

Youth Work in Pontesbury – Annual Parish Meeting 2025

Work at Mary Webb Secondary School

A significant portion of my youth work takes place at Mary Webb Secondary School, where I currently spend two days a week providing one-to-one support and facilitating group sessions. These sessions focus on equipping students with essential life skills and fostering personal growth.

Additionally, we run two thriving student groups during break time and lunch. The break-time group, attended by around 20 enthusiastic Year 7 and 8 students, includes engaging games and short talks with Christian themes. The lunchtime group, which attracts 10-15 students from Years 9 to 11, provides a space for fun activities and meaningful discussions. Beyond these regular sessions, we also lead school assemblies five to six times a year, often centered around themes or Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, always incorporating a message from the Bible.

Youth Café

We currently run two after-school Youth Cafés each week, providing a relaxed and welcoming space for young people to unwind, connect, and enjoy some pizza.

- **Monday Youth Café:** Typically, we see between 9 and 13 young people attending, primarily from Years 7 and 8, with a few older students from Years 9 and 11. Once this group becomes more firmly established (similar to our Wednesday Café), I plan to introduce a structured course or other engaging initiatives.
- **Wednesday Youth Café:** This session attracts between 8 and 11 students from Years 10 and 11. Recently, I introduced the STIR course, a gentle introduction to Christianity designed as a precursor to the Alpha Course for young people. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, sparking curiosity and deeper conversations about faith.

Youth Weekend Away

Just before the summer holidays, we took nine students on a weekend away at Conover Hall, where they participated in archery, aerial trekking, kayaking, and other exciting activities. It was refreshing to see young people disconnect from their phones, immerse themselves in the outdoors, and build strong friendships.

One of the highlights of the trip was the campfire, where we had meaningful conversations while toasting marshmallows and playing games. The evening ended with leaders sharing personal experiences of overcoming difficulties, which encouraged several young people to open up about their own challenges. Since the trip, we have been following up with individuals who expressed a desire for further support. The feedback from both leaders and participants has been overwhelmingly positive, and there is great enthusiasm for organizing similar trips in the future.

Detached Youth Work

Over the summer, we organized two barbecue events for Youth Café attendees and other young people in Pontesbury—one just before the summer holidays and another toward the end. Additionally, Greg and I spent time at Pontesbury Park engaging with young people to understand what activities they would like to see in the area. Their suggestions included a snooker tournament, access to the AstroTurf at Mary Webb, and opportunities to use gym equipment for fitness training. I have taken note of these ideas and am actively exploring their feasibility.

Following these conversations, we successfully launched a Drop-In session at St. George's Church, where nine young people (five boys and four girls from Years 10 and 11) came to play table tennis and pool. This was particularly exciting as most of these young people had not engaged with our programs before, apart from a few who attended our summer barbecue. Their enthusiasm has encouraged us to plan additional sessions during the February and Easter half-term breaks.

Other Youth Work Initiatives Beyond our regular programs, I have had the opportunity to raise awareness about our youth work through media and political engagement. I was invited to speak on BBC West Midlands Radio and BBC Shropshire, where I shared insights into our work in Pontesbury and our partnership with SYFC. Additionally, I had a productive meeting with MP Julia Buckley, where I highlighted the needs and concerns surrounding youth work in the area.

Future Projects and Aspirations

Looking ahead, I have been tasked with planning youth activities for the Pontesbury Festival this summer, which is an exciting opportunity to further engage with the community. I am also exploring the possibility of organizing another weekend away or day trip to strengthen relationships among young people. However, the success of this initiative will depend on securing adequate funding and volunteer support.

Conclusion

So far, all of our projects have been met with enthusiasm, and it has been incredibly rewarding to witness young people forming connections, growing in confidence, and engaging with our team. As we continue to build and expand these initiatives, I look forward to seeing even greater positive impacts on the youth of Pontesbury.