



Gloucestershire
**YOUTH
FOR CHRIST**

Update

Summer term 2026

I feel free!

You know you are on a youth residential when you hear a large number of young people shouting random words enthusiastically together. 'Punt the pig, punt the puppy!' were the words that rang



out across the site as fifty young people were introduced to an old classic game from years gone by! As one leader put it 'the old ones are always the best!'

This year's residential also included 'party bingo' for the very first time which was a huge success with both young people and leaders. Party bingo involves people getting up and dancing to songs that contain any of the numbers. Sarah brought plenty of energy as the host and the atmosphere in the room was incredible! Everyone joined in with the fun, including

Nick from British Youth for Christ, who visited us for the day.

The theme for the weekend was 'Encounters with Jesus', which we explored during our main meetings. We also ran seminars on how to encounter Jesus in everyday life, song writing and answers to big questions.

Throughout the weekend, young people responded to the messages they heard. One young person said that they had grown up in church and would have described themselves as a Christian, but the decision they made to follow Jesus at the residential was the first time they had made the decision for themselves. Another young person was prayed for and they



said they felt free for the first time in their life.

On the Saturday evening, Sarah shared her testimony and talked openly and honestly about the struggles she had faced. She shared how Jesus had broken through all of these situations and transformed her life. She explained that nobody is too far gone for Jesus. Afterwards, one young person said "The worship was genuinely amazing and felt like such a safe space I felt genuinely inspired by Sarah's story." The atmosphere was really special during the times of worship.

Other highlights this year included 9 Square in the Air, archery, craft and, of course, the food! But most of all it was seeing young people encounter Jesus!

Below is some of the feedback we received from the young people...

"I loved each session and worshipping together. I also loved the seminar on how to encounter Jesus in everyday life. It was so helpful and I have started to habit build on my everyday tasks."

"I loved the talks, the worship, the activities. I also loved the food! :)"

"To be honest, I think it was perfect for me. I loved it."

"I encountered Jesus through worship, which doesn't usually happen."

We are already planning for next year's Big Weekender, and we know that many of the young people who attended this year will be coming again in 2027!



THE BIG WEEKENDER 2027

12-14th February 2027

Bem-vinda Laura

After a very long wait, Laura joined us from Brazil. We had hoped she would arrive in September, but was delayed due to waiting for her visa. She arrived in February, in freezing temperatures, having come from the warmth of Brazil. She is spending a year with us, as a gap year. As part of her year, she is based in Christian City Church, where she is also involved in youth work. Her name is pronounced differently in Portuguese, so it sounds more like Laowra. We asked Laura to tell us a little about herself and the year so far.

My name is Laura, I'm 18 and from Brazil. I'm really interested in art, culture and people's stories, and I love creative things like drawing and writing. I'm also passionate about faith and learning more about God through new experiences and relationships.

In Brazil, I live with my parents and my older brother. We're very close and we spend a lot of time together. My family is really supportive, and we laugh a lot together, so one thing I miss is the little everyday moments at home, like the movie nights or cooking together.

Brazil is a very warm and vibrant country with a strong sense of community and culture. People are usually very welcoming and expressive, and family and friendships are a big part of everyday life. I also love how diverse Brazil is — from the food and music, to the landscapes and traditions. There's always music, conversation and people together, which is something I really love about Brazilian culture.

Ever since I was 13, I told my mum that I wanted to do a year of mission work after I finished school. I wanted to experience a

different culture, serve people, grow in my faith and step outside of my comfort zone. And, when I found out about the British Youth for Christ Year Out program, I felt like God was aligning everything.

There are a lot of differences between Brazil and the UK, including the weather, culture and the way people communicate. Brazil is usually much louder and more expressive, while people in the UK can be more reserved at first. The food, routines (like the fact that lunch is usually the main meal in Brazil) and even humour are different too. But I've really enjoyed

learning about the culture here and adapting to it.

This year, I want God to help me grow spiritually and become more confident in who He created me to be. I want to learn how to trust Him more, love people well and be open to whatever He wants to teach me during this season. I also hope He uses me to encourage others.

So far, I've learnt a lot about adapting to new environments and stepping out of my comfort zone. I've also learnt how important

community is, especially being surrounded by people who support and encourage each other. Spiritually, I think I'm learning to trust God more when I don't know what's coming next.

My favourite thing so far has definitely been the people I've met, getting to know different stories and learning from every conversation. I've made really meaningful memories, travelled to new places, and had opportunities to grow personally and spiritually in ways I didn't expect.



