



CHRISTIAN OPTIONS IN
PETERBOROUGH SCHOOLS

Spring Newsletter 2023

"Such a family atmosphere on the trip, an all-round amazing experience."

– Isaac, on attending Letton Hall



"What students need most is time, and time is what you can give our students"

– Staff comment about CROPS Mentoring



"I feel like I have more faith in God. I generally feel, I'm not sure, like more awakened."

– Student comment from GSUS Live



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Matt Wild's update

CROPS Director

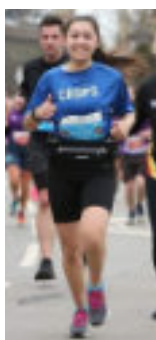
It is so great to issue another newsletter looking back on the first half of this current academic year. The autumn term was particularly unusual in that the team did (very well) without me for the first month (see below). It was then all systems go into December when I got called for Jury Service! However there have been many incredible moments and opportunities where our amazing team (many who are volunteers) could share Jesus with so many children and young people!

September Sabbatical

After 17 years working for CROPS (and several discussions with Trustees encouraging me to!),

I decided to take a short sabbatical of 4 weeks in my role here at CROPS. I was so grateful to be afforded this opportunity to take time out and have space to reflect on CROPS and my own journey. My sabbatical involved a three-day retreat - reading, walking, praying plus time with my mentor and good friend Paul Wilcox at Chapel House, Hallow, Worcester. I also visited Christian Schools work projects in other parts of the UK, caught up with friends involved in national or local youth ministry, read some books and had time with family. Whilst the sabbatical went quickly in some ways, I've been able to draw key reflections from this time.

Running for CROPS!



Would you like to help CROPS with a fundraising event? CROPS is set up with CAF donate for online donations plus the ability to set up individual online campaigns for fundraising events.

We want to say a massive thank you to Caroline and Katy Chan (Mum and Daughter!) who recently took part in the Cambridge 1/2 Marathon, running for CROPS as their chosen charity. It was very easy for us to set up the online fundraising page where donations could be made for this. So... you don't have to run marathons, but you may have your own fundraising idea (cake sale, coffee morning, sponsored walk) to support CROPS in its work. Let us know if you would like to get involved and we can get you set up! No need for sponsor forms and collecting cash!

Forever thankful

I speak for the team and trustees when I say how much your words of encouragement and support shared when we see you, mean to us, and keep us pressing on in our work. We feel the power of your prayers as we go into schools and meet with young people in different contexts. All that we do is in partnership with you, so thank you again for standing with us!

A NOTE FROM THE CROPS TREASURER

Nigel Burroughs

The majority of our funding comes from individuals. Many of these supporters have supported us for many years. We thank you for your continued commitment to support CROPS in many ways including prayer and giving. The current economic environment is difficult for us all. The current situation is particularly tough for the charitable sector. As costs increase (especially in heat and power) our giving does not automatically increase to increase to cover these costs. For CROPS Mentoring this is compounded by our 3 year grant funding coming to an end. As a result, we are approaching a funding crisis.

To those who currently give but cannot afford to give anymore - We Thank You

To those who currently give but could give more - We ask you to consider increasing your giving.

To those who have not thought about giving to CROPS we ask you to think about giving to CROPS.

I thank you in advance.

about CROPS

CROPS (Christian Options in Peterborough Schools) is a charity unique to Peterborough and were set up by local churches in 1989 as a Christian education charity to work in schools. CROPS aim to help children and young people gain an understanding of the Christian Faith and its relevance to our lives today. In its work in schools, CROPS also support the needs of young people pastorally through a mentoring project and lunchtime clubs, developing the whole individual.

CROPS provide a wide range of resources to primary and secondary schools through assemblies, lunch-clubs, curriculum input for Religious Education, chaplaincy work, special 'off-timetable' projects, and targeted pastoral support in liaison with school pastoral teams. In addition to this, CROPS support local youth workers and youth work in churches through events like 'TOGETHER', 'Letton Houseparty' as well as running a Gap Year programme for school leavers. CROPS continue to be funded by churches and Christian individuals, seeking to work in partnership with local Churches and other organisations.



CROPS TOGETHER

TOGETHER is CROPS' monthly event for young people held at Park Road Baptist Church gathering young people from churches and schools in the city each month on a Saturday night. Since our last update we have had almost a year of our new TOGETHER events at Park Road Baptist Church, the updated and tweaked version of what was The Point! Ironically most of the older young people who come who experienced the former still refer to it as this (which we don't mind!)

