgnorth Youth & Schools Project hosted a bespoke conference called 'An Evil Day'. Our conference speaker was nationally recognised RE advisor, Lat Blaylock.

#### ***'An Evil Day' RE Student Conference with Lat Blaylock***

*This dynamic and interactive learning day about evil, goodness, philosophy and religion will explore a wide range of spiritual, religious and ethical approaches to questions about evil and how to reduce it.*

*Students attending the day will gain an experience of university life. The teaching methods will introduce key ideas from faith in ways that provoke argument and deepen thought. Students will be involved in a collaborative creative activity.*

We were thrilled to host this cross area conference, which included RE specialists from Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock & Telford as well as the chair of Telford and Wrekin \*SACRE and Shropshire SACRE member Jacquie Osmond-Smith. In addition, I was really pleased to have Ruth Watkins from St Christophers Trust and Alisha Foentjies from Telford Elim, supporting the day.

One of the most significant moments in the conference was when I was speaking to a couple of RE specialists in a break and it was commented that this event was bringing some joy and exploration into their subject area. Other great outcomes of the day included Alisha being introduced to the Hadley Learning Community RE head and Bridgnorth Endowed School's new RE lead gaining a greater understanding of what we do as a project.

*"Today was an opportunity to challenge students to think outside the box. Throughout the day you saw students developing in self-confidence by contributing their thoughts and insights. Religious studies is a creative and thought-provoking subject. This conference was designed to support ignite that creativity in students which is a busy curriculum can often be lost when teachers are teaching to the exam! The students at William Brookes school very much enjoyed today, one student now is excited to submit an article to the re today magazine, an experience this student no doubt will gain a huge amount from. Wonderful day." Claire Mincher: William Brookes*

\*Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

engage schools



Telford Secondary Schools Update

MAY 2023

together

Telford Secondary Schools together



Events: Stir Gathering  
Date: 24th June 2023  
Location: All Nations Church  
Numbers: 90 young people and leaders  
Bridgnorth & Highley  
Dawley Baptist  
Perton  
Hope Church  
Oasis Church  
Pentecost Church  
All Nations Telford  
Sutton Hill Church  
Chosen Generation Church  
Peace Chapel



At this point in the Stir Gathering programme, I think it's important to recognise that the power of good, highly invested relationships is a key to seeing God move in young people's work in the region.

We're now at a point where If everyone involved came to Stir Gathering at the same time, we'd have somewhere in the region of 130 young people and leaders. Given that there's only around 200 teenagers associated with Church in the region that's an important number, and one we have to aim for reaching.

I will always be as clear as possible about the vision of Stir Gathering: It's a place for leaders to bring their young people as part of their own missional vision for their growth. Individuals are of course welcome, but I care far more about the cohesion between us as leaders. It's that unity, I believe God is blessing.

At this Stir Gathering we had Rueben Williams from Gas Street Church, and Dan Harbor from All Nations led the worship

*"The event was really good for our young people, it felt like God was moving powerfully. The way the response was handled was discerned really well" Beckie Dotson*

Events: Reflect & Hikaru Day  
Date: 4th July 2023  
Location: Madeley Academy



Reflect room: 104 Students  
Hikaru Workshop: 104 Students

This is our third project with Madeley Academy. The first was in 2019 when I took GSUS LIVE. The second project was in 2022 when we took an Easter Workshop, Fit4Life and our Reflect Room.

This year we offered the school two workshops, the first was Reflect, run by Beckie Dotson from Sutton Hill Church, Mercy Salifu from Chosen Generation Church, Geoff Davenport from Dawley Baptist Church and Madeline Prockter our student intern. In Reflect students spend time thinking about justice, forgiveness, peace, hope and identity.

The second workshop was run by me and it was the latest version of our Hikaru workshop. In the Hikaru workshop students listen to sections of the Hikaru: Name above all names book, and then learn how to develop characters and create story boards. During the workshop we talk about Hikaru as an allegory of the Christian faith, and explore the things the main characters are struggling with.

#### Teacher Comment

“Hello John

It was an absolute pleasure to have you work with us again. All the feedback from staff and students has been very positive.

I will be looking forward to our continued collaborative work.

Geoff Hulme”

Events: Hikaru Workshops  
Date: 10th - 11th July 2023  
Location: Thomas Telford School



RS Workshop: 115 Students  
Hikaru Workshop: 115 Students

The original aim was for Ian Oliver, Nick Stansfield, and I to bring a two-part workshop to Thomas Telford School. I ran the first part of the workshop with the Hikaru resource, and then Ian and Nick were tasked with following up on the main themes and the significance of faith in Jesus. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the school changed the timetable, so in the end, our workshops didn't link.

Thankfully, Ian and Nick adapted well and ended up delivering a great workshop based on the main themes of Hikaru, just not connected.

#### **Student feedback for the Hikaru workshop**

- *It's a really amazing book and workshop. I loved the story telling activity!*
- *I came away feeling inspired and would love to get book to read as soon as it is out.*
- *I loved the illustrations and the music that was playing in the background, it helped me to really imagine what was going on and get a better picture of the story in my mind.*
- *I can't believe you were able to hold my attention for that long, it was a great session!*

#### **Teacher feedback for the Hikaru workshop**

I thought it was a really well presented, engaging and inspiring seminar, thank you! (J W Jones – Head of Year 9)

This was an incredibly valuable interactive workshop, and I personally enjoyed the sessions. The materials were outstanding, your teaching is clear, beautifully illustrated naturally, and nicely idiosyncratic. I also really appreciated hearing about your creative process – the journey you have been on in writing this book and I am sure this will resonate with the students about the power of resilience. Can't wait to have copies of the book when it comes out in November. Thanks again for coming to share with us at TTS.

M Antwi. Head of RS and Philosophy, Thomas Telford School

***Teacher feedback for the RS workshop***

Wow! Where should I start? I want to say a huge thank you for taking time to plan and prepare for the RS workshop this this week; I really appreciate your support and contributions. Hope fully we can continue to work together next academic year on other projects/workshops.

M Antwi. Head of RS and Philosophy, Thomas Telford School