Growing team

Over the last few months, we have been recruiting for a new youth work role. The post is shared with Hesters Way Baptist Church and will have an overall focus on developing ministry within the Hesters Way part of Cheltenham, both in the church, but also in the schools and wider community. We are very pleased to be able to welcome Bean Baker to the staff team. We have known Bean for around seven years, and he has been involved as a volunteer during that time. Here he gives a little introduction to himself and why he has joined the team.

My name's Bean, and I'm genuinely excited to officially join the team at Youth For Christ Gloucestershire and become part of the community at Hesters Way Baptist Church.

A few fun facts about me: I'm married to Sarah, we have three amazing children, I'm a musician and songwriter, I once lived on a boat, and at the age of 24 I bought a square foot of land so I could technically use the title "Lord of the Manor" — which is every bit as important and impressive as it sounds! I still occasionally try to use the title at home, although my family remains completely unimpressed.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of working with young people in lots of different settings — through churches, schools, community projects, mentoring, music, and creative events. Whether that's been leading worship at weekends away, helping run youth sessions, supporting young people one-to-one, or simply spending time listening and encouraging, it's something I've always felt passionate about. One thing that has consistently mattered to me is helping create spaces where young people feel welcomed, valued, supported, and able to truly be themselves.



One of the biggest reasons I wanted to join Youth For Christ Gloucestershire is because I care deeply about seeing young people encounter Jesus in a real and personal way. Young people today are growing up in a world full of pressure, uncertainty, and noise, and I believe the hope, purpose, and love found in Jesus has never been more important. It's such a privilege to be able to walk alongside young people during such a significant stage of life — encouraging them, supporting them, and helping them explore faith and identity in a safe and authentic way.

I'm also incredibly grateful for the opportunity to become part of the Hesters Way Baptist Church family. Community plays such an important role in our faith journey because we were never meant to do life or faith alone. There's something really powerful about being part of a church community that genuinely cares for one another, encourages each other, and shares a heart for serving God together. From the very beginning, I've experienced such warmth and kindness, and I'm really looking forward to getting to know more people over the coming months.

In a funny bit of “God was probably already planning this” timing, in my previous role my office was actually just across the corridor from the Youth For Christ office. So even before joining the team officially, I regularly got to witness the fun, laughter, creativity, and passion that filled the place. It was obvious that this was a group of people who genuinely love Jesus, care deeply about young people, and are passionate about making a difference across Gloucestershire.

Over the years, I've also had the chance to be involved in several of the events and weekends, including Breakaway and the Big Weekender, helping run sessions and lead worship. Those experiences gave me a real glimpse into the heart behind the

organisation and the incredible impact it has on young people's lives. Because of that, it now feels especially exciting and meaningful to officially be part of the team.

What I'm most looking forward to is serving alongside the amazing teams at Youth For Christ Gloucestershire and Hesters Way Baptist, building relationships, supporting young people, and seeing first-hand what Jesus is going to do through both communities. I truly believe God is moving powerfully among young people, and I can't wait to be part of the journey ahead.

Looking forward to meeting more of you soon!

Short stories

Bingo Night

Thank you to everyone who supported our Bingo night in February. Your support helped us raise £400. This will help us as we develop a new schools project starting in the summer term.

The Big Bash

Our Easter Big Bash event took place at Elim Gloucester in March. Singer and rapper Jon Jackal returned once again. He performed to 120 young people, shared his testimony and talked about how Jesus can transform our lives. Fourteen young people made a decision to follow Jesus or recommitted their lives to Him.

Street Pastor Training

We have connections with a wide range of other ministries across the county. We recently spent an evening with the Street Pastors in Gloucester to lead a training evening on youth culture and young people. The session is part of the ongoing training that Street Pastors do in order to help them work with the people they face amongst their work with people involved in the night time economy.

Cameo Group

It was fantastic to visit the Cameo group at St. Matthew's Church and share about our work. Laura was also able to share about why she has come from Brazil to spend a year with us.

Work experience

Last term, we were joined by Emily who spent a few days with us for her school work experience. Later in the summer term, another student will be joining us for work experience. This is a good opportunity for a student to discover what is involved in youth work and running a small charity. We aim to provide a wide range of experiences and opportunities. If you know someone looking for work experience, why not suggest they get in touch with us.

Wedding Celebrations

Congratulations to former volunteer Hannah Baldwin who got married to Kane in April. We wish them well as they start their lives together as Mr and Mrs Kilpatrick.

