

Discussion Notes: In it for the Long Haul - What to do When Growth Feels Slow

It can feel disheartening when growth in social action and community engagement happens slowly, but depth of connection is just as important as numbers. These notes reflect a discussion following training from Ellie Hughes, Community Pastor of St Paul's Kingston and Founder of The Riverbank Trust, exploring what meaningful growth can look like.



Watch Ellie's presentation here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_4d-tUxpZQ

How do we encourage growth while keeping things open, organic, and manageable?

- Growth is good - we don't want to create closed groups that people can't join.
- Flyers for advertisement can have a place, but steady organic growth through word of mouth can make growth more manageable and meaningful. This also gives guests agency.
- In more rural settings, groups naturally cap at around 16 – which is actually manageable and appropriate.
- If numbers grow, consider starting an additional session rather than enlarging the existing group.

How do we balance success in numbers with creating a calm, safe, and meaningful space?

- In one example of a parent and children's group, attendance was high and, at times, the atmosphere was positive. However, it often felt chaotic and it was hard to have in-depth, meaningful conversations. Ultimately, this project was closed because it wasn't meeting the core purpose of offering a safe, calm, quiet space. This was ok to do, given the context, to make room for more relationship-driven ministries.
- This highlights the need to reframe expectations of what "success" looks like.
- Simply having the church open is valuable; consider increasing these times, but ensure at least one or more people are present for safety. To provide a place where people can come in for prayer, or quiet space.



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How do we prioritise safeguarding while still building authentic relationships?

- Build real friendships and genuine relationships, but understand that these friendships will be different to those built outside of a social action setting, for example personal friendships.
- Be mindful of language - avoid terms like “clients,” and see people as made in the image of God.
- Boundaries and responsibility remain essential.
- Always remain alert to potential safeguarding issues – for the protection of the individual or others.
- Be honest early on when conversations become difficult:
 - Make it clear you may have a responsibility to act when the person is in danger or they disclose that someone else is in danger.
 - This may shift the relationship slightly, but does not diminish the love, care, or authenticity.
 - It is important that we acknowledge to ourselves that there is an inherent imbalance in these relationships due to safeguarding and responsibility.

How do we build strong, valued volunteer teams rooted in purpose, honesty, and mutual support?

- Everything centres around relationship, even building a volunteer team.
- Invest time in building the team and nurturing volunteers.
- Volunteers want to feel valued, helpful, and that their presence matters.
- Even if no one attends the event/project, volunteers still:
 - Carry the presence of Jesus
 - Can pray together
 - Build community among themselves
- Feel free to share appropriate frustrations with the team and also share the reasons you continue the work. This can build resilience and strengthen mutual support.
- It's natural to have expectations; being honest about this helps to manage the expectations in a healthy way.



We want to hear from you!

Get in touch with Nicole McKeever
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tailored support and advice.

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