

Illuminate – Christian Outreach Project

About The Door

The Door Youth Project (“The Door”) is a Christian charity, established in 1991, so that all young people aged 11-25, their families and carers living in the Stroud District of Gloucestershire can find the right support for their often multiple and complex needs, and with a range of opportunities through which to reach their potential. We have two major and inter-connected strands to our work: Community Youth Work and Family Support Services.

As a Christian charity we impart the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, as detailed in Galatians, in such a way that the cornerstone of our mission is to bring God’s transformative love and hope into the lives of the individuals and the communities we serve.

Historically we have helped our beneficiaries to

- recognise and understand the spiritual aspects of their lives,
- understand that Christianity does not consist in doctrine and Church attendance alone,
- connect with local churches and church youth clubs and
- discover and practice a personal, active and committed faith for themselves including being baptised.

While these have had positive impacts on individuals and indeed local communities and Churches we now recognise that more needs to be done if we are to meet the spiritual needs of our beneficiaries in their present situations and the ever changing contexts of the local Church and the communities in which The Door operates.

Our Illuminate Christian Outreach Programme is one way through which we can respond to these needs.

The Illuminate Christian Outreach Programme

Evidential Basis

In formulating the Illuminate Programme we have taken account of the findings of two major pieces of research. The first is the nationwide survey commissioned by Hope Revolution and conducted by ComRes and Barna (2016) which extended the findings of the Talking Jesus Report (2015). The 2016 survey focussed on the responses of 2000 young people aged 11-18 which showed that 13% of these young people could be regarded as “practicing Christians” where this is defined as those that attended corporate worship monthly and read the Bible and prayed weekly. A further 28% were described as “non-practicing Christians” in that they did not engage in these practices on a monthly or weekly basis. The remaining 59% of the cohort were, presumably, either of different faiths or none at all.

The second piece of research we have taken into account is “secular” in scope and conducted by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Egypt following the civil disturbances in that country in 2011. This found that when just 10% of a population holds an “unshakeable belief” they are the catalyst which shifts the prevailing majority view to their own.

Having applied these findings to our context in Stroud we find that Christian young people believe that they are in a minority and that if they are open about their faith they may be vulnerable to ridicule and abuse, whereas this is, in fact, mistaken. Indeed in a local secondary school of average size there may be at least 100 “practicing Christians”. Moreover, should they be empowered and equipped to act as a catalyst for change with “unshakeable belief” they will be able to change the entire cultural and belief system that surrounds them.

The Project

Giving reassurance as to the relevance of a lively Christian faith in the lives of individuals and groups of young people, across Stroud District, and equipping them to bring about enduring change, where they are and in what they can do, is the primary purpose of our Illuminate Programme.

In order to do this The Door will itself be a catalyst for change. Local Christian Outreach to young people in Stroud District is currently centred on Churches and while this might be of benefit to the 13% mentioned in the ComRes and Barna survey it cannot reach the other 28%. It certainly has severely limited capacity to reach the 59%.

So there is an opportunity to do things differently in ways which build upon our widespread reputation as a model of best practice in Christian Youth Work. We will centre the project on schools rather than churches. This has the dual advantages of allowing us to be a Christian presence where young people are every day and to work across parish and denominational boundaries on a truly ecumenical cooperative basis.

Each school will be a discreet and specialist area of work with its own name (e.g. illuminateArchway) within the overall project encompassing and giving coherence to the programme as a whole. The project will be overseen by a Strategic Youth Pastor who will oversee and deliver the programme and liaise with Churches and local Christian agencies. A number of these local agencies, such as PSALMS, local Church Leaders and youth workers have already expressed an interest in partnering with the Illuminate Programme and consider that The Door is best placed to deliver it because of our extensive contacts with secondary schools, communities and Churches.

The Illuminate project will be discreet from the current Community Youthwork of The Door, ensuring that contracts with councils and other community agencies aren't compromised.

