19th May 2020

Morning all,

I hope you are well.

Thanks again for attending the last meeting.  I’m loving the sharing and your willingness to create and innovate.

I’ve been looking at your Padlet pages and feel so inspired! So much cool material! It’s wonderful!

I just thought I’d try and pull some of the thoughts, ideas and resources which have been shared already. This is from email, notes and memory. If I’ve missed anything drop me a line.

**The Chalice Award**

<https://www.unitarian.org.uk/pages/chalice-award>

Rachel and Cheryl touched on the CW as a useful resource. On the website you’ll find a breakdown of the award. It’s a good starting point which allows you to adapt and change according to the needs and interests of your participants.

**Girl Guiding UK**

Cheryl mentioned how she’s been able to adapt many of the resources to a Zoom context and shared the following links for us to look at:

<https://www.wagggs.org/en/resources/united-nations-challenge-badge-climate-change/>   There is a lot of info and also ideas for activities on here.

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/adventures-at-home/>  Here are some of our resources from our Girl Guiding programme. You will see they are spilt into different age groups, if you click on the age group then the resources list for that age will show. This is added to by our HQ weekly on a Wednesday with new resources.

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/programme-and-activities/adventuresathome/guides_globalgoalie.pdf> this is one of our resource cards again based on the development goals.

**Transformers**

Rosemary and Andrew have developed a range of great resources from a range of sources. I’ve attached them to this email.

**Padlet**

Rachel Introduced us to Padlet as a means of communicating with children and families. See the link below for more details.

<https://padlet.com/rachaelbradfield/t8vkd3b9irve6siq>

**Unitarian Universalist Association**

<https://www.uua.org/ages>

The UUA have lots of resources around youth and family ministry. It’s well worth checking out.

**Safeguarding**

I’ve attached a number of safeguarding documents for you to look at. They’re still in draft form but will give you an idea of some of the things you should consider. Feel free to take and adapt according to your setting.

If you haven’t undertaken safeguarding training, particularly around safeguarding children, within the past 3 years it might be time for an update. I’ve been playing with a few online options.

Two good options you might wish to consider are:

* 31:8 - <https://thirtyoneeight.org/training/foundation-level/children-and-young-people/>
* NSPCC - <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training>

The 31:8 training is good if you want a quick refresher or if you have volunteers or helpers who simply need some kind of awareness training. I’m sure 31:8 will be running more webinars so keep an eye on their website. Cost £39.00 – Webinar.

The NSPCC training is very comprehensive - Very good for lead volunteers. Cost £25.00 – Online.

The final thing we talked about was the possibility of running a national youth/youth and family event online. It could be an afternoon, day or weekend meeting. We could pick a theme and offer a workshops around it. Lots of potential to bring in other volunteers and possibly reach children and families who might not feel comfortable stepping inside a church setting. It could be seriously cool! Have a think about it. Other groups such as GG are doing similar types of things online.

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/what-we-do/events-and-opportunities/event-and-opportunity-finder/girlguiding-presents-adventures-at-home-festival/>

Think that was about it.

**Our next meeting is Tuesday 16th of June at 2pm.**

Oh, while I remember, would any of you have any objections to me inviting a couple of other church youth leaders into the group? I’d keep it at two to start with and see how it goes. I know there are other folk out there who are delivering programming and they might wish to participate. Let me know your thoughts.

Thanks again,

Gav

16th June 2020

Morning all,

I hope you are well.

As usual, a bit of a recap on our sharing from Tuesday’s gathering.

It was great to have Katie join us for the first time and hear about both the current provision at Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel and her plans for the future. All very exciting! If you haven’t yet seen her work click on the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldPWLEPuc5g&t=2s>

The graphics used in Katie’s stories were a real talking point. They’re produced by Katie’s partner (Simon). It was great to hear how Simon’s design skills could be used to help develop Rosemary develop a new project of hers.

|  |
| --- |
| She wants to produce material for pre-school children. The basic idea is to produce a set of animated videos on particular liberal values or morals, together with additional material that could be used as part of a session with pre-school children, run either online or in person. There will also be a website to go with the videos.  This builds on Rosemary’s 26 years of running Humpty Dumpty Toddler Group twice weekly, producing crafts and activities for children  <http://humptydumptytoddlers.org.uk>  (see also the Facebook page for crafts and videos produced during lockdown, <https://www.facebook.com/humptydumptytoddlers>) and a monthly liberal group for children aged 3-7 with Malvern Quakers (*Little Friends*). She has also run *Song and Story Time* sessions and *Gertie Gannet’s Science Adventures* during lockdown.  Like the Transformers material produced by Rosemary and Andrew, Katie is more than happy for you to share her work with your youth groups. Links to Transformers can be found here –  <https://padlet.com/andrewrobertwebb/qjyc1nhbjc1m80gk?fbclid=IwAR3M0hFifuqRpKjjp8NxW88Nd0SBjZWFsfkUwW9mqSSPu9KWkpwt0CqwTEY>  <http://malverntransformers.org.uk/> |

Katie also talked about a resource used at Rosslyn Hill called Soul Matters and how it has been quite useful in helping her develop her provision. I’ve had a look at the website and it looks pretty good. They’ve even got a few samples available free of charge! Have a look at the link below for more information:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/samples.html>

We also talked about how to promote our work within the wider community. This, it became clear, varies depending on the context in which we operate. For example some felt they had a lot of autonomy and simply initiated programming and promoted as they wished and to who they wished. Others felt that maybe it wasn’t their place and that maybe they should seek consent from a minister or committee etc. On reflection, this is actually a great area to explore with your minister/committee. What is your remit? How much freedom do you have? If you don’t have a regular catch up (monthly/quarterly/whatever works) with whoever you’re supporting it might be worth requesting one. Your remit could be one of the issues you might want clarify in that first meeting. I’d also suggest you touch base on the issue from time to time to ensure everyone is on the same page. I’m very keen to support you in any way I can with this. I’m a great believer that clarity is a form of kindness. It makes our roles much easier, enjoyable and fulfilling.

