



The Hub Church

The church that's by young adults for young adults

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The idea that would one day become The Hub Church first began with the leaders Dan and Alex feeling that there wasn't a church in their town that they could invite their friends to. This feeling grew over time and eventually led them to start a church themselves.

This case study of the church they founded explains:

- the "Would my friends come to this?" principle
- the power of treating outsiders as 'in', not 'out'
- ways of extending reach through social media



Introducing The Hub Church

Where: Hitchin, a medium-sized

market town in Hertfordshire

Denomination: Church of England

Date started: January 2011

Target group: 20s and 30s

Number of people involved: Average of 50 people each Sunday across two communities

Staffing / funding: Dan Drew (church leader) and Martha Inch (morning community leader). Both are part time and funded by members of The Hub

(although for the first 18 months all the leaders were voluntary).

Premises: The Market Theatre and Hitchin Christian Centre (both rented)

Other points of note: The Hub Church's website won an award for its design in 2016. In June 2017, The Hub Church received a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO) which means (in their words) "it's now officially part of the C of E!"

Website: www.thehubchurch.co.uk



Mission at The Hub Church

"Would my friends want to come to this?"

The Hub Church team have always remembered why they began and the question "Would my friends come to this?" informs everything they do. Whether they're planning events, socials or services, they say that everything they do is mission. Their values as a church are to:

- **Be social**
- **Create debate**
- **Build family**
- **Become disciples**

We'll now look at three main ways through which The Hub Church reaches out to young adults.

Inviting friends to socials and Alpha courses



The Hub Church runs monthly socials and encourages members to invite friends to these. Two key questions they use to inform their planning are: “Who can we invite to this?” and “Who needs love this week?” They also run the Alpha course several times a year.

The reason for doing Alpha so often and having regular socials is that: “If you’re talking to someone, there needs to be something coming up that you can invite them to. If you’re chatting and someone says, ‘Actually, I’d quite like to explore Christianity’ and your response is that you’re doing an Alpha course in six months’ time, you’ve lost them...”

“We’ve tried to design our church in such a way that if we see an opportunity we can respond really quickly to it.”

Interestingly, The Hub Church has sometimes tried running their own course, but they find that they keep coming back to Alpha. “We don’t think it’s the best thing in the world, but it seems to work,” explains Dan. “We show the videos rather than us do the talk. If people watch the video, they can tear it to shreds and it doesn’t really matter, ‘cause all they’re doing is offending some posh guy from London!”

Interactive services

Services at The Hub Church are designed to be accessible to non-churched young adults, with as few stumbling blocks as possible. For someone who’s never experienced church before, their first time can be a strange and intimidating experience.

With this in mind, they try to explain everything very clearly (e.g. saying “You can stand up to sing if you want to”). They even have explanatory cards on the tables reminiscent of the ‘in case of emergency’ cards you find on planes!



They also have lots of times of discussion. Dan believes that young adults “don’t just want someone at the front telling them what to think all the time; they want to explore that”. Similarly, they also always have a question and answer time with the person who’s spoken. “There needs to be an opportunity for what they’ve said to be challenged, and I think we do that in a positive way.”

Social media



The way the church uses social media was described by the team as giving people little “building blocks” in their experience of Christianity. Each interaction can be a positive experience - “so when somebody gets to the point of maybe coming to an event, they’ve already experienced a lot of it”.

When we visited over the summer, they were running Hubcast Live. This is where the evening community gathering is broadcast on

Facebook Live and sees people interacting via social media as well as those physically in the room.

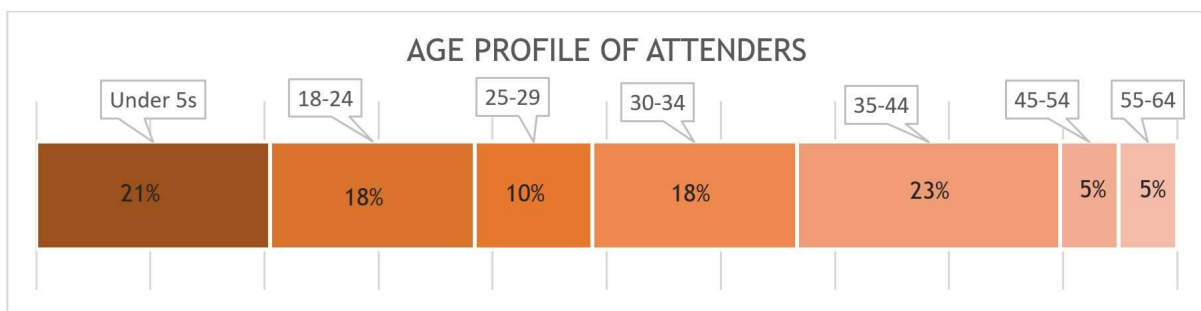
The impact that these livecasts have can’t be underestimated - from the big details (the last one saw 750 people engage with it on the night and then 3,000 views afterwards), to the smaller details of which Martha gave just one example:

“One couple have a hot tub in their garden. The magic of Facebook is that they posted a photo of them watching from the hot tub and that went round all their friends. That’s a positive experience their friends have of church that they might not have had otherwise.”

