

If results matter, we must focus on our youth – but how?

It is generally recognised that over 80% of those who come to faith do so before the age of 20.

- While those growing up in Christian families mostly come to faith as children, those from non-church families primarily come to faith in their teenage years.
- The most significant age group for this is the 11 to 14yos – with religious worldview now largely set by that age.
- Our own research as the Shining Lights Trust across NZ in 2016 revealed that NZ church youth ministry attendance was sitting at about one-third to one-quarter of what it was 25 years ago.

Youth ministry is therefore logically a wise area of focus for outreach.

When looking at NZ youth ministry, the outreaching focus is notably weak in many places. One factor is the increased number of emotional challenges young people face. Many young people come from broken homes. For this reason youth leaders are overwhelmed by the complex issues their youth are facing. Youth leaders on average last about 18 months to 2 years in the role. Our denominational (and other) youth networks have therefore had to adapt to support them. The outreaching focus has suffered.

How could this be changed? What if senior pastors (SPs) and their elders' boards were to take responsibility for ensuring certain practices were sustained in their church's youth ministries? This could be achieved by inducting each new leader into certain understandings and practices when they start.

Godtalk.nz exists for this specific reason, to help fill a specific gap.

#1. The SP gets each new youth leader to watch the 12 x 5 minute videos at Godtalk.nz/leadership. They then discuss these.

#2. The SP then asks the youth leader to imitate their own example by committing one month per year to **equipping** for outreach (resources at Godtalk.nz/equipping) and to run some outreaching events.

#3. The youth leader is then encouraged (or helped) to **network** with other youth leaders in their city or town.

- For example, the SP asks an elder and their spouse to volunteer to cook the youth leaders of their city or town a generous breakfast once a term, to help catalyse their meeting. Youth leaders will last longer as a result.



- Youth groups could unite in a vision to encourage their youth to meet and pray in their respective **schools**.
- They could run some **combined outreach** / social / sporting events – to strengthen youth ministry and its profile in their community.

It is our habits that build culture – not programmes. What if we were to more intentionally support our ever-changing youth leaders, to see an outreaching culture established and sustained in our youth groups?

Resources:

- Godtalk.nz
- 24-7youthwork.nz
- sunz.org.nz/youth
- Denominational youth networks