

# Evaluating the Diocese of Sheffield's Centenary Project:

## Briefing note for dioceses

### Introduction

This report presents the findings of a mid-term evaluation of the Diocese of Sheffield's Centenary Project. The Centenary Project (CP) began in 2015 when the diocese set aside £1m of its historic reserves and launched a 10-year plan to employ children, youth and family workers, targeted in the most economically disadvantaged areas.

The evaluation was completed by Church Army's Research Unit between May 2021 and December 2021. It is structured around 12 core evaluation questions identified by the diocese and accompanied by six case studies of parishes who have hosted Centenary Project Workers. See: *The Centenary Project: a mid-term evaluation for the Diocese of Sheffield*.

### Key findings

Under questions on **vision and values**, this evaluation notes:

1. 54 parishes have been enabled to share or appoint a worker. Most of these projects would not otherwise have been able to appoint a worker.
2. Of the 54 parishes, 35 are within the 20% most deprived in England. 16 of these parishes (30%) are among the 5% most deprived in England.
3. The CP values have been deliberately and carefully nurtured by leaders who understand youth work and have significantly contributed to the project's success.
4. The CP's important role within the wider diocesan strategy is well-articulated and explained within existing documentation about the project.

Under questions on **impact on mission**, this evaluation notes:

5. Churches with a CP worker have a higher proportion of under 18s in their worshipping community than churches without a CP worker. There has been a statistically significant difference between them for every year since 2017.
6. The project's SDF target of engaging with at least 2,000 children and young people on a regular basis by 2023 has been exceeded already.
7. Survey questions about the impact of CP worker-run groups on participants all received high average scores. Statements about feeling 'accepted', 'supported', 'belonging' and 'understood' scored particularly strongly.

Under questions on **potential areas for improvement and future exploration**, this evaluation notes:

8. The project has a well thought out, clearly articulated, and recently updated communications strategy. Awareness of the project has grown as a result.
9. Compared to volunteer-led models of ministry, the CP is more expensive but delivers significant added value which other, more low-cost, models cannot.
10. The CP is recognised by the senior staff of the diocese as playing a key role in the delivery of the diocesan strategy.
11. Ideas for further opportunities were offered by participants; many had already been attempted by the central team who are quick to spot and explore further opportunities.
12. The CP has well-developed systems for collecting relevant statistics and use the data collected to good effect through its various communications channels.

## Implications for other dioceses

### Why learn from this project?

- This project is not trying to deliver anything novel or alternative. **It is core ministry.** Where parishes, deaneries and dioceses find themselves with ageing attendance and more thinly-stretched resources, this project ensures quality children, youth and families ministry.
- The careful process by the wider team to decide whether a parish is suitable for a worker means a parish receives help with **strategic mission discernment at no extra cost.**
- This project has tracked its progress from the start. The **statistics** prove it has made a difference.
- The project has developed considerable **expertise in developing systems to measure impact.** Similar projects can learn from this expertise.
- This project is about serving every parish in a diocese, but especially those in **economically disadvantaged** communities. It's about growing potential from small and ordinary beginnings.
- This project ensures long-term investment is made in children, youth and families. Where **diocesan strategies will adapt** and the wider landscape of resourcing will change, this project has proved it can adjust to such developments.
- Don't be tempted to think *'we're not in a place to start'* and dismiss an opportunity. There are priorities to line up in a diocese, but if the diocesan bishop is convinced, things fall into place.
- This project respects local context, considering the history of a parish and existing resources in the area. The bespoke discernment process allows for exploration to determine what existing ministry is taking place - either Anglican or by other denominations - and so complement.

### What do you need to know before starting?

Key to this project is the balance of local workers and central team. Workers are supported by the central infrastructure. **One cannot exist without the other.**

This central infrastructure is especially vital for those parishes without stipendiary clergy - whether in vacancy or with no dedicated clergy person long-term.

Longevity is aided by developing the right culture built around key values. Love your workers. Support them. Invest in what they do as a vocational ministry. **Take seriously their calling.**

**Mentoring** is key to this project's effectiveness. It is essential.

While this is not an overly expensive project - central costs are kept as low as possible - **neither is it a project to be delivered 'on the cheap'**. Take seriously 'fair hours for fair salary' to respect your workers and their ministry from the start.

This project cannot perform miracles. It will not instantly transform numbers of children, youth and families attending churches overnight. However, **do not underestimate** the significant impact that paid workers can have directly and indirectly to the life and health of parishes they are working with.

Recognise the importance of **networking** to help workers feel supported and part of something bigger of which they are proud to be a part.

Due to the balance of central versus local elements of the project, most workers will be best known for their work locally. Communication and **celebration of the network** of lay workers across the project will be vital to make transparent the core ministry it delivers for the diocese as a whole.

Prepare churches well. It's all in the **preparation**. Work on finance from the start.