We also talked about our thoughts regarding programming for children entering adolescence. Historically, even at GA national level, this has something we have been mindful of for some time. We have very healthy numbers up to 12 years, they then drop off and then pick up again at around 14 years. I’m wondering if we should set aside sometime at one of our meetings and explore this together?

I gave a brief update on one of my projects where I’m working with a small group of adolescents (14 -17) to develop their own online provision. I’m being supported by Torry Glinwell. Torry is a Rangers leader with Girl Guiding Norfolk. The group meets every two weeks. So far the group has identified that they want - an online youth club that allows them to meet, let off steam, be with friends and have a laugh. (Sounds alright to me…) It’s still early days and we’re very much in the planning stage but I think they’re doing pretty well. The provision, once established, will be available to all aged 14 – 17.

A national online event came up in our conversation too. We felt it would be good if our participants could be part of something beyond our provisions. There is currently a GA national youth programme which meets at Great Hucklow in Derbyshire. This is currently on hold due to the current measures introduced to tackle Covid 19. However, that doesn’t mean that we couldn’t hold a national youth event online. An online event would allow everyone, providing they have the tech, to attend and participate. An online event would also appeal to those folk who are just curious or might be nervous about attending a religious/faith/spiritual event in person. Potential new attendees might find it much safer to give it a go from home where they can easily leave if it’s not for them. I asked if those in attendance would like to be part of an exploratory conversation with the current youth panel and GA youth volunteers about the possibility of having a national online event. The feeling was lets go for it. I’m chatting to the Youth Panel next Saturday and will discuss it with them then.

Finally, I just want to check that the current set up is working for you. The point of these meetings is that you feel supported in your role. If there are ways to improve/ develop things please get in touch. Really keen to hear your feedback and develop the provision in line with your needs.

**Our next meeting is Tuesday 14th of July at 2pm**. As usual we’ll aim to keep it to one hour.

Thanks again everyone. I’m loving the energy of these gatherings. There’s some seriously cool ideas/sharing/connections emerging…

Best,

Gav

14th July 2020

Morning all,

I hope you are well.

As usual, a bit of a write up on some of the issues discussed on Tuesday.

It was great to have Lizzie join us from the Bridport congregation. Melda and Meinir sent their apologies as they were attending the funeral of Rev Alun-Wyn Dafis.

The big topic of conversation was if, how and when groups were planning on holding in person meetings.

On the whole, there appeared to be no great rush to hold in person meetings. The mood in a number of chapels is understandably cautious. Some of you felt it might be September, October or maybe even Christmas before this becomes a realistic possibility. Some of you mentioned, that within your setting, various groups have been established in order to determine the work that needs done in order to create safe spaces for people to meet.

It was good to hear that a number of you are currently involved in creating risk assessments for your settings. We agreed that it would be helpful if these were shared within the group. If helpful, I’m also happy to review these with you. It also occurred to me after the meeting,  that you might want to touch base with your chapel’s safeguarding lead before and after the risk assessment is completed. In fact, I’d strongly advise it. Ensure they understand the types of activities you’ve got planned and the measures that will need to be put in place to keep you and your participants safe. Also, make clear to them that the risk assessment is a working document and that it will need to be reviewed and updated regularly. To begin with you might need to update it weekly. This is because, even with the best minds working together, things get missed or unforeseeable issues arise. I’d imagine that after the first few weeks, once you’re up and running, that the review period could be extended to every month or whatever you feel is appropriate.

The following offer some good advice on becoming Covid – 19 ready:

<https://nya.org.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Some of you are consulting with parents in order to ascertain what they might feel comfortable with. This seems a very sensible approach as potentially you could go to a lot of trouble in terms of preparation only to final that folk, for whatever reason, don’t feel comfortable coming into the space regardless of what’s put in place.

I’m also quite mindful that attendance at youth and family settings can fluctuate quite a bit. Perhaps, when consulting with parents, you could ask them how they might feel about letting you know in advance whether or not they plan to attend? Potentially, depending on your setting, there might be a lot of extra prep required in order to run in person gatherings at this time and, if honest, it doesn’t sit well with me that you could go to all that trouble only for no one to turn up… Then there’s also the potential to have to do a deep clean afterwards which might, with time, become quite onerous if only for 1 or 2 participants turn up…

Some of you mentioned taking advantage of any available outdoor space whilst the weather is good. Some of you are playing with the idea of holding socially distanced picnics which sounds like a great way to begin meeting in person again. We talked about using gazebos as a means of having shade or escaping the rain. I think this is a great idea. I think Rachel mentioned that there are a number of Forest School activities/ resources which might work well during this time…

<https://www.owlscotland.org/local-options/forest-schools> (You can filter the resources by subject-area ('moral and religious education' for instance). Rachael is going to meet with two of our families for a socially distanced picnic, and is planning to incorporate some of the Tree stories from the website, as well as using Thich Nach Hahn’s *A Pebble for Your Pocket* for a mindful eating exercise.)

