

# YFC and schools

## Input

Youth for Christ (YFC) is an interdenominational charity that has been working in Britain for over 50 years. During that time it has evolved as a mission organisation. In its early years, following a visit by Billy Graham, it was very much about large choirs, big rallies, great crowds.

As the nature of mission changed so did YFC. Out went the choirs and the rallies and in came a more compact mission organisation based in local communities. These centres were encouraged to develop their own mission strategies which reflected the needs of their local community. So a network of around 60 centres was developed from the highlands and islands of Scotland to the Isle of Wight in the south of England. Each centre was unique, but a common thread ran through them all: each was concerned to have some kind of Christian input in schools.



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.

## Extended schools

The nature of this input has varied over the years, but has typically included assemblies, RE lessons and lunchtime Christian groups. But as education has changed so has YFC. Youth for Christ does not see schools as a captive audience for evangelism, it sees schools as part of the mission field. By this I mean that YFC schools workers feel called to love, serve and support the students and staff within the school community. This will involve sharing their beliefs in assemblies, but it will also mean so much more.

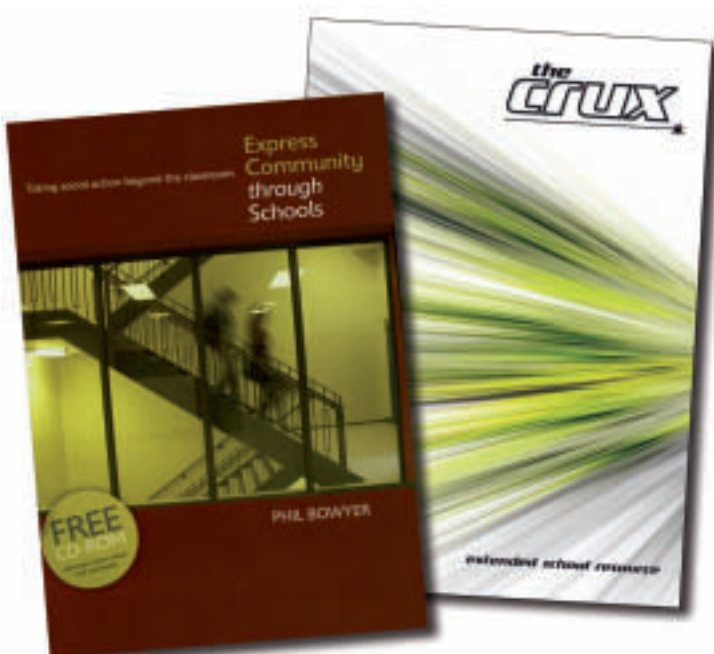
In recent years YFC has decided to become a more active and innovative partner with schools. When the UK Government introduced the extended schools initiative it soon became very clear that the delivery of the 'core offer' would prove to be very difficult for a headteacher working in isolation. In fact this was recognised when the prospectus was re-issued in 2007 with a particular emphasis on the importance of developing community partnerships.

*Youth for Christ does not see schools as a captive audience for evangelism*

## The crux

Reference was made to partnering with faith groups and voluntary youth organisations. With this in mind YFC developed a resource called *the crux* – a series of after school clubs for each day of the week, 48 weeks of the year for three years – designed to fulfil that part of the core offer which called for a wide range of study support activities.

Week by week, *the crux* focuses on a different area each day such as IT, sport, the arts, etc, all with a Christian basis. The resource can be used directly by teachers or, better still, by local churches and youth organisations to build positive links with their local school. The great thing about this



*the crux says something profound about mission and the nature of the church*



Children enjoy learning about Jesus

approach is that it is not short-term – it is a demonstration of longer-term regular commitment to students. In order to deliver the programme a church or organisation needs to be very sure of its calling and purpose. Hence, *the crux* says something profound about mission and the nature of the church.

## Partnership

Whereas in the past a YFC centre may have dropped into a school for a week and dazzled students with their bands and drama groups, now the workers are there throughout the year developing trust, building relationships, becoming accessible.

## A significant proportion of YFC’s workforce is made up of qualified teachers

But the innovation has not stopped there. In partnership with Soul Action a resource called *Express Community Through Schools* has been created. It works by helping students develop projects in their local community in a series of citizenship lessons. Again, this resource attempts to help churches build meaningful long-standing links with schools. The underlying philosophy is one of partnership. As more and more efforts are made by politicians to improve community cohesion, resources like *Express Community* become useful tools for making the policies happen on the ground.

## RE resources

Perhaps the boldest step, though, has been the development of YFC’s new resources for use in RE



IT is an important part of *the crux* programme

## YFC workers receive training in schools work

lessons. When England’s *Non-Statutory National Framework for Religious Education* (QCA, 2004) was published it became clear that RE would be taught in a new way. This has been borne out by the release of the suggested study programme at Key Stage 3.

The emphasis is now on students exploring, discovering, analysing and assessing. Students are to be encouraged to engage in debate in the quest to discover a personal truth. This approach seems a long way from the one traditionally followed by YFC workers in the classroom. YFC’s new RE resources are much more in line with other contemporary materials produced for the Christian market, *Youth Alpha* being the most obvious example. *Alpha* had been designed to allow people to explore faith in an open and friendly environment giving people space to express their own feelings and beliefs without any judgement.

## Alpha, of course!

In short, it was not such a great step to develop a series of RE modules based around the *Youth Alpha* course. The resource is called *Explore* – to reflect the new philosophy. Over the last two years *Explore* has been through a rigorous series of pilots and tests. It has been taught by RE specialists, youth workers and by non-specialists in a wide variety of schools in all parts of the country. And it has been rewritten numerous times and commented upon by experts. The end result will be launched in May 2008.

*Explore* is an RE course for the post-9/11 generation. It encourages students to ask questions in order to better understand beliefs and believers, and it provides numerous other opportunities for exploration and discovery. *Explore* is a resource that can be used with confidence by teachers and churches; it promises to stretch adults involved in

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teaching/leading the lesson as well as children and young people who are learning/participating.

### **Deeper understanding**

Youth for Christ has changed – it has gained a deeper understanding of schools, students and staff. Working in partnership with organisations like the Association of Christian Teachers, YFC is developing a broader remit for its work which remains true to its mission statement – to take the good news relevantly to every young person in Britain. There remains a problem, however.

Working in many schools as I do, I witness a range of responses to Christian organisations. Some schools welcome them; some accept them with a certain degree of caution; some will not have them darken their door. At the heart of these varying responses lies a perception of Christian workers that includes the following:

- They only want access to the school in order to convert the children.

- They are unprofessional and untrained.
- They can be unreliable and uncommitted.

These reservations may be warranted in the case of some Christian workers, but certainly not all. A significant proportion of YFC's workforce is made up of qualified teachers, many of them possessing an additional degree in youth work. And, of course, all YFC workers receive training in schools work.

Yes, YFC would love to see students become Christians. Mission is the motivation for all we do. But the nature of that mission is broad and its foundation is service.

It is my hope that perceptions in the coming years will change as YFC and other organisations have changed. I hope that schools will see in us a group with which they would love to partner so that together we can bring about a change for good in the local community.

■ Nigel Roberts

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Education and Christian  
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Published biannually by the Association of Christian Teachers, Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning, and The Stapleford Centre, *JECB* is concerned with current educational thinking from a Christian perspective.

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