**Recruiting and Keeping Young Leaders**

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(notes from Children’s Ministry Catch Up- 3 May 2012)

**What are some of the characteristics of young people  (13-25 year olds)?**

Social networking – Connections count, used to belonging

Relationship focussed

Savvy consumers

Multi- taskers

Instant access to whatever they need- feedback, information, ideas,etc

Involved, not just spectators- experiential learners and creators

Technologically savvy

Want to make a difference, and believe that they can

Etc

**So how do we build a team that includes young people?** **How can we recruit effectively, keep and train them?  And why should we bother?**

**Why?-** Opportunities to speak into their lives, helping to impact next generation of leaders, discipling, growing, leadership as part of the discipleship journey, kids often relate better to young people who they can feel connected with. We need to continually gather new leaders into our ministries, and it needs to be win-win.  The ministry gets leaders and the leaders have new opportunities to learn and grow as disciples, etc

**How?- 4 Suggestions**:

**Don’t just invite them to serve, give them an experience of your ministry**.  Young people are inundated with ‘invitations’ all the time through facebook and other social media.  They’re used to being involved, so involve them.  Look at ways to give them a taste of what serving in your children’s ministry might be like.  Offer opportunities for them to experience the ministry (but consider safety issues if you invite them in to your programme- check you safety policy).  Perhaps bring activities to main church or invite them to a ‘party’ with other leaders to experience the fellowship and fun. (eg of facebook, text invites that didn’t work).  Childrens’ ministry is experiential, fun and interactive- make your recruiting the same! (eg of inviting young people who weren’t leaders to party at end of year to meet other leaders, enjoy fellowship time, share food, hear stories about the kids and the ministry and be offered an opportunity to join the team, etc)

At the same time, be honest when recruiting.  In can be tempting to ‘sell’ our ministries as fun and games and easy.  It can be those things, but it’s also important to share the reality that sometimes we deal with tough kids or difficult spaces or whatever else your situation entails.  Be open, and answer questions honestly.  Building relationships based on trust is crucial.  Be honest about what you expect from them.  If your expectation is that they’ll help lead a small group, tell them that and explain what it means.  (eg of mom recruited to help in crèche where my expectation was that she would work towards taking over and her expectation was that she’d be available to help out when she was at church- caused big problems and her family ended up leaving.  I wasn’t clear)

**Get to know them**. Young people, like all of us, want to have their skills, abilities and passions put to good use.  They’re less likely to say ‘yes’ to any old job, than to say ‘yes’ to a well considered role- however big or small.  Think about what you’re inviting them to do, involving them with.  The loyalty that many older people feel towards their church (the idea that we gain so much so we should give back) doesn’t always click with youth and young adults so we can’t just rely on them being able to be pushed or pulled into things that don’t appeal.

As leaders it’s important to spend time getting to know individuals personally.  Spend time with them- outside ministry time if possible.  Be available for them to share feedback, comment, ask questions.  Be a good listener.  Give feedback (remember this is a generation that’s used to being able to tap into info, feedback, resources, whatever they need, instantly).  Be yourself, be real in your relationships with your leaders. Young people can sense hypocrisy, be open as much as possible.

**Nurture a sense of community.** Young people often identify themselves in terms of community and belonging.  (eg using ‘likes’ on facebook to connect and to identify who they are)  Where older adults might see fellowship and relationship as an added benefit to being in a team, for young people, those connections are crucial.  Their lives are rooted in relationship.  They often prefer to serve with friends.  Socializing is what can make the experience meaningful.  (eg of 2 teen girl helpers serving in the crèche who were quite chatty with each other and a bit distracting and overloaded the roster on their week and left alternate weeks short of leaders, but when attempts were made to roster them separately they stopped coming)

Build relationships within the team.  Schedule social times as well as training (or combine the two).

**Young people want to make a difference.**  Making an impact can often be what keeps them going.  Children’s Ministry doesn’t always give instant feedback and for this generation, that can be tough. It’s important to share the vision of why we do what we do and how our ministry fits into the bigger picture of what God’s doing.  Take time to share how they’re impacting the lives of the kids they’re working with, helping the families, contributing to life of the church and making a difference for the whole community.  Be specific.  As leaders, be attentive to what’s happening with young leaders and kids so that you can be specific in what you share.  If you get positive comments from parents, share them.  Look for ways to connect them to the bigger picture of serving and building God’s Kingdom.

One of the gifts that young people can bring to your ministry is the ability to see things differently than you do.  Don’t feel threatened by this (as tempting as it can be).  It’s a good thing.  Often suggestions and ideas come from a place of wanting to do things better which is great.  Try to accept all ideas and suggestions positively- even if not all of them can be implemented.  As you build a relationship of trust, it will become easier to sift through ideas as a team, pray together and make good decisions.  Remember, the worst thing that can happen with trying a new idea is that it doesn’t work.  For someone who is driven by wanting to make a difference and change things for good, that permission giving is crucial.

We have a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people and in our ministry by recruiting and training these next generation leaders.  They are amazing and have huge potential.  By including them in our teams, we can work with God in all that He’s doing in their lives, but we can also help make a difference in the lives of the children and families that we minister to and with by bringing in young people with fresh ideas and perspective.  Sometimes it can be difficult to connect with young people who can approach situations in a different way, but it’s well worth any extra effort.