



# Every child matters

## Yes to everything

In 2004 I made a significant change in my career. Up to that time I had been a local Youth for Christ (YFC) schools worker based in Leicestershire. But at the end of that academic year British YFC asked me to become the national schools resource manager and at the same time one of my local schools invited me to adopt the role of extended schools co-ordinator with responsibility for teaching drama. I said 'yes' to everything.

Subsequently it has become clear how well the two roles compliment each other. As the extended schools programme rolls out across the country the need for engagement with the voluntary sector and the faith community becomes ever clearer. I was in a unique position to create bridges between school and church through a variety of means. But little did I imagine that some of what we did would have an impact on an international scale.



Nigel Roberts is the schools resource manager for YFC for half his time. In the other half he works as an extended schools co-ordinator for a family of schools and has particular responsibility for developing drama.

## ECM

The extended school programme calls for schools to allow access to a wide range of exciting, challenging and innovative activities, including study support for every day of the week, 48 weeks of the year. Involvement in the arts and ICT is particularly encouraged, as is meeting the outcomes of Every Child Matters through the programmes provided.

I had begun teaching a media module in my drama classes and discovered a massive interest from a wide range of students of varying academic abilities. At the same time some of my drama club students had begun to improvise scenes around a theme of child slavery arising out of material they had picked up in citizenship classes. On reflection I realised that I had the basis for what could be an interesting holiday project within extended schools.

## Film and drama

I booked a two week block of the school's summer programme for a 'film and drama school.' I invited some professional camera operators who I had met through the local church to come and teach technical aspects of film making. I also contacted Oasis Europe, an organisation that is taking a lead in campaigning about the issue of child trafficking. Oasis Europe provided me with the kinds of facts and case studies that I knew would stimulate the actors.

In the first week of the project students became technically able, improvised characters, helped write a script and rehearsed scenes. In the second



A student addresses the UN conference on global trafficking

*Students gained new skills, new confidence and a fresh understanding of world issues*



# to God

week, with the continuing help of the cameraman, we shot a 40-minute film. I undertook the editing myself with some student support with the aim of drawing a line under the project at a film premiere.

The experience was immensely rewarding. Students gained new skills, new confidence and a fresh understanding of world issues. They also began to learn empathy for those caught up in trafficking. The deep level of role-play involved in the film was a major contributor to this. The experience was also exhausting. Extended schools programmes are a very demanding new aspect of a school's prospectus.

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... as dynamic agents of change in a hurting world*

## Oasis Europe

The film premiere was an important part of the process. It was a time when students, parents and staff at school could actually celebrate achievement. The film was a major success for many of the students and demonstrated to some staff hidden depths to those who might otherwise have been dismissed as disruptive or difficult. As much of what had been written in the script came from material provided by Oasis Europe it was decided that we would invite Phil Lane, Director of Oasis Europe, to come to the premiere. The invitation was accepted and Phil flew in from his office in Belgium to be at the inaugural screening of our film. The impact on both students and their parents was significant.

At the premiere Phil outlined in more detail the issues relating to child trafficking and commended the students for wanting to know more and



Students from Redmoor High School in the UN building in Vienna

creating something that could be used to bring the issue to the attention of other young people.

Accordingly, the film and accompanying lesson and youth work material was made available more widely. Everyone involved concluded that it had exceeded our expectations and met all its objectives.

## Stop the Traffik

The new term got into its swing. Christmas began to impose its shadow on everything we did, both in terms of YFC and at school, until in the week before the end of term we had a call from Phil Lane. He was on a committee of Stop the Traffik that had been invited to participate in the United Nations international conference on child trafficking. He invited us to show the film and talk about how young people felt about the issue at the conference, which was to take place in Vienna. It was hoped that the project might act as an inspiration for diplomats to try and create similar projects in their own country.

And that was how we came to be at the Vienna conference centre talking about the role of extended schools, partnerships with churches and charities, and the difference young people can make



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in the lives of their less fortunate peers. We had travelled a very long way from an initial idea for an activity to fill the long weeks of summer in an attempt to meet UK Government recommendations.

**Agents of change**

What did the children learn? There were many obvious things. They learned how to make a film. They learned how to write a script. They learned the facts about one of the greatest crimes the human race has ever committed. They learned some less obvious things too. They learned that the Church cared. The greater our involvement in the project, the closer we came to our partners the more they discovered about the motivations behind them.

The children saw Christians as people of compassion who cared enough about issues to do something about them. They saw Christians not

just as the group that took assembly once a month, or those that ran the lunchtime Rock Solid club or even those who went to church on Sunday, but as dynamic agents of change in a hurting world.

By the end of our journey their view of the Christian faith had changed. They now knew it to be real, life changing and relevant. None of them expressed a wish to become a Christian but they all were happy to call Christians their friends.

**Unicef**

But the lesson I felt most valuable was to discover that they too could change. The 14 children who took part went through a process of self discovery. They went from knowing about something, to caring about something until they became activists for change. They themselves learned compassion. So that now those students who went to Vienna are taking lessons and assemblies in their cluster, they are organising county-wide conferences and they are planning a new project at the instigation of Unicef to run this summer.

The Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education (2004, QCA) expresses the hope that students will not only learn about religion but learn from it, and that what they learn will affect their own worldview. In a way what started as a drama project for extended schools became a piece of extended RE.

I look back on the project as proof that the philosophy behind extended schools can work in practice, and that the outcomes of Every Child Matters can be met in many and surprising ways.

■ Nigel Roberts

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Students enjoy some sight-seeing in Vienna