



hands on

Stories, ideas & news from Kids Friendly | ISSUE 23 | February 2013



The Kids Friendly Way

During my first week back at work I received seven requests to visit churches and share the Kids Friendly vision. "We've been thinking about Kids Friendly for some time," one elder said, "and now we're ready to find out more and start working to become a Kids Friendly church." I admit I felt slightly overwhelmed by the appointments filling my calendar after my month's summer break, but I'm also very encouraged to know that the message is getting out there and stirring hearts and minds. Sometimes as I sit in my Auckland office all on my own I wonder if I'm just ranting into a big void. So when I receive emails from all over New Zealand from ministers or children's leaders I've often never met, sharing their hopeful stories of ministry with the children in their communities, I feel encouraged by our churches' commitment to "let the children come".

One such email arrived on my desk this week from Nathan Monk of St John's church in Hastings. Their story of new life and growth (shared on page 2) is yet more evidence that it's never too late to start investing in children and families. Nathan acknowledges the role his congregation



has played in graciously allowing him to bring about change. My latest Bush Telegraph article "Let them fly" tells an all too common story of a passionate and enthusiastic volunteer wanting to effect change in her church but being obstructed by negativity and gate keeping. Some of our finest children's ministry leaders have left their churches and ministries over the last year burnt out and discouraged. If you are experiencing difficulties, please let us know. We are here to support and encourage you in your ministry. And if you're a leader in a church please do everything you can to encourage your children's ministry team.

Being Christ's church in secular New Zealand is increasingly challenging, but nothing compared to Jesus' first followers. It's wonderfully encouraging to hear your stories of being people of "the way" as you engage with your communities children and families and share the good news and love of Christ. I am inspired by Mosgiel's story on page 3 and know many will benefit from their experiences.

Thank you from all of us on the Kids Friendly team for the way you commit to loving and serving the children of our beautiful nation.
Blessings
Jill

Welcome...



We are thrilled to welcome Nikki Watkin to our Kids Friendly team. Nikki will be joining Jill in the Auckland office and will be working part-time. Nikki is also a minister with her husband Richard at Kohimarama Presbyterian church. Nikki is well known for writing the Faith Box material. She has created 8 volumes (96 weeks!) of wonderfully inspiring family devotions. Nikki is passionate about encouraging and equipping parents to share their faith with their children. She also has extensive experience in connecting with and serving children in her community. Says Nikki: "I am excited to be able to take on a new role that will complement my ministry at Kohimarama and enable me to use my skills and qualifications."

A Kids Friendly Celebration

by Jill Kayser



I've learnt many lessons in my role as Kids Friendly coach. One of the most humbling is that I am a part of God's mission and not the other way round! Although there's still a remnant (okay maybe more) of impatience at churches not "getting" the importance of ministry with children fast enough, my eight years in this role has shown me that all things work according to God's plan and timing. I mostly accept that my role is to plant seeds, nurture and feed them as much as is feasible from a distance, and then hand over to God and his gardeners. Like an avid propagator I take great delight in seeing the amazing miracle of new life shooting forth from what sometimes seems like dormant seeds.

An email I received this week from Nathan Monk, children's and youth pastor of St John's Hastings, sharing his church's story of hope and growth, reminded me of God's hand on HIS ministry once again.

I first visited St John's six years ago to share the Kids Friendly vision. Since then the church has undergone a few leadership changes and a tragic fire damaging their buildings. Now under the leadership of Rev Paul Loveday and Nathan Monk and "after heaps of work" the church is ready to declare itself Kids Friendly.

Says Nathan: "We have completed the self review and have an action plan that is already seeing fruit with our numbers growing from 4 kids six months ago to 22. The congregation has been amazing and coped with the necessary changes with grace."

To launch the year St John's has organised a back to school party for the community's children with a bouncy castle, games, food and drink. To deepen their relationship with their community's children they are offering two after school programmes; a Hip Hop dance group called Loud n Proud for Primary and Intermediate Kids; and a "Build a Boat" programme. "Kids will build their own radio controlled sail boat over two terms with the help of mentors from our church. Both these programmes are targeted at disadvantaged kids and we hope to provide some much needed self esteem and Christian love while having heaps of fun."

Also on offer at St John's is a mid week youth group "Courageous Contagious Youth". Free family movie nights are also hosted by the church each term. While the church is intent on serving its community, it is also committed to welcoming and involving children in Sunday worship. Children and youth participate in and contribute to worship with all the congregation for the first 20 minutes on Sunday before enjoying their own programme, followed by a shared morning tea for all the faith community.

"To say we are a perfect Kids Friendly church would be a lie," says Nathan, "we have many challenges ahead, but our congregation is committed to embracing and loving children and families. I think it may be time to celebrate all their hard work by getting the title of Kids Friendly, what do you think?" I think you're right Nathan. Well done. St John's is the 58th church in our denomination to become Kids Friendly!

Finding New Ways

by Cheryl Harray



"If we'd had a big 'successful' Sunday morning ministry with children in 2008 we probably wouldn't have started Family T" admits Trudie Clearwater, an elder at Mosgiel Presbyterian Church and one of the founding leaders of 'Family T'.