Growing faith

Often, the greatest impact on young people's lives, happens over a long period of time. A culmination of lots of small steps brings significant change. Faith is much more than a decision, it is a journey, that sometimes has twists in the road. Two young people we know have recently been baptised. They have both shared a little about how our work has made an impact on them.

Emily

My first time experiencing a Youth for Christ event was in 2023 at the Breakaway weekend away. At this time, my faith wasn't a big priority. I believed that God was real, but I didn't think much about it. Throughout that weekend I sat at the back of the room and kept to myself, not really wanting to talk to anyone or participate in any of the activities. However, over the next two years, Youth for Christ became such an important part in my life. I was excited to go away on the weekends and attend events like Big Bash because they were times where I didn't feel alone in my faith, as I knew that the people who were there were there for a reason.



In October 2025, I decided to give my life to Jesus. I was on a Youth for Christ Living Beyond weekend away, along with all my friends that I had made in the previous

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years. That weekend was so special to me because as I listened to each talk and read each Bible verse I felt like I was safe and that I had no need to worry because God was with me and He had it under control. That weekend helped me decide that I wanted to be baptised. I wanted to make a commitment to God to show others in my life that I want Him at the centre of my life. I then asked Matt and Paul to baptise me because they made such an impact on my journey in faith through their talks and how they share their own journeys in faith.

Their work with young people and how they have changed my life has inspired me for my future.

Abi



Abi is another young person who has attended our residential for a few years. She was baptised in December. Abi wrote a poem that she shared at her baptism. In it she refers to Breakaway, the old name for our

residential. She has allowed us to share it to demonstrate the impact that the residential has had on her.

Thank you for supporting our work and helping us see young people like Abi and Emily changed by Jesus.

*"My world has changed, a brand new start
New friends I made unlocked my heart
Through those weekends I began to see
The love of God surrounding me*

*From a home of faith, a guiding light
God's love in my life, shining bright
At Breakaway camp, a path so clear
God's love became even more near*

*New friends I met, a joyful sound
With open hearts, a friendship found
Through shared stories, laughter's art
We built a home within the heart*

*Support surrounded, a helping hand
In this new family, I now stand
Breakaway's where God found me
And that's how life's supposed to be*

*God gave me strength, it is true
With Jesus' love my heart is new
A path of faith where I belong
With open arms I sing His song*

*Through laughter, tears and open skies
Jesus met me, opened my eyes
No longer drifting, lost at sea
But anchored firm, wild and free*

*His presence comforts, always near
Of sins forgiven, grace held dear
My heart restored, my purpose won
Now Jesus is my number one."*

BarnFest 2026

Three years ago, Counties Connect launched a new festival called BarnFest, to celebrate all the good things that God is doing in people's lives. Set in a barn on a farm in Newent, the festival has grown year on year. In 2025, we were asked to run a youth programme on the Saturday. After a successful day, we have agreed to return for 2026.

Our involvement this year has grown, and we will be providing a full youth programme across the whole weekend. We will also be running a seminar aimed at adults attending the festival, looking at hope in an anxious generation. The theme of the festival is "Finding Hope", looking at the hope that Jesus brings.

The speakers for the weekend include Malcolm Duncan (Kensington Temple) and Martin Saunders (Youthscape).

Why don't you make the most of a festival in the local area and join us for the weekend? Camping is available, or you can travel in each day. There is no charge for the festival, but there is a small charge for food. Tickets can be booked at www.barnfest.uk



FINDING HOPE

BARNFEST

2026

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FRIDAY NIGHT

FRIDAY
26 JUNE
5:30PM – 11:00PM

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Reaching a milestone

In April, I celebrated my 25th anniversary of joining Youth for Christ. A lot has happened in those years, none of which could have happened without a large number of people.



23rd April 2001 seems a distant memory, but I remember turning up for my first day at the office, which at that time was in the St. Paul's church centre. This was to become the first of six offices over the next twenty five years.

Those years are full of memories of the team members, trustees and volunteers who have served with me at various points. They are too numerous to mention, but it is something like twenty five gap year volunteers and twelve staff members, plus multiple trustees and volunteers. If you are part of that number, thank you for serving with me. Nothing would have been possible over the last twenty five years without your effort.

Those people have been involved in around 350,000 interactions with young people. We have led lessons, taken collective worship, run groups in schools, walked school playing fields for detached work and led school carol services. We have led 24-7 Prayer, had numerous evangelistic events, supported churches, mentored young people and trained young people in evangelism. We led a mission trip to Annecy, and have built a link with Cyprus Youth for Christ, where I spoke at their summer camp. I will be returning to Cyprus this year along with Bean.