I also feel I should also stress that many of you are volunteers or are being paid for a handful of hours. From experience, the most successful youth and family ministries are those that are obviously needs focused, but also manageable and sustainable. If you are volunteering, it’s important you reflect on how much time you are willing to give and communicate that clearly with your line manager/committee/trustees – whoever you are accountable to. Think long term. I’ve seen it too many times were folk give give give and burn out which is bad for them and the setting. Again, keep things manageable and sustainable. If you are employed, I’d strongly advise you to keep a close eye on your time. If the time needed for planning, preparation, delivery, clear up and reflection has increased this needs to be communicated with your line manager/committee/trustees. Again, think long term… Initially, you might be able to give a little extra time but how might that change over time? These are important points which need to be considered.

If you’d like, and once you have shared your ask assessments and consulted with parents, we could have another Zoom meeting were we solely look at risk assessments and keeping everyone safe.

As well as discussing opening our settings we shared what was working well in our settings and our plans for the future.

Andrew and Rosemary reported back that their application for a Hibbert Trust grant had been successful. They plan to create a number of free downloadable stories for preschool children. They’ll have some kind of lesson/ learning at their heart. The grant will also support the development of a new website. All very exciting really!

For those of you now don’t know, the Hibbert Trust promotes a public interest and personal scholarship in contemporary issues in liberal religion. They are VERY supportive of Unitarian youth activities. I stress VERY supportive… (Wink nudge) They like fresh and innovate stuff. So, if there’s an element of your provision that you’d like to develop and need a bit of cash please put in an application. I’ll happily support with this. They meet twice a year. Did I mention that they are VERY supportive of ANY Unitarian youth type initiative?

<https://www.thehibberttrust.org.uk/>

They also told us that they are currently preparing a special summer edition of The Starfish. How exciting I hear you cry! If you email either Andrew or Rosemary they’ll put you on their mailing list. Please feel free to then share this with those who attend your setting and beyond. I’ve been quite impressed by the number of folk reading it. It’s a great publication so let’s get it out there. You can find the current and previous editions on the page below:

<https://padlet.com/andrewrobertwebb/qjyc1nhbjc1m80gk?fbclid=IwAR1rsN8iEfM0Lku1n9Yjt5noXhRGS_VWLu0DX8HnaJAxClnMJBBfgjM78GE>

Katie gave us some feedback on her pre-recorded offerings through YouTube. Not surprisingly, the feedback had been overwhelmingly positive! Interestingly, she’s been contacted by a number of older members who really appreciate her style of ministry. I’m wondering if there are lessons we can learn from both her style, tone and choice of content? You can access Katie’s ministry through the Rosslyn Hill FB page. Again, like The Starfish, I’d encourage you to share those videos with those who attend your setting and beyond. Great stuff!

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD5R8QIlUjz3pENUL7y4MtQ>

Rachel brought us up to date with developments in Edinburgh. Like Andrew and Rosemary, she’s running a weekly Zoom workshop. She’s designing her own curriculum based on The Chalice Award. As part of her programme, she’s establishing a pen pal/vlogging initiative with a Unitarian group in India! I know - Cool right?! She also asked if others in the group might be interested in a similar initiative closer to home. Needless to say there was great interest. Those interested in participating should contact Rachael directly. See the email addresses above.

To my great joy, someone else raised the issue of how to manage this initiative safely! Hurrah – Extra Chalice Points all round! We might need to give this a little thought, but as suggested, as long as the letters etc. were channelled through the congregational youth leaders that should be ok. We’d maybe need to issue a little light guidance around not recording addresses, phone numbers, email address and other social media details on the letters etc as well as advice to the congregational youth leaders on checking content before passing on correspondence but that’s all very doable and not too burdensome… It’s a super idea! I’d be very happy to support this initiative. Might also be worth ensuring that those participating congregational youth leaders are DBS checked and have received recent safeguarding training. I can see the latter being especially important in case, whilst checking letter content, they come across something that doesn’t feel right. Training would help them in knowing know to respond appropriately.

Rachel also mentioned how she was reviewing her practice in relation to kids going back to school. Personally, I was interested in her comments, if heard correctly, in the potential of having blend of online and in person meetings… Maybe, depending on where you are with this Rachel, you might share your thoughts on this at our next meeting?

Lizzie talked about how they, for various reasons, were unable to run youth/family ministry during this time. The group expressed its desire, when the congregation feel the time is right, to help support any initiatives at Bridport. That they, may it be Lizzie or someone else, are extremely welcome. Katie actually shared how she’d used one of Lizzie’s resources to great effect in her own setting and mentioned how it was very well received. We’re delighted to have made contact with Bridport and are excited by what might potentially unfold as we work together.

Finally, I reported back on my exploratory conversations regarding a national youth online event. The Unitarian Youth Panel, Unitarian College and our GA Youth Volunteers were all in favour. They all thought it was a great idea. I’ll get something out pretty soon with our next steps. Especially if we want to start letter writing/vlogging before we meet!

I think that was it… An extremely positive and productive hour! Great stuff! I really enjoy these meetings. The energy and willingness to include, support and share best practice is quite inspiring…

**Our next meeting is Tuesday 11th August at 2pm.** As always we’ll keep it to an hour. I’ll send the Zoom link nearer the time.

If I’ve missed anything drop me a line.

Gav

11th August 2020

Morning all,

I hope you are well.

Wasn’t yesterday’s meeting an absolute belter?! There was a great vibe with lots of imagining, sharing and encouragement. Thank you for what each of you bring to the space. It’s a real pleasure to be a part of it.

I’d also be willing to bet that, in a church context, ‘belter’ and ‘meeting’ have never been used before in the same sentence.

Anyway, as a usual, a bit of a summary. This might be a bit shorter than usual as, if honest, I was listening more than note taking. So, if I miss anything important just drop me a line and I’ll adapt accordingly.

I should also say that it was a real pleasure to welcome Jacquie to the gathering. We hope you come again. It would be fantastic to both support and learn from the Bridport congregation.