Objectives

The Illuminate Programme will have four areas of focus:

1. Young People as Yeast in their Schools (Matthew 13:33)

Illuminate will focus on “whole-life discipleship”, inspiring young people to see themselves as yeast in their school communities. The term yeast implies that which is covert and acts as a catalyst for change from within. So while some “practising Christian” young people are already gifted in talking about their faith and this needs to be celebrated and nurtured, many others are not. Through the Illuminate programme those who are not able speak about their faith can be disciplined to live a Christ-like existence in their schools by uncovering the gifts they do have. They may, for example, choose to socialise with those on the margin of their year group not only to befriend them but to help their integration into the school community as a whole. Another example might be in taking a stand against modern day slavery, trafficking and the treatment of refugees from a Christian perspective.

2. Being a Christian Presence in Schools

The liaison work which the Strategic Youth Pastor will conduct with schools will allow “practicing” and “non-practicing” Christian young people and others to see Christianity as relevant and interesting in world and in their lives. The Illuminate Programme will ensure that they have a positive experience of the faith and develop regular opportunities and events through which to explore that relevance still further.

3. Events

All events in the Illuminate Programme will provide opportunities to which the Strategic Youth Pastor and young people who are “practicing Christians” can invite their “non-practicing Christian” friends and those of no faith. Every event will include a clear Christian message inviting a response by way of making a definite commitment to follow Jesus or exploring further what it means to do so. The events will be followed up with the appropriate age groups in schools. This will be facilitated by the Strategic Youth Pastor together with key Christian young people as part of their on-going discipleship and personal development. This involvement may as Illuminate progresses produce a number of young Christian leaders.

4. Supporting Existing Youth Ministry in Local Churches

Illuminate will offer a range of professional practical support to local churches in developing their youth ministries and discipleship of young people. This will include volunteer training and development, the sharing of resources, strategic planning and best practice together with the ability to help with their existing provision where this is possible an appropriate. This will demand a deepening of our existing relationships with local Churches and the forging of new ones. We will coordinate a monthly “Engine Room” worship event for young people of all denominations to gather together for worship, fellowship and prayer – inspiring them to connect up within their school communities and go out as yeast into the world.

These four areas can be summarised in the following table;

	In School	Beyond School
“Practicing-Christian” Young People	Being “Yeast” in their school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident in their faith • Formation of Christian Unions • Access to Strategic Youth Pastor 	Gathering Together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship & Pray • Discipleship • Socialise
“Non-Practising Christian” Young People	Exploring the Christian Faith <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemblies • Availability of Strategic Youth Pastor • Access to all areas of school and all age groups. 	Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality events & performances with a Christian message and response • Connections and partnership working with local churches and Christian agencies.
The Local Church	Christian Presence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Youth Pastor works relevantly with young people in their own environments 	Expert Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and resourcing for church leaders and youth work • Connections with other Churches and organisations.

Outcomes

- Perceptions of Christianity will change, being seen as interesting and relevant in the modern world and in the lives of individual young people.
- Young people will become more confident in their beliefs.
- The culture of their schools will more readily adopt clear “kingdom values”.
- There will be a significant increase in the number of young people interested in exploring and following the Christian faith.
- Illuminate events will encourage as many young people as possible to make a personal commitment to follow Jesus and engage with their local churches and Christian groups.

The Pilot

From September 2018, The Door will be piloting illuminate for 2 years across the Stroud Deanery area, focusing on working with Archway, Maidenhill and Thomas Keble schools.

Whilst each school was involved in the LZ7 mission week, current Christian connections into each of these schools varies:

Archway

- Contracted mentor from The Door in school
- Christian Worship assemblies to each year group each week
- Youthworker from The Door engaging with year 7 one lunchtime per week
- The Door delivering ad hoc small group work (anxiety, self-esteem, bullying, relationships)

Thomas Keble

- Christian Union (supported by local churches)
- History of prayer spaces in schools

Maidenhill

- Sports clubs run by PSALMS
- Mentoring by PSALMS
- 6 Christian assemblies run per year

This variety will prove a good basis for the pilot programme, which will also include engaging with local churches; benchmarking against similar projects nationally (XLP, The Message, Frontier Youth Trust, Youth For Christ); running Engine Room monthly; running 3x outreach events per year.