Expect to **recruit locally**. In the Sheffield experience, it is unlikely people would move house for smaller contracts, so advertise in local networks and through social media.

**Set clear objectives** with the right blend of realism and aspiration but knowing that 'life happens'. Regular meetings drawing together worker, mentor and local line manager help ensure objectives are set and tracked as much as possible.

**Make training for line management** - even for clergy - compulsory.

The project can never be impervious to the unknown. There will always be seasons of things working well and other seasons when things feel like a struggle. **Be open to change**. Always ask 'How can we do this better?'

It can be **hard for workers to tell good news stories** about their own work. It won't happen without intentionality. Ensure there is energy and capacity on the central team for communications.

## **Key learning from a parish perspective (illustrative case studies)**

### **Case Study 1: St Mary Magdalene, Whiston and St Cuthbert, Herringthorpe**

*Selected to offer the experience of the first parish to recruit a Centenary Project worker, who started with under 5s ministry and has supported the cohort through to youth work.*

- In their experience, it was good for CP workers to have **some prior knowledge** of the local community and the context the churches are in.
- As Lucy was the first CP worker to be employed by the diocese, she has a unique insight into how the work with the central team and project has evolved. Lucy mentioned the importance of **mentoring** to support CP workers: *'Each and every worker is encouraged to be the best they can be, and they celebrate each worker with their unique talents. I really do think the Centenary Project has made a big difference to the diocese.'*
- Relating to hours and use of time, one member of the focus group explained that although the Centenary Project was fantastic at training, networking and mentoring, whether a CP worker is employed full- or part-time, **they do the same amount of training**. In their experience, sometimes all of Lucy's weekly hours can be taken up by training, although she completes her weekly work as a CP worker alongside this.

### **Case Study 2: St James, Woodhouse**

*Selected as an example of a parish who initially recruited for a youth and families worker but swiftly realised children's work was also needed as part of the post. They have also been successful in applying for external grant funding to finance the post beyond three years.*

#### **1. Collaboration on HR and fundraising**

Without support from the project's central team, applying for external grant funding beyond the project would have been tricky. The application process contains a degree of jargon, plus there are continual changes in safeguarding law, GDPR, and risk assessments which a church must keep on top of. Their PCC secretary did well to write the bid, but not every PCC would have someone willing and able.

## 2. Prepare well

The team offered this wisdom to other churches considering a CP worker:

- Budget properly and factor in National Insurance, redundancy and expenses - young people don't deserve 50-year-old chairs and dried out glue sticks that feel like cast-offs.
- Think in advance about who is suitable to take over line management responsibilities for a worker if the vicar moves on. It always helps to have a Plan B ready.
- Make sure the church has a core group for supporting the worker. The PCC have got to want it; it can't be something 'done' to a church.

## 3. Discipling young leaders

Without a full-time stipendiary clergy person, scope for discipleship development feels limited. Currently, it feels as though they are stretched to capacity, although the team are hoping to run a Christianity Explored course in the autumn.

However, some degree of discipleship is clearly evident in those adults and older teenagers who now volunteer. As the team remarked, *'You can see [the discipleship impact] in the teams of leaders more than anything.'*

## Case Study 3: St Lawrence, Hatfield

*Selected as an example of a relatively affluent parish who recruited a worker through SDF funding.*

### 1. Local and central support

For both the CP worker, Rachel, and wider focus group, a key strength of the Centenary Project has been the strong mix of local and central support available to Centenary Project workers.

- Locally, Rachel has benefitted from a supportive and experienced line manager and a wider support group of 4-5 others from the parish who she is able to call on (via a WhatsApp group) for advice and support.
- Relationships with other Centenary Project workers (via a Messenger group and network events) have been highly valued. Reflecting on these, Rachel told us: *'I don't think any of us [CP workers] will have got through lockdown without that.'*
- Support from the central Centenary Project team (including mentoring and help with objective setting) has been a further valued layer of support. In this regard Rachel told us that the central team's input has helped her to focus and prioritise. Focus group members commented: *'The help that's been provided by the Centenary Project has been well thought out, targeted and researched.'*

### 2. Flexibility and focus

Those from the parish involved in the project reflected that the experience of applying for a CP worker had been *'quite an arduous process'* because it was extremely thorough. Though at times that thoroughness had been slightly frustrating, it had been worth it in the end.

Focus group members also reflected that, though the Centenary Project's emphasis on targets and objective setting helps to give CP workers a focus, a degree of flexibility is also important in responding to changing local circumstances.