We started by reviewing where folk are with regards if, when and how you plan to restart your various provisions. Andrew gave me permission to share a document he and Rosemary have been working on with regards restarting Transformers and the various other provisions they run. I’ve attached it to this email. It’s well worth a look. If you have any suggestions, please drop them an email. Please too feel free to share it with your congregational leaders and safeguarding teams. It’s good to learn from each other and get an idea of how different groups are doing things. It was good too to hear Rachael talking about including the congregational safeguarding coordinator in their plans to open up. This is really good practice and I’d encourage all of you to continually and regularly touch base with your congregational safeguarding leader not only with regards reopening but on your activities more generally. Katie told us about how Rosslyn Hill are surveying their members, including families, on what they’d like/feel comfortable with going forward. It would be really interesting to find out what folk say. Maybe Katie you might share are the next meeting?

A number of you have or are in the process of organising socially distanced picnics. It was felt that, certainly in the short term, this is the way to go. Some of you talked about meeting in the church grounds and others talked about going to local parks. It was noted that other denominations seem to be using public spaces quite well during this time and that maybe we could learn from them.

It was mentioned a couple of times during the meeting that it might be worth considering a more blended approach to youth and family ministry. By blended we mean a mixture of online and in person gatherings. (Though I can see how, with time, this interpretation could evolve further.) This seems like a very sensible approach as it’s looking like we’re still a long way from ‘normal’ and with local lockdowns becoming a popular strategy to help manage the virus blended might be the way to go. Rachael mentioned that this is something she was looking to introduce at Edinburgh. I’m wondering if blended provision is something we might want to explore at a future gathering? Lots of thoughts (very positive) running through my head…

There was still lots of interest in the pen pal scheme. Rachael mentioned setting up a google document in which we could share ideas. When it’s up and running she’ll get in contact. We also talked about branding it and that sort of thing. We agreed all ideas and thoughts, no matter how small or trivial they might seem, are welcome and that folk are encouraged to express them on the document. We also agreed that we should spend some time on this project at our next meeting. It sounds really exciting! Huge potential!

Meinir and Melda, I’m thinking this would be an amazing initiative to involve young Welsh Unitarians and their families. How cool would it be to receive a letter in another language and then, in a playful way, have fun translating it. Lots of fun and lots of learning! Your thoughts. And thinking of The Starfish, there’s often a country focus as part of the curriculum. Maybe folk could write to each other in the language of that country. Buckets of potential. There’s loads of apps to support with this sort of thing.

We also talked about a document I circulated by Jean Bradley. It contained the framework she uses for conducting her monthly family/intergenerational service. I’ve attached it to this email for ease in case you want to look at it again. On the whole, it was felt useful to see how other youth leaders approach intergenerational/family services. It was interesting to see how she structures this type of service, the rituals she employs and the journey she takes her participants on. It was also interesting to see that this is a monthly event. I couldn’t help but feel that maybe it would be great for us to talk about our own sessions. How are they structured? How do we welcome, open and close? What’s the intended participant journey? What kinds of rituals do you use? (if any) Are there any little rituals you’ve invented? Routines? Traditions? It would be great to learn more from each other about what we do, how we do it and (my favourite) why we do it. Also, interesting to note that ritual was explored at the GA Being Together event in the spring. If you’re interested check out the video - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvM7X7vHgs8&fbclid=IwAR1hL0cuMcy0MvjaYgAqVB5O4iIEYlMlHnz\_SLr42SH76DJ9gyTL0j7irnI](https://mailtrack.io/trace/link/b3c20cbcb9ad53b8a078ec58009ff81fc8d3a2c0?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DxvM7X7vHgs8%26fbclid%3DIwAR1hL0cuMcy0MvjaYgAqVB5O4iIEYlMlHnz_SLr42SH76DJ9gyTL0j7irnI&userId=422045&signature=39d52348504c54da)

Finally, we briefly touched on outreach. Sadly, time was against us by this point but it was felt this again was another good area for us to explore during one of our gatherings.

To recap, as well as the pen pal scheme, we might want to consider blended provisions, the structure of our sessions and how we do outreach.

As I said at the start, an absolute belter of a meeting!

**Our next meeting is Tuesday 15th of September at 7pm.** Note the change of time. As always we’ll stick strictly to an hour max. I’ll send out the Zoom link nearer the time. Our main focus, as agreed, will be the pen pal scheme and well as a general update on what we’re doing.

Thanks again and I’m already looking forward to our next meeting!

Best,

Gav

Tuesday 15th September

Morning all,

I hope you are well. J

As usual, a bit of a write up on our last gathering.

It was great to have Jacky from New Unity and Natalie from Bradford join us for the first time. You are both extremely welcome. I felt energised by what you brought to the space and am excited as to what might emerge as a result of your participation. Great stuff!

We kicked off by hearing from Andrew and Rosemary of Evesham Unitarians based in Malvern. They informed us that they are once again holding in person meetings. They had 11 participants at their last gathering with 5 more expressing some kind of interest in attending in future ones. At the moment, whilst the weather is good, they’re running most of their programming outside. They’ve had a number of folk express interest in their various provisions as a result of The Starfish. The Starfish is the magazine of Malvern Transformers. (See the link below to view the current and previous editions)

<https://padlet.com/andrewrobertwebb/qjyc1nhbjc1m80gk?fbclid=IwAR3l1gbwB-PcCTFoSLKkyUyEEiPQ95IT4p6lh6h1mUp7kIn_O_SjAqWe-4g>

I should say at the point that Andrew and Rosemary are more than happy for you to share the magazine in your settings. Even better, email Rosemary and she’ll add you to the mailing list. Then It’s just a matter of forwarding it to whoever’s interested. ([Rosemaryefwebb@googlemail.com](mailto:Rosemaryefwebb@googlemail.com))

I know too that Katie, children’s leader at Rosslyn Hill, is also very happy for you to share her videos. They’re uploaded to YouTube on a weekly basis and can be found on the Rosslyn Hill page. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD5R8QIlUjz3pENUL7y4MtQ> ) Subscribe and share. J

I can remember us talking before about how maybe we should have a focus on how we promote our various provisions. Given the success of The Starfish in sparking new inquiries I’m wondering if we should have that chat soon? Your thoughts.

