

Hillsborough Trinity Methodist Church

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Becoming a (more) child-friendly church : first report

Introduction

This is the first report of the group which we have created to review and improve our approach to children and families. A lot of good work already goes on at Trinity with children and families, and so we feel that we have a good basis on which to build. We noted how there are probably about the same number of children that take part in our activities as adults who worship on a Sunday; something many churches would be pleased to be able to say. Equally, we are aware that there are areas of our church life and organisation which we could work at improving, and the group, with the enthusiastic approval of the Church Council, has set itself the task of reviewing existing arrangements, developing our practices and seeking external assessment. Hopefully in a year or so we can apply for Child-friendly status.

The group is composed of all the leaders and volunteers from the Junior Church, Boys' Brigade, Girl Guides and Brownies and Rainbows, Kids and Cuddles and Toddler Praise. These 14 people represent the youth leadership of our church, and we feel have the opportunity to be the powerhouse of much of the church's life.

Main criteria for assessment

These are the main criteria set out for us to consider as we review our activities. It is against these criteria that we will be assessed sometime next year.

1. There is a Vision for youth and children's work
2. There are opportunities for the voices of children and young people to be heard
3. The church takes seriously and responds to feedback from children and young people
4. There are opportunities for children and young people to be included in child friendly services
5. Ongoing training and support for leaders
6. Suitable materials for under fives are in church

7. There are groups to nurture children and young people
8. Safeguarding
9. The church buildings offer a safe and welcoming environment.

Initial Review of current practice

The group reviewed Trinity's current performance against these criteria in some detail, using the assessment template that the external assessor will use next year, and found that our performance against the various criteria was mixed. In some areas we are doing well; in others there is work to do. A detailed report which shows the analysis is available to accompany this report on request, but we set out here an overall perspective on each of these criteria, and the specific detailed questions asked in the assessment template.

1. **Vision:** we think children are welcome, and we have some previous statements about the work we want to do, but we do not have a written "Vision" that would set out clearly what the church overall, and the activity groups themselves, are aiming to achieve. We don't consider children's work regularly at Church Council,(though we do hear a report from the worker), and we don't have a budget for children's work (though we do spend money on the activities). We don't have a member of the Church Council with oversight of children's issues.



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2. **Listening to children:** We don't think that the church has a way of listening to the children, or of asking them their opinions. In each activity group some of this happens, but in a haphazard manner, and there is no mechanism for the views of children to be heard at Church Council. We felt that children are involved in the planning of activities in the groups and do take some part in the running of the church, by helping on the rotas, and working with the adults at tea and coffee, but this could be improved. We do not have a policy about children and young people becoming members.
3. **Taking children's views seriously:** We don't think that the church has a mechanism for taking the views of the children into account, or for asking them their opinions, when we are making decisions. The church does sometimes respond positively to suggestions from children but not always. We do not have an opportunity for all ages to discuss issues in the life of the church. We do believe children have their own spaces for their activities, but we are not proposing rooms or areas which are defined solely for single use by one group.
4. **Child-friendly services:** We felt we are doing better here, with children able to attend all age worship, for example Church Parades, and special Sundays. We have a few services designed to include all ages in leading the worship, but this is perhaps only about 8 in a year out of about 80 services we have in the year, which is perhaps not the right balance. The quality of all-age worship depends heavily on who is leading it, and this has not always been satisfactory. We have been trying to make sure that the leaders of all-age services are themselves "child-friendly" and we must take action to ensure that this is always the case for such events. The length of the services needs to be considered and leaders must be encouraged to cut their services short, rather than go on too long. Sometimes there is the opportunity to move around in the service and be vocal as part of the service, but this is restricted and does not happen often. Sometimes the prayers and songs used are old-fashioned and we need to develop a more child-friendly language in our services, at least for the part when they are in the church. The children and youth workers are involved in the planning and leading and participation, especially the Family worker, but we felt this could be a wider participation. We have some children's resources, but they are not readily available. Children are encouraged to participate in all aspects of worship and are included at communion. The activities have done some communion preparation in the past, but we feel could re-fresh this again. We use published resources to help in worship, and we have invested in a new overhead system and new software to support worship, which makes it easier to include new material relevant to young people. We need to make sure the parts of regular services that children share in are more relevant to them than they sometimes are.
5. **Children and youth group leaders:** We felt that the leaders of the activities were not affirmed or commissioned in a supportive way, though the church is always extremely grateful that they take their roles so seriously and with such commitment. We felt we could renew an annual service of commitment for them, and ensure that they are regularly in our prayers in service and personally. Each activity has its own training programmes, which individuals use as they feel they want to. All volunteers have had some basic first aid training, though we should review its cover and effectiveness for all groups. We have agreed the new fire alarm system needs training and will organise this. We felt there is room for developing an overall view of how we could use training to increase the support available to leaders and volunteers, to increase their confidence and broaden their skills and experience. We do not believe all volunteers receive an initial induction, and ongoing supervision and support is casual, rather than organised, and is mixed in its practice. Those who work with young people do not meet as a group, either regularly or occasionally, to discuss and plan activities, though each activity does on its own. There is no one person designated to ensure people are provided with the training and support they need.
6. **Materials for under 5's in church:** Though there are no specific people assigned to look out for children and welcome and support families with children, in

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fact there are two or three people who regularly do take this care very seriously. We now have a new child-friendly space with carpet, toys and books for use in worship time, though we need to review the quality and appropriateness of the toys. We do not have a designated baby-changing facility, and we should have one, and there is no signage to toilets and baby-changing. There is no statement in the pews to help families know how we can help them to deal with their children whilst in worship.