Throughout all these years, we have seen many precious moments. The work we built in Kingsmead School was fantastic. Half of Year 7 came to our after school

club and the Christmas Carol service became a favourite event of staff, some of whom still mention it to me today! We have walked alongside many young people, but some of these journeys have been harder than others. Some were frustrating because we were unable to see the positive conclusion we wanted for the young person. However, some of the young people I still see as I am out and about. It is always good to find out how they are doing, and hear their positive memories of their time with us. It was good to see Jess, who we helped find work, whilst out shopping recently. Five years later, she is still with the same employer. I wasn't able to talk with her as she was busy serving customers, but was clearly doing a great job.

Throughout all of this, we have been supported by a great number of people who have prayed, given, supported and cheered us along the way. Thank you for all who have done. Over the years, more of you have joined us and helped us make a difference in the lives of young people. Thank you. Without your support, it would never have been possible. You have been as much a part of the team as anyone.

Twenty five years from now, I will be well past retirement! The great thing is, this ministry is not about one person, or even a small team. It is about each and every one who plays their part to see young people encounter Jesus. Thank you to all of you who have been part of the team!

It has been a privilege to have been part of God's work amongst young people in Gloucestershire for these twenty five years. We have seen so many lives transformed by Jesus, yet the need is still great. There has never been a more fruitful time to share Jesus with young people than we are currently seeing. Let us continue to reach more young people with the life changing message of Jesus.

9 Square

We have recently purchased a new resource called 9 Square in the Air. It is a sports game that we can use with youth groups or in schools. It is a game that young people love, and is enjoyed by people of a wide sporting ability, mainly because it is quick, fun and anyone can win.

We have created a lesson plan to be able to use 9 Square in schools. So far we have trialled this with Year 6 students in St. Mark's Junior school. The lesson was well received by both staff and students. We are looking to take 9 Square into more schools, both primary and secondary.

If you would like us to bring 9 Square to your school or youth group, please get in touch.



Becca's highlights

Eight months ago, Becca joined the team as a Youth Worker who is based at Hillview Church in Hucclecote. Here she shares her top highlights from her time on the team.

My personal highlight has been seeing how God is working through the lives of young people in Gloucestershire. Whether that be in inviting their friends along to church events, actively living out their faith,



unashamedly worshipping God, praying for other people their age or reflecting God into the environments they are in every day. These young people all have one thing in common: boldness. It's a great encouragement and reminder that

our faith should not be fear-driven, but rather spirit-empowered. Every day young people in Gloucestershire are choosing to be bold - displaying a courageous faithfulness that is rooted in God. It has been a privilege to observe that!

I also loved watching the young people on the Big Weekender and Living Beyond weekends away praying for each other and supporting each other through difficult conversations and situations.

We ran Youth Alpha at Hillview Church and it was great to see how open the young people were to conversations about life and faith, and how willing they were to invite friends along to those conversations.

Seeing God move in the hearts and lives of young people at the Easter Big Bash was fantastic. It was great to see so many make a decision for Jesus.

Finally, it has been great to work with a team that is full of wisdom, support and love.

I would like to become a Youth for Christ Gloucestershire partner.

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Events Diary

Every Monday morning at 9.00am we gather for our prayer meetings. All are welcome to come and join the team to pray for our work. The prayer meeting is available on Zoom, if you would like to join us, please email office@yfcgloucestershire.co.uk for the Zoom codes.

The following are a few dates for this term. Please do pray for these events.

June

8th Youth Workers Prayer
9th Youth Unite Gloucester
14th Paul speaking at Hillview Church
Matt speaking at Hesters Way Baptist
21st Paul speaking at Emmanuel Church
Matt speaking at Tewkesbury Baptist
26- BarnFest, Newent
28th

July

3rd Big Bash Gloucester
5th Paul speaking at Salem Baptist
12th Paul speaking at Gateway Elim
13th Youth Workers Prayer
14th Youth Unite Gloucester
21st- Paul and Bean speaking at YFC
24th Cyprus summer camp

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How to get in touch

Feel free to get in touch with us. We love hearing from our supporters. It is always worth checking we are in the office before popping round as we are frequently out working with young people.

For general enquiries, please email office@yfcgloucestershire.co.uk

We can also be messaged via our social media accounts.

To contact a staff member directly, please use the details to the right.



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