Evidence of growth

The Hub Church leadership report that around 30-35 people have come to faith since they started and in the last few years 7 people have been baptised.

Around 50 people attend each Sunday and on the Sunday we visited, two-thirds of the attenders were under the age of 35.



Within the past year, The Hub Church has launched a second community, meeting in the morning, which has more of a family focus. This has grown quickly in size and now regularly sees more people than the evening community. The morning gathering has attracted a lot more non-Christians. But the team has also noticed that more existing Christians have been joining the evening community from other churches or as they move to the area.

This latter point highlights a tricky balancing act for The Hub. With increased numbers of established Christians, The Hub now feels more financially sustainable. But this also makes it harder to maintain a clear missional focus on the non-churched. The team are aware of this and are currently starting to think about establishing a third community somewhere else.

A further dimension to The Hub's missional impact among young adults is its reach on social media. As Dan explains, commenting on the number of people who viewed Hubcast Live (see above), The Hub's core community may be relatively small, but "our network and reach is massive".

They have also seen a significant number of people exploring and training for ordination.



How have people come to faith?

Reflecting on the experiences of people who have become Christians or are exploring faith through The Hub, the team have spotted two main recurring themes:

- the role of the **Alpha course**
- people feeling that they 'belong' before they 'believe'

Here we look at two short stories that illustrate these points.

Helen's story



Helen was an atheist for most of her life. When she began to question things, and became agnostic, she decided to go on an Alpha course. She looked on the national Alpha website and found that the nearest and soonest course to her was at The Hub Church.

After finishing the Alpha course, she started to attend The Hub Church on Sundays and after 4 or 5 weeks became a Christian. She says that while the Alpha course let her ask her questions and helped with her understanding, it was the community of The Hub Church that had a major impact on her:

“Initially it was just the fact that these people were normal, they made jokes, they were relaxed and friendly. As I got to know them more it was realising that this isn't just something they do on Sundays - they really believe it and it affects their whole lives.”

One key experience for Helen was going to visit the Calais refugee camp with some members of The Hub Church: “It just made me realise ‘they believe it’ and it affects what they do. This place was being kept together by Christian charities.”

Since becoming a Christian about 2 years ago, Helen has been baptised, confirmed and is now exploring the possibility of ordination.

Jon's story

Jon has been coming to The Hub Church for about 6 months. His only previous connection to a church growing up was singing in a choir for a year. He describes his general impression of church and Christianity as what he'd seen on TV: “for older people with someone standing up at the front and telling you what you should and shouldn't believe”.

His wife, Verity, already attended The Hub Church as part of the evening community, but when their son was born she wanted them to go somewhere together as a family and suggested the morning community.

Jon says that he really values the community feel of The Hub Church and the feeling that



there is no pressure on him. He didn't have to keep coming after the first few times, but he chose to and that's because of the community.

“There isn't a lot of pressure here, people are just happy that you come along and spend some time together.”

He is currently exploring faith on the Alpha course.

Conclusions

Reproducible principles

From this case study of The Hub Church, three key principles that would be reproducible in many other young adult mission contexts stand out:

1. The “Would my friends come to this?” principle

Whatever activity they're planning, this is a key question The Hub team always asks. As Martha explains:

“The best people to get other people to come to church are their friends - the people you're in relationship with, your work colleagues, your neighbours. That's really key for when we're thinking about doing stuff - we're designing things with our friends in mind.”

2. Treating outsiders as 'in', not 'out'



We saw this in action when walking with Dan through Hitchin town centre and he stopped to talk a few moments with a complete stranger. During the course of the conversation, he briefly mentioned something about The Hub. Reflecting on this afterwards, he said they genuinely believe that everyone is part of their family, "even the guy we just met on the walk over here".

“As soon as we make that first contact and they know that we're part of this thing called The Hub, we believe they're part of our family in some way. There's loads of people that love what The Hub do; they've never been, but I think they're part of our family.”

3. Extending reach through social media

The way that The Hub Church uses social media enables them to connect with a much wider range of people than they would otherwise. Through social media, they try to give people lots of little positive experiences of church and Christianity. Whenever someone interacts with some of The Hub Church's content, this can immediately be seen by all of their friends. As a result, their reach has grown rapidly.



Potential downsides

Though The Hub Church has many strengths, there are also some potential disadvantages and risks to be aware of. These are largely the flipside of the positives we have identified above:

- In gearing pretty much everything to outsiders, **there is a risk of neglecting the discipleship of existing Christians**, old and new.
- If you take the “Would my friends come to this?” principle to an extreme, **there's a risk of simply building a clique of like-minded people.** (This keys into wider debates within church planting circles about the ‘homogeneous unit principle’.)

Top tip

“If you wanna reach 20s and 30s, crudely speaking, you need 20s and 30s leading.”



The Hub Church is aware of the challenge of the need to work at reaching even younger adults. A few years ago Dan and Alex realised that the average age of people in The Hub community was 28, the same age as them - the community was aging with them. This led them to look for a younger person to join the team - Martha. Dan is now 31, Martha is 25 and the average age at the evening community is now 25, so it seems to be working.

But the team are aware that this will continue to happen and so are always looking for the next even younger person to join them.

To find out more

To find out more about The Hub Church, visit

www.thehubchurch.co.uk