

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work response to Covid-19 update

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Robinson paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Dr Sam Richards sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report the work of the CYDO+ team and Children's and Youth Work staff to support local churches during Covid-19 restrictions.
Main points	Changes in working practices, production of new resources.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods through CYDO+ team and CYDO+ managers Safeguarding URC Comms URC Youth Executive CTE.

Summary of impact

Financial	Financial savings of at least £50K due to cancelled meetings, events and move to digital alternatives.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Strengthening links with ROOTS; contributing to ecumenical projects; and sharing resources freely with other denominations at national, synod and local level.

Children's and Youth Work response to Covid-19 update

1. The 2020 world pandemic has changed the context and lives of children, young people and young adults. In England, Scotland and Wales this has seen periods of

lockdown and varied restrictions on daily life. The results for those aged 0-25 included months of missed education, disrupted exams and results, greatly reduced social contact, suspension of church activities and those offered by other voluntary organisations. Many things that had been looked forward to such as birthdays, holidays, and celebrating life transitions were lost. A number experienced the loss of older relatives to the disease. Employment opportunities have been severely reduced with young adults most effected. Domestic violence and child abuse have increased as families have been restricted to households which are not places of safety for all. Disparity in virtual connectivity has widened the gap between socio-economic groups. The economic impact has hit families with children hardest of all, with a sharp increase in use of foodbanks and reliance on benefits alongside increased debt and a rise in childhood poverty. Many children and young people have mental health and wellbeing issues arising from the loss of play, social contact and freedom so necessary to healthy development. Whilst those aged 0-25 have been least at risk from the infection, they have been the most seriously impacted both during the pandemic and in terms of the anticipated longer term consequences.

Living, loving God,
we praise you,
and through times of peril we lean into you,
for in Jesus Christ
you have trodden paths as difficult as ours,
revealing there a love that nothing defeats,
a love that bears us through.

We pray for children, young people and young adults
whose lives are being impacted
who are experiencing anxiety, loss, frustration and isolation.
We pray for those seeking to support them
and protect them from all forms of harm.

Even as we strive to behave responsibly,
and to care reliably,
so we feel after you
that in these uncertain times we might trust you are with us,
our refuge and strength,
and our faith, hope and love might be renewed,
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Adapted from 'A prayer for uncertain times' by immediate past moderators of General Assembly Revd Nigel Uden and Derek Estill.)

2. The team of synod Children's and Youth Development Officers and other synod lead workers for children's and youth work (the CYDO+ team) with the Head of Children's and Youth Work and Programme Officer started a weekly online meeting each Monday from 30 March 2020 until August when this reduced to fortnightly.

In addition, the team have had longer, more focused meetings online to replace their normal 24 hour residential meetings in June and October. These online

meetings have proved extremely beneficial and we will seek to continue them beyond the current pandemic response. In particular they have:

- a) helped the team to strengthen working relationships, particularly enabling those who are employed part-time, and for whom travel time is often prohibitive, to be more connected.
 - b) enabled the needs of local churches to be shared at a denomination-wide level very quickly.
 - c) enabled the team to make rapid decisions about which issues were best served collectively, and how best to resource that work.
 - d) enabled CYDO+s to offer their skills and gifts to particular projects.
 - e) helped the team members to remain connected, supported and motivated at a time when much of their normal work was suspended.
3. A much more flexible approach to CYDO+ allocations for assembly level work has emerged, as planned work (such as What Do You Think and The Big Speak Out) was cancelled, and other projects emerged as timely ways of resourcing local churches. This flexible approach also enabled us to reflect the variety of circumstances the team were in during different periods (such as health, local restrictions, being involved in other areas of synod work). This created a much more fluid way of working which raised potential issues around accountability to synods through line-managers and to the assembly programme through the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC). On the whole ways of working and lines of communication have been established to mitigate these issues, and there is a general desire to find ways to retain at least some of this flexibility going forwards to enable children's and youth work in the URC to be responsive to the ever changing context.
4. The CYDO+ team and Children's and Youth Work team have together created the following additional resources in response to the impact of Covid-19:
- i. Supplements to the normal bi-monthly e-newsletter on the following:
 - Online resources
 - Holiday club
 - CPD opportunities and online training
 - Supporting children and young people through anxiety, grief and loss
 - Resources for 11-18 year olds.
 - ii. Pre-recorded services
 - Together for Pentecost All Age Service
 - Pilots Sunday
 - Intergenerational Worship for Education Sunday (for CTE).
 - iii. Families on Faith Adventures @ Home – a weekly resource for Pilots Companies, FOFA Groups and local churches to send to families. This has been made available each week since 9 April 2020, online or as PDF to email or print, and includes a

range of activities (craft, play, prayer, worship, storytelling) that invite a family to explore a Bible story together, with supporting material on YouTube and Pinterest.

- iv. URC Youth TRIalogue – a weekly resource for age 16+ broadcast live on YouTube from 7 May 2020 to 30 July, and fortnightly since 3 September with option for live audience engagement via **Slido.com**, and available to view afterwards or access as a podcast. The first eight sessions also have an accompanying Going Deeper resource. This is a panel discussion with three contributors, chaired by a CYDO, exploring an issue in relation to a Bible passage.
- v. Let's Celebrate: children and youth work in the URC – online 'fringe event' for General Assembly 2020. This enabled us to share news and highlight projects, reaching a much wider audience than normal.
- vi. Stepping Out – our first webinar on starting youth work outside the building (detached youth work) with Tim Evans, CEO of Worth Unlimited. This method of offering training enabled us to provide specific support to a widely scattered group of participants, and to showcase some examples of good practice.
- vii. The Big Speak Out and Pilots Big Day Out were offered as virtual events but did not go ahead due to low take up.
5. URC Youth Executive in 2020 have only met online, and in September took the difficult decision not to hold Youth Assembly 2021. They are working on an alternative programme on the theme of Heroes and Villains. They created an online service for International Youth Day on the theme of mental health. Some have also been involved in a peer-led regular online worship gathering.
6. Our normal June mailing to all churches was re-conceived as an email campaign with support from URC Comms. We will be assessing the relative impact of this.
7. Our Faith with Under 5s day conference (run in partnership with Roots) in September was re-conceived as an online conference over three evenings 24 to 26 November, with strong take up.
8. We are partners in an ecumenical project Creating Space with Children, offering an online community of practice to reflect on ministry with children, hosted by the Methodist Church.
9. At the invitation of URC Comms we are creating a family engagement resource in a post-able box for the six weeks from advent to epiphany – Advent Hope and Joy.
10. We are producing an online Christingle service for the URC.
11. We have been producing guidance for local churches and sample materials for risk assessment, consent and code of conduct for online engagement with children and young people:
 - Latest URC guidance for children's and youth work
 - Guidelines for safe use of video conferencing with young people and children (PDF)
 - URC online engagement with children and young people RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL (PDF)

URC online engagement with children and young people RISK ASSESSMENT TOOL (Word document)

- Online engagement information and consent form for under 18s (PDF)
 - Online engagement information and consent form for under 18s (Word document)
 - Code of Conduct for online engagement with young people, children and families, and church workers (PDF)
 - Code of Conduct for online engagement with young people, children and families, and church workers (Word document)
 - Top Tips for engaging in online worship (PDF)
12. This represents a huge amount of work and ministry in an uncertain time and we encourage the church to give thanks to God for the Children and Youth Work team, the synod CYDO+ team, Youth Executive, and the many people working with children and young people in our local churches and local communities.