The reality for Mosgiel was a small Sunday school for a

few church families and a thriving mid-week mainly music group attracting 40 community families. Sound familiar? Relationships with mainly music families were good but what was the next step? Leaders realised an invitation to Sunday morning church was too big a step for most – the culture was just too different! So the team listened, prayed and tossed around the question "What might church look like for these community families?" Out of this, Family T was birthed in May 2008, held weekly on Sunday evenings, 5-7pm including a meal. The meal is central – a gathering point for families as they sit at tables talking and spending quality time together, participating in value based activities and sharing wholesome food.

It took FAITH to start and to continue, as numbers fluctuated. Resourcing this weekly event was a challenge for the leaders, but some weeks really 'flew'. It was noted that attendance was higher when there was a definite theme and families appreciated making something together and taking it home. "Sharing our progress with the wider church family was important; helping them to understand that we were building a new congregation, not providing a pathway to Sunday worship." Understanding grew and prayer and financial support from the leadership and congregation was crucial to the success of this venture.

Reviewing the sustainability of this mission and ministry led to more changes in 2010. Family T was offered just once a month with a stronger emphasis on the theme. Attendance averaged 60. A core of families could be counted on to be there.

With additional leadership in 2011, Family T has increased in frequency to fortnightly, reinforcing the same theme, based on a scripture, over two weeks.

"People love to join other like-minded families and experience sharing, caring, equipping and encouraging," says Trudie. "Obviously the food is hugely appreciated as we offer a full and nutritious meal created by a talented chef and helpers from our church."

Activities and crafts help families 'take home' the all age learning.

"Christmas and Easter in particular have been great opportunities to introduce community families to Christian traditions and to explore Christian rituals in a contemporary way."

Everyone participates together regardless of age. The children range from 0 to 15 years. The primary invitation and 'way in' is still through mainly music and pastoral care of community families.



There are now 10 core families attending and Mosgiel sees its challenge is to ensure that Family T doesn't default to a Sunday morning style of worship. Questions Family T leadership

grapple with include: Should we try and have a time for adult learning? How do we continue to cater for the wide range of children and young teens who come? What about sung worship? How do we encourage more faith conversations? But most importantly the ongoing priority for Family T leaders is to strengthen the community and deepen relationships with God and one another on this exciting quest to be people of "the way".

People of 'the way'

The early followers of Jesus Christ were called the people of "the Way." They were known for the way they lived, not only for what they believed. Christians were associated with a discernible way of living and relating that grew out of their faith and gave testimony to that faith. They were a new people embarking on a new way of life. Their proclamation that in Jesus Christ the reconciling and transforming reign of God became an historical reality was more than an intriguing idea, it became visible in a people whose life together was the first fruit of the new social order intended by God for the whole of creation. **Inangrace T. Dietterich, Cultivating Missional Communities**

School adopts a church

by Cheryl Harray



A common question Kids Friendly coaches ask churches seeking to connect with their communities is: "Do you know your local school?"

Befriending and serving your local school is the first step towards building positive relationships with your community.

A visit with the local principal to ascertain needs and offer help, has led some churches on an exciting journey, with an interesting twist at the end of last year for Flagstaff Community church.

When Carolyn Sims started as the community worker for Flagstaff Community church in 2007, she visited both primary schools to find out how her church could support its local schools. One school was open to volunteers helping with tutor reading, Bible-in-schools and the establishment of Hilltop Kidz, an afterschool club. Five years on, the principal enthusiastically endorses the difference the church's ministry has made in the community. It's a great story that you can view on "A day in the life of Carolyn Sims" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVzi--eyRpo>)

The other school responded to Carolyn's offer to help, with a challenging proposition. "Could you help with controlling our children's head lice" the principal asked. Not one to be deterred, Carolyn got to work forming a "Nitbusters" team. As Carolyn says: "You need to go in prepared to be a servant. The job required may be reading or gardening or nitbusting. Show them that you want to form a relationship and that you can be trusted to do the job you are asked to do and soon you may be called on to help in other ways."

The principal admitted that he didn't think this bright-eyed, bushy tailed team of nitbusters would last very long, but five years later Carolyn and her team are still busting nits! "Our relationship with the school has gone from strength to strength," says Carolyn, "and now we run a lunchtime SUPAKidz club (there had been no religious education in this school for 12 years) and we get asked to visit needy families."

At a recent morning tea to thank volunteers, including the Nitbusters and Supakidz teams, the Principal announced he was leaving his current position for another school in Dunedin. "Tell me, who is the local church that I need to connect with in my new school community?" he asked. What a wonderful invitation! It was a pleasure to be able to connect him with his local Kids Friendly church and minister.

Is this a challenge for you and your church in 2013....What might happen if you visit your local school and ask 'How can we serve you?' For more encouraging stories of churches connecting with schools see Hands On 20 "Back to School" stories and Hands On 17 "Looking Out". Back issues of "Hands On" can be found on our Kids Friendly website (www.kidsfriendly.org.nz) under "Resourcing/Stories from our churches".



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