What remains is the same heart to see young people engaging with what their faith means to them, taking steps to go deeper, being challenged to grow as disciples and knowing that they don't have to take this journey on their own. There is a real sense of togetherness at the event which we love, but not 'cliques', with new young people joining all the time.



Young people always involved

One of our values at CROPS is about young people being at the heart of what we do, participating and leading, not just being 'done to' if you follow. We really want to push them to step up and do things even if it's a little scary! So, our team contains an adult team but also a young person's team who are at the heart of making the event happen. This includes a worship band that is 99.9% young people, young people running media and tech, hosting from the front and leading games and many other ways of serving. We want to release a generation who know that a heart to serve is the heartbeat of leadership.

These young people have been at the heart of the changes we have made to the format of what was 'The Point' as an event, to ensure we are engaging the young people and keep things fresh, based on what they think!

Speaking into Young People's lives

We have been so fortunate to have guest contributors (speakers) each month of such quality, bringing relevant, challenging and biblical based talks that speak into the young people's lives. Our thanks to Bob Goody (YFC), Andy Acheson, Ezra Upton, Kat Wade, Chad

Chadwick, Jason Royce, Ethan Smith, Nathanael Grenfell, Arthur Franklin, Chris Wild who have shared through their own stories and bringing God's word to challenge and inspire the young people.

Going deeper in discussions and response times

Discussions – these were a big part of what we did, and we noticed the young people really engaged in these times, so we now have two moments in the evening where young people are in groups to talk, one early on helping foster relationships, the other after the message shared by the speaker to dig down into the practical outworking and challenge of the message in our lives. Another feature was about having lots of activities on offer as soon as young people arrive, which was vital when we were outdoors. This now means the lower hall with lots on offer as people arrive before moving everyone upstairs for the main programme.

We currently have a regular 50 young people attending the event, and from 16 different local churches – which is incredible. We have new young people coming each time and it is great to see how our residential experience at Letton Hall is accelerating the sense of community and relational connection within the group.

If you know young people who haven't attended recently check out TOGETHER on our website: crops.org.uk/together



PRIMARY schools

WITH *Rachel Jessup*

Praise God that we can visit classes in person and have more face-to-face lessons and Collective Worship opportunities again now. Here are some highlights!

All Saints CE Primary School

All Saints CE Primary 'Unity Day' was a delight to be involved with. Several visitors had been invited to teach the various classes on the theme of 'Stronger Together'. I confess that, having taught mainly 9-11 year olds in the last few years, I was rather daunted to be going to teach Reception and Yr1 on this occasion. Fortunately, my trusty puppet, Carlos the Toucan joined me to ask the difficult questions and to 'help' me plant some seeds while discovering that being able to accept help is just as important as being able to give it. We found out that seeds need a combination of things to be in place in order to grow - they can't do it on their own and God helps each one. We also retold a Bible story about how Moses needed help from friends and from God when life got difficult.

Heltwate School

Heltwate School assembly was during a week of torrential rain and that morning was no exception, with a lot of water and traffic causing hold ups, so I naturally chose the story of Jesus and the storm. I invited some volunteers up to act it out at the front of the hall. Three boys all decided to be Jesus and promptly lay down on the hall floor and pretended to fall asleep in the 'boat'. The only problem was when one of them decided he was quite comfortable down there and didn't really want to get up again! (I know the feeling). Fortunately, our God never sleeps, and we can bring all our tiredness and different emotions to Him - He always understands our struggles and frustrations as well as loving to celebrate with us when things go well - which was part of the theme. I was very grateful for their 'Music



Man' who played the piano and accompanied our singing of 'Great Big God' at both the beginning and the end - the dancing, singing and actions were definitely the highlight for me.

All Saints CE Primary School

As always, I have had a great time teaching Yr5 and Yr 6 at **St Michael's CE School** and **Stilton CE Schools** the Old and New Testament storylines this term. The children are enthusiastic learners with great questions. On Wednesday 7th September a Yr 5 boy in my class heard the story of

“Rachel is an incredible presenter, the way she teaches the children is awesome, inspiring. I love seeing the children's faces when she delivers the sessions.”

– Staff comment



“Is there something you do to become a Christian?”

– question by child after a lesson

the Flood and God’s promise through the sign of a rainbow. He put his hand up eagerly and asked: “Does that mean that every time I see a rainbow God is speaking to me?” It was an exciting discovery for him that God wanted to communicate with him in that way. Over the following two days, rainbows were seen over Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and then over the Balmoral estate – I wonder if he remembered his question and what he might have thought God was saying...

