

Finding and keeping volunteers

Creating spaces where children and young people thrive



Tom Clark is Churches and Networks Consultant at the Church of England. He leads the workstream aiming to help churches recruit 27,000 volunteers with children and young people by 2030.

We want young people to treasure God, have fun, influence society, value everyone and emulate Christ. We want to see young people encounter the love of Jesus and share that encounter with others. The Church of England has a priority to grow younger, with an aim to double numbers of young active disciples by 2030. To have those spaces in which children and young people can thrive, we of course need the team to do it. And I appreciate **finding the volunteers to make that happen can be the hardest part!**

How can we possibly recruit, inspire, mobilise and equip the team we need to make our children and youth sessions happen? I like to think of the following three values as three legs on a three-legged stool. With all three in place, you have a good foundation to begin.

1. Strong Support
2. Honourable Hours
3. Clear Communication

Strong Support

Everyone likes to be part of something fun, right? So, keep volunteering fun! Have a yearly thank-you party, send the team birthday cards, take someone a cake or a meal if they are going through something. Offer to pray. Leading children and youth work can be hard work, but doing it with a team that cares and is there to support each other makes the whole thing way more fun. I appreciate it will take time to write the birthday card or to send the text, but I've noticed if anything, it feels a lot less awkward asking someone to step in and cover a gap if there's a deeper relationship going on in the background.

Honourable Hours

No one joins a team to be rinsed of all their time and energy! Of course, we know we are going to have to roll up our sleeves and muck in, but there has to be some respect for people's time and wellbeing. Part of honourable hours is the team honouring their commitment to be there. If a team member has not shown up or has been late, you are responsible to communicate clearly with them about this. Your role is to care for the team who had to fill in. It's only right and proper that we check in with people if they haven't shown up without any warning – to make sure they are ok.

We honour our team with briefings before activities to set expectations and share information about the session. Start these team times with worship, a reflection from the Bible and/or prayer, to ensure you have given the session the correct foundation.

Be ready to welcome your team and set them up for success by being early enough to the space to pray and set up anything necessary prior to briefings. Don't set up what the team needs to set up themselves – as this sends the message to them that they're not needed. Leave some things for the team to help with. And remember to set a culture for arriving on time: start on time with your briefing.

We also honour the team by debriefing after activities to reflect, learn, train and improve practice and to pray. Keep these short, like 10-15 minutes, again, to honour people's time.

Clear Communication

And finally, keep communicating. Make sure the vision is communicated regularly. Keep the main thing the main thing. Why are you inviting the team to do what they're doing each week? Set up a regular email that goes out with all the correct information. See if you can send that out at the same time each week so people know when they can expect it. You could consider setting up and maintaining a WhatsApp/messaging group for your volunteers to offer prayer and send out any reminders. If not all your volunteers are on WhatsApp, make sure the information goes to all via the best means. Ensure the team members you are responsible for have all the dates they need well in advance, i.e. Summer and Christmas parties, festival celebrations, family services, etc.

So, who would you like on your team?

It is hard to find team, isn't it? That's why we've created the JOIN resources:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/JOIN> These are being used by many churches across the country to successfully recruit new volunteers.

There is nothing like a personal ask. Volunteers want to know that they are wanted relationally (not just to fill an adult/child ratio), serving alongside friends and being part of a worthy cause – passing on faith to the younger generations. Share your vision for young people as well as how rewarding and relational serving can be.



Training

For information on training in Children's and Youth ministry for all your new volunteers, take a look at our online resources [WEB](https://bit.ly/42ICVbO).

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Share the bitesize tips in the 'How to' series: 'How to start a conversation with a child' and 'How to respond well to additional needs'.

 Listen to Tom Clark on the Roots podcast: rootsforchurches.podbean.com