They also informed us that the toddler group has been very busy since reopening. They’re running two gatherings per week of up to 25 people (including volunteers) and to date both gatherings have been full! A fantastic achievement! Well done!

Finally they brought us up to date with their latest initiative, sponsored by the Hibbert Trust, to produce a short series of videos based around a range of themes with accompanying session plans. The videos will then be made available to all free of charge. Currently they are having a number of story boards produced which are developing exactly as hoped. Well done! A fantastic initiative!

A quick reminder on the Hibbert Trust. The trust is a grant making body that supports new initiatives promoting liberal religious values. They are extremely supportive of youth initiatives.  So, if you have an idea emerging and you require funds to get started then put in an application. I’m more than happy to support or provide a reference. <https://www.thehibberttrust.org.uk/>

Rachael, a member with Edinburgh Unitarians, then gave us an update on how youth ministry is evolving within her setting. As the children have returned to school she’s no longer running a Wednesday meet up and is contemplating running something at another time. She’s also introduced a children’s element which runs before the main service on a Sunday morning. Like a number of other chapels, she informed us that there’s no plan to return to in person gatherings anytime soon though families have been meeting outdoors and taking advantage of the good weather.

Later she also gave us a very useful update on the pen pal initiative. Through consultation, it’s become clear that the children and families would prefer to send physical rather than virtual letters. She also discussed how participants could be matched and how it might be useful to develop templates for youth leaders to use in their setting. All great stuff!

Since the meeting she’s prepared the following proposal:

‘Unitarian Youth Connected

Would your youth programme like to connect with youngsters in other UK Unitarian congregations? If so please sign up to *Unitarian Youth Connected*

Aims:

To help our youngsters make friends and connections across the UK in a safe and easy manner

To build relationships between congregational youth programmes

To correspond, learn, and respond

What happens:

Congregational Youth /Children’s Programme leaders sign up to the programme by emailing xxxxxxxx who will then connect them to a partner congregation. The Programme leaders from the two connected congregations then give each other a bit of information and context such as *how many children they have in their group* and *the ages of the children*. Between themselves, the Programme leaders will decide the make and mode of their first exchange. For instance, will it comprise a group letter, a video, pictures?).

The leaders help the youngsters prepare their first group correspondence, and send them off to their partner congregation.

We recommend that in the first instance, whatever you choose to exchange with your partner congregation, is prepared during one of your usual group sessions and that all communication between congregations is conducted by the Programme leaders.’

If you’ve any thoughts or would like to offer feedback then click on the link below or email Rachael directly on [rachaelbradfield@googlemail.com](mailto:rachaelbradfield@googlemail.com)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eh1oGDIBNjACAxvLl8FB0tHDFaEQRblpmvzpXhDdWmQ/edit>

Thanks Rachael for taking a lead on this! I think the feeling is that this is an initiative with huge potential and that there’s great enthusiasm amongst other congregational youth leaders. Happy days!!! J

To conclude Rachael brought to our attention to the issue of participants taking screen shots of meetings without consent and then posting/sharing the image(s). I should say that this is the third Zoom/video conferencing issue that’s been brought to my attention this week. I think it’s becoming clear that we (The GA) might need to do some work around exploring and promoting Zoom etiquette (for want of a better term) in order to support participants use the technology in a safe and respectful manor.

Jacky, representing New Unity, then gave us a snapshot of their provision. Pre lockdown they had between 4 and 8 kids attending with folk playing games, baking cakes and making pizzas. Sounds alright if you ask me! Great stuff Jackie! J However, as a result of lockdown and in line with pretty much every other chapel, they have had to move their provision online. They now meet on a Saturday and play games online. It’s been a positive experience with Jackie using this as an opportunity to get to know the children really well. Jacky also raised the issue of not everyone having the right/same access to technology which can be a barrier to participation.

Finally we heard from Natalie a member of Bradford Unitarians. She’s recently been taking a more active role in her chapel through supporting the children’s programme. She informed us that given their close relationship with the Quakers they are in early stages of holding joint family services. The plan is to hold them monthly.

Interestingly, this is the second chapel offering a family service that has come to the attention of the group. If you remember back to our last meeting we discussed the Brooke Street model and how it could be used as a starting point for those chapels wanting to create a more inviting service environment for those in their local community. Natalie very kindly offered to feed back to the group at a later date on the progress of the initiative. Great stuff Natalie! J

Rosemary reminded us that she too uses/ delivers Quaker resources as part of her offering. It reminded me of the importance of taking time to explore what other groups are doing as there is much we can learn from/ gain from them. I remember Cheryl’s Girl Guiding <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/>  resources were a real hit as were the Forest School <https://www.owlscotland.org/local-options/forest-schools> resources highlighted by Rachael.

We didn’t feel the need for a specific focus for our next meeting so it’ll be updates and sharing.

Our next meeting is **Tuesday 13th October at 7pm**. As usual we’ll keep to the hour. J I’ll send a Zoom link nearer the time.

Thanks again for your time folks. I personally find your work incredibly inspiring and loving how the group is growing and unfolding.