After completing five lessons on the New Testament, as I was leaving the classroom, one of the children standing nearby asked, ‘Is

there something you do to become a Christian?’ I had about 10 seconds before the next lesson started – I wonder what you would have said?

It has been with great difficulty that I have begun to let schools know that I am unable to volunteer for CROPS Primary work next academic year. (One teacher offered to rearrange the RE syllabus so I could fit in next year’s lessons this year for the children.) I will continue to do lessons until the summer and have even started doing occasional assemblies again since Covid lockdown has eased, but am having the next academic year as a time to discover what the next part of God’s plan is and get

used to my oldest daughter moving away to University!

Werrington Primary School

Just before the Christmas holidays I had the treat of a **Werrington Primary Christmas** assembly and Yr6 lesson. We will put Jesus at the centre and think about what made that first Christmas special – God with us. He was with the ordinary people at work (like the shepherds), the people searching for answers (like the wise men), the refugees (like Mary and Joseph escaping to Egypt) and His love changed everything for everyone He met. May God’s love transform your experience of 2023.

CROPS mentoring

WITH *Chris Wild*

"I feel unworthy, like I have no place in this world."

Words like these wouldn't be uncommon to hear in a mentoring session, but on this occasion, they were the student's first words to me. It took me by surprise. The first mentoring session with a new student is always a bit uncertain. You're not quite sure whether they'll open up straight away or may need some time to build up trust first. Sometimes words and phrases that students say just stick with you, and I always think of these powerful words whenever I see this student. What must have happened to leave them feeling this way?

We are not able to 'tell the story' of most students that are involved in our mentoring project, and rightly so, but we can say what a privilege it is to work with them. It's

amazing to have an opportunity to tell someone, once a week, that they 'ARE worthy', and that they 'DO have a place in the world', and to explore together with the student what that place in the world might look like.

The Christian author N.T Wright once said, '*When God wants to sort out the world, as the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount makes clear, he doesn't send in the tanks. He sends in the meek, the broken, the justice hungry, the peacemakers, the pure-hearted*'. I 100% believe that mentoring young people in schools, who are hurting, broken, troubled, in pain, confused, angry or upset is part of building His Kingdom here in Peterborough. As our team of volunteer mentors goes into each and every secondary school in Peterborough, they are doing something more





than listening and supporting, they are doing something that makes an eternal difference.

Unfortunately, the need for this work is ever increasing. One in six children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in July 2021, a huge increase from one in nine in 2017. That's five children in every classroom.

We are holding more mentoring sessions than ever before (over 2200 in the last academic year), but the issues that students are facing are stretching deeper and wider than ever too. At the start of our project, 6 years ago, we regularly met students who were struggling with issues like; Low self-esteem, changes in behavioural patterns, disruptive in class, difficulty making friends, not getting on with parents and getting into fights.

Currently many of the students we work with are increasingly facing issues such as Self Harm, anxiety, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, and domestic violence issues. Whilst our mentoring training to help mentors with these variety of issues has greatly changed, our approach hasn't. We show up each week, we listen, work together to find strategies, build resilience, and work closely with the school for the student's best outcomes.

Schools really appreciate our mentoring support and hearing from them about the difference they are making is such an encouragement to everyone involved in the project;

"She is such an asset to our pastoral team, and I, and all the young people she has helped are very grateful".

"You know how much your mentors mean to us, they are all brilliant and the students love them for the support they receive, they are amazing".

In my discussions with schools the most frequent comments are based around 'what students need most is time' and time is what you can give our students. We would love it if you would consider joining our team and giving time to students across Peterborough, there is always a long list of students waiting for support.



Letton Hall HOUSEPARTY



We have had our second visit to Letton Hall this academic year! We have been building back after the pandemic and so we were thrilled that we were able to take a full group of 63 young people away to Letton! We could have squeezed a few more in – but so good to be back to a group this size!

What an incredible week at Letton Hall it was! We saw God do spectacular things throughout the week including but not limited to the main meeting sessions. The Young people were excited to be back, or there for the first time with

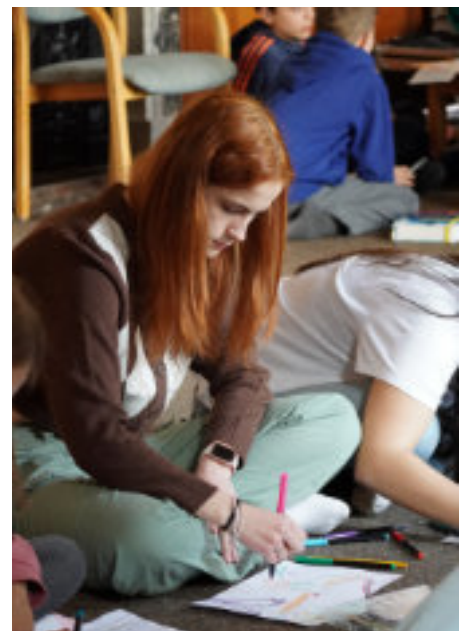
around 22 new young people with us for the first time! It was great to see them engaging with all the activities and responding in the sessions. Young people stepping out in faith - hearing from God and praying for one another. In all our worship times there was a real sense of surrender before God and authenticity as they worshipped, lifting high the name of Jesus!

