

saint marys **YOUTH** PROJECT



CLIMB 61

Last year's annual report opened with "2019 was the year of dramatic change for SMYP." We may have underestimated how dramatic the following year was going to be...

SMYP made a good start to 2020 with events and trips booked for the year ahead, with a growing number of children and young people getting involved in activities. The Cleobury Community Hub (CCH) was growing its base of users and the atmosphere created by the building and more importantly the volunteers was welcoming.

The Youth Project was in transition, with only one full-time member of staff, leading to a review of our weekly activities. We chose to close the weekly youth club that was struggling to draw in young people, to focus on where we were engaging with young people the most; through the CCH, both socially and through volunteering. We continued with all of our other activities which were really well attended but started to focus on how more young people could start to drive the vision for the CCH. Then March 2020 arrived... Lockdown.

Initially, we focused on contacting regular attendees of SMYP activities. We called them regularly but on an ad hoc basis so not to be too predictable, but as time went on everyone was getting tired of small talk when not much was changing day to day.

We started engaging with young people through zoom activities, also creating Nippers online, The Chatrooms and Climbing Club Exercise Hangout (all online).

Nippers was aimed at families with young children, aiming to give an opportunity to chat to other adults. However, after a few weeks it was evident that adults chatting on zoom wasn't ideal with their little ones running around. Numbers drifted but it became a valuable time for a few families.

The Chatrooms was setup for regular coffee drinkers at the CCH and became a valuable space for volunteers to meet and have a coffee once or twice a week online.

The exercise hangout grew in numbers, where young people were starting to engage with exercise sessions on screens confidently.

As time went on we were able to open the CCH for takeaway drinks. We created "Chatterboxes" where households could safely enjoy a drink outside and chat to others at a safe distance, marked out on the floor.

We then started to run the climbing exercise hangout in the outdoors rather than on zoom. It was so good to see young people in the flesh again and the numbers continued to increase until we had to limit spaces to meet government guidelines.

As the country started to get to grips with life with covid-19 we were able to do much more. Welcome volunteers back to the CCH on a rota basis, engage with young people

through climbing club, restart interventions in school and see a mix of ages at our Sunday session activities as well as celebrating school leavers in a covid secure way in July.

Everyone was discovering that the restrictions in place would last sometime and so we had to adapt the way we worked and the way we met the needs of others. We applied to the National Lottery Covid Support Fund to help us make the CCH covid secure, create a level area at the front of the building and support us to fund an extra climbing coach for when we could reopen fully and to cover the costs of our hub supervisor and hygiene officer. We decided that a decked area at the front of the building was the most appropriate option and it works really well. Since the decking has been completed we had a gift from a family in the local community to purchase a marquee to cover the area for the community to enjoy.

We had a group of 12 young people signed up to go to the Limitless Christian summer festival and whilst we couldn't camp at the festival, due to covid restrictions, we did manage to engage with their online festival via YouTube and enjoy a socially distant camp out with individuals in their own tent/ family unit. A great way to spend time together in these craziest of times.

August through to the end of October went well and we found that despite the troubles of the year so far we felt that more people had started to open up, reach out and want to be involved in community.

By Christmas the strain of the past year was beginning to show. People were desperate for connection and longed to be together during Christmas. We setup a Nativity Trail around the town that was long enough to get out of the house for but not too long for little legs! We had 75 families complete the trail with 121 children receiving a Bible Society Nativity book and sweets for completing the course, kindly donated by the Methodist Church. As we drew closer to Christmas it was clear that restrictions were going to be in place and people may be isolated during the Christmas period. SMYP was able to network with several different agencies including the local primary school to support 10 families with food and gift hampers and books of encouragement for the Christmas season. We hope that they will bring positive relationships into the future with families most in need.

Thank you to everyone that has supported us through the past 12 months, whether it is the amazing trustees, staff, volunteers, financial supporters and most importantly prayer supporters. We would not be in this position where we are excited and expectant for the next year if it wasn't for the hard work and support we have received throughout 2020.

Looking Ahead

With all the optimism that 2020 started with, we take into 2021. Throughout this past year we have trusted that we are here for a purpose, for our community to bring light. We have been backed financially, practically and prayerfully throughout this past year and we step into 2021 knowing that as we have continued to seek God first (Matt 6:33), He has made a way for us to continue supporting our community by providing practical support, running activities, providing a safe space (both covid safe and emotionally safe) and have a community of volunteers to lead the way. Throughout 2020 we raised the funds needed for our Climb61 Bouldering Wall, completed March 2021. We cannot wait to incorporate climbing in our building for the use of our community.

We know that we are stronger together and we aim to make a space suitable for any person to walk in and feel valued, worthy and loved.