Take care,

Gav

Morning all,

I hope you are well. ☺

A bit of a write up on last night’s meeting. As always, it was incredibly inspiring! ☺ Thank you!

To begin with, Andrew and Rosemary gave us a bit of an update on the latest initiatives at Malvern. They’re looking to launch Transformers::GameChangers in the next few weeks. (Leaflet attached) They’re still running their in person gatherings and providing resources for those who, for whatever reason, can’t attend the in person youth events. Interestingly, Andrew informed us that from what they (Transformers) have been told (presently), youth groups fall outside of the government lockdown system meaning they can meet in person regardless of the threat warning.

The Starfish now has around 60 subscribers which is fantastic! If you’re not subscribed drop either Andrew or Rosemary an email. It’s a great resource to share with your youth participants and their families.

It was good also to hear of the work they have been doing with regards reflecting upon and refining their current practice too. Inspired by a conversation during one of our previous meetings, they have been looking at the role of ritual in their various provisions. Have a look at the Malvern Transformers Facebook page to see the starfish inspired chalices they are now using. They look seriously cool. Great to see a playful approach to lighting the chalice. If you’d like to find out more drop them an email or ask them at our next meeting.

One thing that Rosemary mentioned was the key role that toddler groups have played in the growth and development of their various provisions. If I heard correctly, and I apologise to Rosemary if I didn’t quite pick this up right, toddler groups have been a great way of getting families in the door. She mentioned that most of the kids in Transformers etc are kids that came through her toddler group. I’m wondering if this is something we should explore further? I’d love to know more. I have to say I like the idea of meeting need, both of the kids and their parents from a young age. It feels more holistic in its approach. Effectively, through running a parent and toddler group, a Transformers group and a Transformers:GameChangers group, your meeting the needs of the whole family.

Personally, I should also say with my Nurture Teacher hat on, I love that it’s a toddler group and **not** a mother and toddler group. Certainly, from my professional experience, I worked with fathers who, because of the name, felt that these spaces where not for them.

Next we heard from Jacky at New Unity. At present, though there are moves to have in person gatherings soon, all of their provisions are online. It was great to hear of Jacky’s efforts to keep in touch with the families who currently have some kind of link to the chapel. Jacky has been doing a lot of scanning during Zoom meetings and starting conversations with those families with children. It was great to hear of that kind of proactive approach. Super to see a desire to build relationships. No doubt that hard work will pay off once those in person gatherings are up and running. Great stuff Jacky!

One thing she mentioned, linked to the point made earlier, is the number of parents with toddlers/ babies she’s noticed attending their online provisions. I’m wondering if God/The Universe/The Divine Spirt (delete or add an alternative if appropriate) is telling us something…

I was also really interested in a new initiative they’re (New Unity) looking to run where they host a family gathering on the 4th Saturday of the month. Jacky informed us that it’s still early days but that her and Andy (minister at New Unity) have been working together on the project. Please Jacky keep us up to date with this project at our congregational support meetings. We love to know how it develops and I think it’s fair to say that the group, if helpful, would love to support you with this.

This reminded me of the importance of not only keeping safeguarding leads in the picture but also our ministers/service leaders/congregations.

Rachael, who couldn’t make it on the night, got in touch with me to ask for clarification on who wants in on the pen pal scheme. She’s keen to get the initiative started in the next few weeks. Please contact her directly on [rachaelbradfield@googlemail.com](mailto:rachaelbradfield@googlemail.com) ASAP. Letting her know numbers and approximate ages too would be helpful.

Rachael, the group asked me to pass on their thanks for initiating and leading on this project. It’s such a good idea with huge potential. Thank you! We really appreciate it!

Katie also got in touch asking if we’d consider moving the time of our meeting from 7pm to 8pm. A later time would make it easier for her to attend. Katie, needless to say, it was an emphatic yes! We love and value contributions. Anything to help. Our evening meetings will now take place at 8pm and we’ll stick to the hour.

Perhaps mindful of Rosemary and Andrews approach to reflecting and refining their practice, I was watching Katie’s latest YouTube video and, with my teacher hat on, that provision has progressed in leaps and bounds! It’s great to see. Well done Katie. If you haven’t seen it click on the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5DHP1TDwsg>

Share it too!

I’d quite a few updates to offer myself which included the following:

**GA Virtual Youth Event** - The task and finish group planning the GA virtual youth event up have met on a couple of occasions and devised a proposal of sorts which they’d like to put to interested participants, parents, congregational youth leaders and other groups/individuals for feedback. I have to say that I’m quite impressed by their desire to hear the views of others and be led by the needs of stakeholders. Our national programming is changing a lot and in fairness the team is responding well. I’ve yet to pin down a date but we’re looking at the week beginning 2nd of November. It’ll be an evening Zoom event. I’ll get the date and details to you ASAP. It would be great to have you share your thoughts with the team. Your input would be greatly valued.

**Bad Coffee Club –** For those of you who don’t know, I’ve been supporting 3 teens aged 14 – 17 in creating their own virtual youth programme. They’ve been meeting every 2 weeks since May and have explored a range of options from online ministry, online activism and an online youth club. Out of those, the online youth club is what they want right now. They’ve being playing with a format and now have something they’re happy with. I’m confident in the next few weeks they’ll open it up to their close friends in order to get both feedback and to practice running it themselves - with me in the room from a safeguarding perspective. The plan then, when they feel ready, is to open it to everyone aged 14 – 17. We’re not rushing it. It’ll emerge when it’s ready and in its own time. But it certainly looks and feels very exciting. I’ll keep you posted.