7. **Groups for children and young people:** We do have a range of activities for children up to 18 years of age. There is no formal or regular oversight from the Church Council, and each group runs itself. The church does not regularly pray for these groups. The leaders plan their sessions, and share the planning among all the volunteers. The leaders work well in their own activities, though there is room for improved inter-working between the activities. The sessions include different learning styles. All groups include prayer, and have opportunities for the children to learn about Jesus, and a loving God. The leaders take account of individual special needs in each activity. The Family Worker organises outreach activities including holiday clubs and regular work at the local schools.
8. **Safeguarding:** The church has a safeguarding policy and procedures in place, and this is reviewed annually. The church has appointed a Safeguarding Co-ordinator. It is not clear that all children know how to share a concern in all the activities, but the process has been applied and used. The Church Council does not approve every volunteer, though it does conduct a CRB check on every volunteer, and keeps references and records as required. All volunteers have been involved in training on safeguarding; the church needs to keep on top of this. The uniformed organisations have conducted proper recruitment process for all volunteers, but we need to update the recruitment process for non-uniformed groups. Annual parental consent forms are in place in all activities, and these are being reviewed for the taking and use of photos. All activities are believed to be adequately insured under the church policy or that of the uniformed organisations, but we need to run a check on all

these policies and keep an overall file in force. Registers are in place and retained on file for the uniformed organisations but not for all the other activities. We need to clarify the retention period and ensure that suitable registers are in place for emergencies, ensuring that before we use upstairs we know about the fire alarm and evacuation procedures.

9. **A safe and welcoming environment:** While we believe that the building is safe, and free from hazards, and we pay careful attention to that, we believe that the building could be warmer and more welcoming and improved internally in its facilities. The current church plans should address some of these issues. The adult/child ratios are correct. The leaders have been trained in emergency procedures, but with the new fire alarm and newly re-furnished rooms upstairs there is a need to update the training. The multiple accident books should be replaced with a single up-to-date tear-off record form book (though some activities may need to retain their own for outside requirements). We should move from each activity having its own first aid kit to a single well-placed one that meets all needs, (though again the uniformed organisations may have further requirements). While each activity has trained and aware volunteers and leaders none have a 'designated' first aider, and we need to review how we manage this. All first aider training should be updated. No one person is responsible for stocking the first aid boxes and this should be sorted when we have one box. All volunteers know how to act if insufficient leaders arrive.



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Next steps

The following actions were agreed at this initial meeting:

- **Youth Leadership Council:** This group should become the Trinity Youth Leadership Council with a function to consider all the children and youth work undertaken at Trinity. Its roles will be to develop Trinity's strategy for working with children and young people, and their families, to share good practice, resources, ideas, and plans, to collaborate across activities, develop child-friendly policies, and to report to the Church Council on the development of work with children, young people and families, seeking the support and approval of the Church Council where necessary. (Note: Its role is not to act as a management committee for the Family worker; management arrangements are already in place for that. Nor is it to act as a management committee for each of the activities, each of which already has its own arrangements.)

- This Youth Council will meet three times a year, and the next meeting will be on Monday 13 May at 7.00 at Trinity.
- A report should be written of this first meeting, and presented to the Church Council and the Church Members, setting out the initial review and the plans we have for taking this work forward.
- An Action Plan should be drafted to set out the specific actions proposed by the Council, and their timescales, and who is responsible for each action.
- The Assistant Minister should meet with the leaders and volunteers of the four groups of activities in their own groups, Boys Brigade, Girl Guides groups, Junior Church, Community groups (Kids and Cuddles and Toddler Praise), to consider the report in relation to their own activities, to develop a Vision Statement and an Action Plan, including further actions not yet considered.

- **Youth Council:** The group proposed and agreed that we should establish a "Youth Council", to consult with the young people in the youth activities, listen to their views and ideas, consider the church's plans,

and ask their opinions of the plans. The Youth Council will propose a framework for communicating views from the Youth Council to the Church Council and vice versa, so that the young people's views are taken into account, without compelling all of them to attend the Church Council.

- **Health and Safety:** A number of specific issues should be dealt with as soon as possible:
 - a baby-changing fold-down table be installed in a suitable location;
 - toilet and baby-changing facilities identified by notices and pew leaflet;
 - emergency procedures amended in light of new alarm, and new fire practice events run in each activity;
 - the church clear-out on Saturday 23 February to be carried out;
 - a nominated person to be identified as the health and safety person for the church;
 - a first aid module delivered for leaders and volunteers onsite;
 - all the various church and activity insurances to be collated and reviewed;
- **Other Items:** The group agreed that there will be other items that emerge as the Action Plan is developed, but for now there are some items that we are agreed should be taken forward:
 - we should consult on the church plans for the redevelopment with the young people;
 - we should ensure that worship leaders are selected and booked in advance for all parades;
 - we will plan for a youth leader and volunteer commissioning service;
 - we should include communion at one parade service in the next year;
 - an individual to be assigned the role of Children and Youth oversight in the Church Council;
 - we will include a 'Youth Work' item on the agenda for all regular Church Council meetings;
 - we will identify a 'youth work budget' for consideration at the next meeting;
 - a training plan to be developed for all leaders and volunteers.

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