

Wheatley United Reformed Church

Youth and Families Project

1. Wheatley United Reformed Church and the Community

This project aims to provide more opportunities for young people and more support for their parents and carers in Wheatley. As the only one of the 4 churches in Wheatley with hall facilities, Wheatley URC has long fostered community through a wide range of activities and the premises are used by many community groups. It is a part of the wider United Reformed Church and belongs to the URC Wessex Synod.



Wheatley URC is at the centre of the village

2. The Youth and Families Project - Background

The background to the current Project started when Wheatley's local authority-funded youth club for 11-16-year-olds was closed in 2012. The church's Children and Young People's Team offered to provide leadership alongside Wheatley Community Church and re-started a weekly youth group for young people between 11-16 years of age called *Pulse*. *Pulse* meets in term time on Sunday evenings between 6.30 and 8.30pm with Trips Out and Film Nights once per term. Week by week we alternate between providing 'fun' games evenings with the aim of building trusted relationships, and more 'serious' discussion



Wide-game on Trip out to Brill Hill

evenings when a range of topics of interest to this age group are presented and explored through dialogue. There are currently over 30 young people registered. The young people come not only from Wheatley, but also the villages around Wheatley – mirroring the school catchment area. The average weekly attendance prior to lockdown was 19, and we have maintained contact with the young people throughout the pandemic through zoom meetings, using new Games and Discussion formats.



Film night in the Mulberry Room

3. What are our hopes?

The aim of this post is to support our work with young people in our community and extend this to their families in the following ways:

3.1 *Direct Youth Work*

- further develop the weekly Pulse Youth Group (ages 11-16) by making available residential conferences and camps for the young people and to accompany them there;
- liaise with the Synod's Children and Youth Development Officer to provide training opportunities for our assistant youth leaders (ages 16-21);
- work with children at the end of primary education (ages 10-11) as they prepare to make the transition into secondary school, and into the current 'age window' that we currently serve.

3.2 *Work with parents / carers and families*

- offer activities specifically for parents and carers of 11–16-year-olds. Starting with the parents and carers of young people who attend *Pulse* then extending to other parents, the post-holder will enable us to provide support at the time when many find parenting challenging. Parents and carers often feel isolated when their children move to secondary school and they no longer have the 'school gate' contact with other parents, and when their own careers are demanding much of their time and attention. There is a major gap in provision to be filled. With this project, we hope to have the capacity to fill this gap with discussion groups and events for parents and carers (e.g., Mindfulness classes, where we already have experienced teachers, 'Food for Thought' evenings, *Parent-Talk* www.careforthefamily.org.uk/courses/parentalk.)



Barbecue for the young people and parents/carers



4. Partnership working

We work closely with the other churches in Wheatley and Holton, but for our Youth Work we work most closely with the Wheatley Community Church.

Discussion evening in Mulberry Room



Games in the Hall

6. Summary

The Youth & Families Project will allow us to develop our youth and families work and also to extend the scope of what we offer. The further opportunities this project will enable, such as conferences and camps will be especially important as we navigate the long-term aftereffects of the pandemic lock-downs. For the young people, many of whom have been affected by school closure and exam disruption, it will be a much-needed lifeline. For their parents, it will give an opportunity to come together to share and to learn new skills to cope with the stress of parenting at a time when support is most needed.

Church and Village

Further information

1. The local community

Wheatley is a village of around 4000 people, six miles from Oxford city. Eighteen per cent of those in the village are under 18 years of age, and around 250 are between the ages of 11 and 16.

The village is also a hub for surrounding villages. A further 650 young people (age 11-16 years) come into the village each day to the Secondary School and see Wheatley as their base (see map at https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/4077_all.pdf).

Wheatley URC is located near to the centre of the village on Crown Square. The village is expanding rapidly with over 50 houses recently completed in the village and planning permission for a further 500+ dwellings in the small hamlet of Holton that is attached to Wheatley and uses its facilities.

2. Wheatley URC

The Church was an 18th century tanning barn that was converted to a chapel in 1842. The adjoining Hall (left) was constructed as a schoolroom in 1898 but is now used as a Church Hall. The church has maintained its membership numbers over the last 50 years, with around 50 members at the inception of the United Reformed Church in 1972, and the same number today. Around 40 people attend the main weekly worship though, like many churches, the age profile has changed with fewer younger families.



Renovated hall - 2019

The church values its liberal theological tradition, a tradition that believes that God is still at work in the world in new and surprising ways and that God's spirit urges the church to recognise this radical and divine love in action. To this end, the church Ministry teams organize courses such 'Living the Questions', run mindfulness retreats and creative spirituality days and movement groups. It also plays an active role in Fairtrade, is an eco-church, and is involved in several social justice projects including Amnesty letter-writing and raising funds for and fostering close links with a school in Zimbabwe. As part of its inclusive mission, the church welcomes and is registered for same-sex marriage.

3. Recent developments

In 2018-19, to extend the church's work in the community the hall was re-roofed and renovated (above), and a 1960's outbuilding was demolished and rebuilt as a meeting room (right) with a new lobby and disabled facilities.

These developments were warmly welcomed by both the church and the wider community. We now have facilities that are welcoming, accessible and fit for purpose, used for meetings, mindfulness groups, memory café and youth activities.



New Mulberry Room - 2019