**GA Congregational Support –** The feeling is that this initiative has been a great success and that it would be great to see it grow. The culture within the group is positive, playful and supportive. The willingness to share resources and encourage others has been inspiring. So I’d like to publicise the work of the group and encourage and welcome others into the space. I’m confident that there’ll be some interest. To facilitate greater demand, I’ll run more groups with a midday group as a potential option or maybe an early evening and a late evening group. I’ll see what the need is and go from there.

I’ve also been chatting to Rory Castle Jones, GA Comms, and we’d like to have a bit of a youth focus in January 2021. Basically, instead of having congregation of the week, we’ll have youth group of the week or something along those lines. If you don’t know what I’m talking about have a look at the Unitarians UK Facebook page and you’ll get an idea. We’d like to feature youth groups already involved in congregational support and therefore help publicise the group. It would be good coverage for both your provision and the congregational support group. What’s involved? A few photos and a bit of a burb about your provision. Let me know if you’d like to be featured.

**Other Initiatives –** On Friday afternoon I’ve a meeting with Melanie Davis. Melanie is the programme director for the Our Whole Lives (OWL) programme. It’s a comprehensive, lifespan sexuality education curricula for use in both secular settings and faith communities. We’re (GA) exploring how this could be brought to the UK. It’s former participants rate it extremely highly. Click on the link below for more details:

<https://www.uua.org/re/owl>

I’ve also a meeting with a few folk who are interested in exploring supporting student age people.

So lots going on…

I think that’s all for now.

Keep up that good work folks!

Remember to get in touch with Rachael regarding the pen pal scheme. ☺

**Or next meeting will be on November 17th at the new time of 8pm. As usual we’ll stick to an hour. I’ll sort the Zoom invite out nearer the time.**

Best,

Gav

Morning all,

Hope you are well. 😊

Wasn’t that another incredibly inspiring meeting!? So many cool initiatives emerging… All very exciting!

It was wonderful to have Kate, Janine and Louise join us for the first time. I hope you felt welcome and at ease. Hope also that you got something useful from the experience.

Katie kicked off this month’s meeting with a bit of an update on all things youth and family related at Rosslyn Hill. Again, great to hear Katie talk about the continual effort being made by all to reflect upon and refine their provision. This includes keeping the pre-recorded material tight, relevant and punchy; rebranding their group (Bright lights) and making their offering available to all. By available to all, Katie talked about those inside and outside of the chapel community. It was interesting to hear Katie talk about those ‘young at heart Unitarians’ in the wider congregation and how they also enjoy the style and content of the pre-recorded youth and family material.

This final point, on the ‘young at heart Unitarians’ has got me wondering… More specifically, why do they like it? What needs are being met through this provision? What does that mean in terms of our wider ministry? Cool areas to explore…

Katie also talked about the efforts being made to develop their relationship with Channing School of which there’s a strong historical link. I love the approach being taken: that the chapel wants to support the school in meeting its aims in harmony with its ethos. Fantastic! Thinking back to my teaching days, I used to love it when organisations offered to support me in meeting the needs of the students. They led to great partnerships resulting in fantastic opportunities for my students. Interesting that Rosemary (Malvern Transformers) is also working with a local school with great success…

I’m wondering if there’s scope to investigate church – school initiatives in general… Again, another cool area to explore…

Rachael then gave us an update on the pilot pen pal scheme as well as the other wonderful things going on in Edinburgh. The pilot scheme is up and running with interested congregations matched. Delighted to hear that those participating congregations have also established how the programme will run with correspondence being exchanged between leaders. Chalice points all round for following safeguarding good practice. Well done Rachael on getting this up and running. I look forward to hearing how it goes. All very exciting!

The children’s group continues to meet weekly for half an hour before the Sunday service via Zoom. From what Rachael said it sounds like this provision is doing a great job in terms of providing a space for families to keep in touch. Great stuff.

Great also to hear about Friday’s family service marking World Children’s Day. It’ll include a mixture of live and pre-recorded material produced by the children and other members of the congregation. You too can attend by following the link below. (11am this Sunday – 22nd of November) A good opportunity to see one of the many different ways chapels are exploring youth and family ministry. Personally, I can’t wait to see it! Best of luck to Rachael and the rest of the team!

[https://zoom.us/j/459569403](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fzoom.us%2Fj%2F459569403%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR2dZ2pgI7wClqsgEPD-IeigtPfFohDI7bSc1EO1Rf2PPb6kQPRCV-ExBrc&h=AT3LLlZFfqH-0EPkWY1NnOWULS0VF5gQQMmt_eeYBnVoxuWUM3O6yh7YO5NbliI69Su7szn1MpPa1ReF7ndTfPYkdl5EKLmSgAZu1WfXjIJKeUi72S8FdUTvlfCdjYU23qsF9p7ISvUzJEM2Cg&__tn__=-UK-R&c%5b0%5d=AT2d22zytC55BJ5EOb7FrsdHBbfZ9pzyIhYRqhHuVgTOH3OFZrSlifFw0NxO58KZSRPCCCgLExmXRaq3z9Wscb7nBi75Cx_wO2CxAs-IOHEWsyRSoOVjl2Fx7Fj1_vbj4LPQXEO1pgax0godgeMKMnvRMKcGRliep7RVRXygqz1bIko) (If the link doesn’t work, check out their Facebook page – ‘Unitarians in Edinburgh’)

Next up Andrew and Rosemary gave a bit of an update on what’s going on with Malvern Transformers. With the change in restrictions they’re back to Zoom meetings. It’s been a bit of a mixed bag as they’ve reconnected with those families who, for any number of reasons, couldn’t attend the in person meetings but yet they’ve lost a few who struggle with Zoom. To support and enable families to participate they’ve been preparing resource packs and delivering them ahead of their sessions.