### 3. Tapered funding

For this parish, it was felt that the Centenary Project's tapered funding model worked well because it allowed time to *'build the credibility of the project before you start asking for money'*. Within this context, it was felt that it would be realistic for the parish to fully fund the CP worker within three years, but participants also acknowledged that this may not be the case for poorer parishes. As one put it, *'We're okay, but I suspect some other parishes may struggle.'*

## Case Study 4: St Peter, Bentley

*Selected to offer the experience of a parish who, when they first expressed an interest in the project, were not in a position to apply financially but took time to prepare and subsequently appointed a worker two years later.*

### 1. Teamwork

All agree that teamwork is key to the success of the post. The team recommend that such posts be integrated as much as possible into church structures and leadership, for mutual support and the sharing of ideas. A church looking to appoint a worker should never think, *'Oh, they'll get on with it [by themselves].'*

For the Bentley context, this works because all mission and ministry is integrated. Like a jigsaw, different pieces of ministry draw newcomers into church life as they see different faces that care about them through Cuppa in the Car Park, debt advice, Alpha or Sunday morning.

*'When I started at St Peter's, the vicar and wife did everything. Now there are four of us in office, which is amazing.'*

Revd Dave Berry reflected that having their worker, Steph, involved in the worshipping life of the church on a Sunday makes all the difference. It's all part of integrating new families who connect with Steph midweek into worship on a Sunday. If Steph wasn't present on a Sunday, it would be very odd.

### 2. Recruit a CP worker who is at ease around non-Christians

Local church members described Steph as *'fearless'* in offering to pray with parents and were *'amazed'* by what she achieved in lockdown in staying connected with families.

They described the interview process for Steph's role and reflected on Steph's ability - demonstrated on the day - to interact with non-Christian mums in a very natural way. Looking back, they recognise this as a crucial element of the job and advise others to look for similar gifts when recruiting for posts.

### 3. Realistic expectations

Don't expect the post to pay for itself in the space of three years. In this team's experience, it takes two years of regular attendance for newcomers to give regularly to the church, and it feels like Steph is starting from *'scratch'*. In terms of the Engel Scale, the team are working with people navigating the very earliest stages of faith journey.

The way the project works with named objectives takes a bit of getting used to, but the objectives meetings work well in setting realistic short-term aims. *'It's been a great success here that can be mirrored in other parishes.'*

## Case Study 5: St Paul, Wheatley Park

*Selected to share the experience of a relatively deprived parish which found external funding for their worker after the initial three years of Centenary Project funding.*

### 1. Discerning

For other churches considering appointing a children's or youth worker through initiatives like the Centenary Project, the St Paul's team highlighted the need to:

- Prayerfully discern - *'Just because one [a CP worker] is available doesn't mean you should have one necessarily.'*
- Think carefully about whether to employ a specialist children's worker, youth worker or families worker, or appoint a more generalist combined role - there are pros and cons to each approach.
- Appoint someone you know you can work with, including a good enough *'theological match'*.

## 2. Leap of faith

As a small church in a deprived area, St Paul's leadership team were initially unsure about the Centenary Project's tapered funding model, which involves parishes paying 100% of the CP worker's salary after year 3. But as they told us in interview:

*'Our advice would be, don't let [funding] be a stumbling point.'*

*'We took a leap of faith that God would provide. And he did. We found that grant bodies really liked what's been going on...'*

## 3. Fundraising

One of the main reasons why St Paul's have been able to continue employing a CP worker beyond the initial three years is that, right from the outset they have been *'always firing off'* funding applications, as well as putting money aside from internal church funds. In this regard, the support of the diocese has also been appreciated, with one interviewee commenting: *'The diocese have been fantastic. They've got people to help with fundraising.'*

## Case Study 6: St Mary, Bramall Lane

*Selected to tell the story of what happens in a parish a few years after a post has ceased and the worker moved on.*

### 1. Be clear about objectives

From St Mary's, there was a gentle hope originally that a CP worker might kickstart more youth initiatives in the community, possibly in conjunction with Tenants and Residents Association (TARA). Despite initial conversations, this never quite got off the ground.

It is important to be clear about what should be prioritised within a worker's role and for the worker and parish to support one another in that. Being adaptable and reviewing objectives regularly ensures everyone's expectations are met.

### 2. Wider network

The team praised the project for its support of workers, recognising that this kind of role can be so isolating. They would recommend other churches to explore working with the project, citing benefits such as help with advertising for the post, through to networking support and supervision for a worker in post. *'For a church like us, it opened us up to different opportunities, including a youth worker interview process.'*

CP worker Amy valued the wider youth events as a way to develop youth work midweek with a limited team. Hearing about the project's hub work (wider youth networking) that has come online since she stepped down, Amy confirmed this as much-needed, both to support a CP worker and for a small youth group to feel they are part of something bigger.

### 3. Gather a team from the start

For sustainability and further development, securing ongoing finance is part of the picture. However, Amy's advice for any parish thinking of appointing a youth worker is to gather a committed team before appointing. Finding volunteers who are willing and able to help run sessions is the ongoing challenge. Safeguarding obviously requires more than one leader, but the valuable one-to-one mentoring is only effective with a ratio of 1:3 or 1:4 (one worker to three or four teenagers).