They’ve suspended the launch of ‘Game Changers’ a new provision for kids aged 10 – 14. I have to say that I’m quite keen to attend and experience this one myself. I know, for many years, our national youth programme has struggled to retain this age group and so I’m keen to observe, learn and, if helpful, support. Great stuff!

Rosemary informed us that toddler groups are allowed to continue to meet under the new restrictions. This is a strong and growing provision with over 50 families attending since September. This is really encouraging… Well done!

This has got me wondering if toddler groups our worth exploring further… Along with partnerships with schools, are they worth more of a national focus? I can recall Rosemary mentioning that children from the toddler group tend to stay with her as they move through the age groups. Worth exploring… I’m also mindful that Mercedes, a youth leader at Rosslyn Hill, is also working in this area. There are others too who I can think of that might be interested.

Or… I’m wondering if intergenerational care, or something like it, might be even more interesting and worth pursing…. Seriously cool if you ask me! Like super mega cool! A more holistic approach… Your thoughts…

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/toddlers-and-seniors-together-the-benefits-of-intergenerational-care>

Jacky then brought us up to date with what’s happening at New Unity. She informed us that families have continued to connect regularly using Zoom and that this Sunday she’s focusing on inviting parents with younger ones to meet with their children in one of the virtual ‘breakout’ rooms after the online Sunday gathering. The aim being to encourage connection. Great stuff and good luck Jacky!

She also organised a bulb planting session in Newington Green next to the meeting house and plans to hold another one when safe to do so with the support of local council park community ranger.

The bulb planting initiative has got me wondering as I think it has a lot of potential…

- It's simple and easy to organise.

- It can be done observing physical distancing. (Depending on local lockdown guidelines)

- It has some scope as an intergenerational activity. I can see lots of ways in which this could evolve and grow.

- It's partnership based. I LOVE how this is in collaboration with the local council park community ranger. Might mean also that there could be funding... They might have other initiatives you could get involved with...

- It's a great activity to get some good publicity around. (Local paper, social media posts and inviting collaboration with other like-minded groups - a foot in the door!)

That's before looking at the environmental, health and wellbeing benefits... I could go on...Basically, it's a winner!

Lots of good stuff going on Jacky. Best of luck on Sunday!

It was great next to hear from Kate and Janine from Plymouth and their wish to work in collaboration with other Unitarian groups in developing youth and family ministry in their setting. They currently run a monthly intergenerational café style service.  They have one young person attending their chapel on a regular basis and are keen to explore to how to grow that number further.

The longer I’m in role, the more I’m noticing that there are quite a few congregations in this situation or, even more common still, dropping in and out of this situation.

Louise, from Newcastle Upon Tyne Unitarians, talked about how she’s been approached by a parent of a teenager about attending/getting involved and is wondering as to how this could be done.

I’m thinking that this too (congregations with one young person) could too be a bit of a focus. I’ve a few thoughts around this and am wondering if we (Newcastle, Plymouth and of course other interested groups) might want to work together on this one? Your thoughts.

I then gave a bit of an update on what’s happing nationally.

Bad Coffee Club – The group is testing its provision with a small group to help them improve and refine their provision. It’s going well and hopefully they will feel ready to launch soon.

GA Online Youth Event – The stakeholder meeting went well. The task and fish group organising the event will report to the wider volunteer pool in the next week or so. Again progressing well.

Provisions for 18+ - A number of groups/individuals have expressed an interest in this area. Lots of conversations taking place. Let’s see what emerges…

OWL Programme – Good feedback from the stakeholder meeting. Exploring how next to proceed…

Collaborating with Religions for Peace – Lots of exploratory conversations. Let’s see what emerges…

Finally…

* If you have any material from your provision that you’re happy for me to share please email it to me. It could be pictures of work, pictures of the kids engaged in activities (with consent), posters of youth events, links to online youth events that your running, links to pre-recorded youth material, youth newsletters etc etc. Anything really… I’ll then post them on the UK Unitarian Youth FB page and then share on UK Unitarians. Often when these things are shared folk get in touch about youth and family ministry which is great. Basically it gets me in the door which is really helpful. Also great exposure for your group. I posted a photo of a rice krispie chalice produced by the kids at Edinburgh 3 hours ago on FB and already it has 47 likes! Amazing!
* Feel free to get in touch with each other and share resources. No need to reinvent the wheel. If someone is doing something which your participants would benefit from just get in touch and see about sharing, inviting or exploring joint initiatives. Lets lighten the load. 😊
* Get the word out there about GA Congregational Youth Support. The monthly meeting is only part of the support available. I have a number of ongoing meetings with participating congregations on a 1:1 basis regarding developing forms of youth and family ministry in harmony with their setting.
* A reminder that Rory (GA Communication Officer) and I would like to have a weekly youth group focus on the Unitarians UK FB page for the whole of January. It’ll be based on the ‘Featured Congregation’ initiative. Check out the Unitarians UK FB page. Basically it involves a photo and a bit of a blurb about your group. It’s extremely popular! Great exposure! I’ll mention it more at our next meeting.

**Our next meeting is Tuesday 15th of December at 8pm. As always we’ll meet for one hour. I’ll send out a Zoom link nearer the time.**

Right, I think that’s it… Great meeting. A very productive month!

Thanks again for all your hard work in supporting youth and family ministry at this time. It sounds like your doing amazing work and I’m encouraged that, despite the challenges of lockdown, others are starting a conversation and exploring what youth and family ministry might look like in their setting. Very encouraging.

If you’ve any questions or would like to chat further just drop me an email and we’ll go from there. Always happy to help. 😊

Take care,

Gav