Theme and Teaching

Our theme for the week was FORMED. Our heart was for the young people to know that they didn't arrive on this planet by

chance but that each one of us was formed by God, every aspect of us carrying the Creator's mark and formed for a purpose, not for a meaningless existence but for our Creator God. Formed, not just for Church on a Sunday, but for relationship every day!

We loved having **Jon Sewell** with us as our speaker. Jon works nationally for Youth For Christ as Head of Missions, he was previously an urban mission evangelist as a rapper in *Soulbox* for The Message Trust in Manchester, working in schools and touring the UK and around Europe. Not only did Jon share his story on the first night of how he came to Christ, but performed one of his songs to communicate his testimony (search Jon Jackal on YouTube to have a listen!). In the main meeting sessions as Jon opened up the theme of FORMED, we weaved our way through key Bible texts in Jeremiah, Genesis,





“Letton has helped me strengthen my faith and bought me closer to God, and since Letton I have started the bible in one year!”

– Alicia

the story of Jesus walking on water, and the Armour of God in Ephesians; we discovered that our identity is rooted in knowing we are formed by God, formed with purpose, designed for relationship with God, that discipleship matters in our everyday, and that we have a challenge to take this message to our generation. What a humble, engaging, fun passionate guy he is - who carries a message for this generation.

Soul Stretch, Seminars and workshops

What is a consistent highlight for the young people is our morning Soul Stretch time, 30-45 minutes for the young people to engage with a passage of scripture in varied ways (creative/artistic, journaling, discussion, reading and reflecting, annotation). We know that in modelling these things we are giving young people the tools to take home to keep going back into God's word. Our seminars carried some great themes for the young people to explore: 'In the world, not of the world', 'Why do we sing/what is worship?', 'Forgiveness', 'Navigating school as a Christian', '10 ideas to help you read the Bible',

and 'Social Media'. The aim being to help young people with discipleship essentials and issues they face. Then there were workshops – fun activities to build community and relationships: Letton Lego Masters, Footgolf, Just Dance, Drama, Blaze Pods, Painting. It was so good to see the young people having fun and being creative.

Programmed fun!

Our programme always has plenty of time for activities and being outdoors in the beautiful surroundings of Letton Hall. We kicked everything off on Monday with an outdoor wide game (Kill the King) then night game options (outdoors glo-stick capture the flag, and our board game lounge indoors). As the week progressed, we accessed the onsite activities that Letton provide, go karting and archery - all bathed in sunny dry weather! The young people also had free time in the ground for football etc.

We had a brilliant talent show on the last night – dances, songs, regional accent impressions, and Star Wars prologue recitals! The closing act was one we will not

forget – Dan Tarver with his song about Letton Hall over the years he has been. This being his last one, we joined in and sang with tears in our eyes, reciting the familiar chorus written many Lettons ago. We love you Dan! Thanks for being you, and all your hard work leading the worship over so many Letton Halls.

All our leaders!

We had an amazing team of leaders who carried the programme - led seminars and small groups, listened to and prayed with young people creating a welcome and open atmosphere. We had many young people at the forefront of the week too, with our young leaders serving and helping in many practical ways, including leading our worship. Huge thanks to our cooks: Hayley, Simon and Liz - serving up great food, and always with a smile. Also, our thanks to **Speedy Couriers** for sponsoring yet again, our van to get everything to Letton!



“Jon’s talk on relationship made me realise that I have to let go of my burdens and talk to God about the good and the bad and prioritise our relationship. I felt like I did that that night. Since then I have been reading the bible and praying... my faith already feels stronger.”

– Erin

SECONDARY schools

WITH *Matt Wild*

GSUS LIVE 2022

GSUS Live is a resource that CROPS hosts locally in schools every autumn in the run up to Christmas. This is now part of our strategy to ensure that as every young person in Peterborough goes through secondary school, that they experience a 'relevant-to-the-issues-of-their-lives' lesson about the good news of Jesus. The aim of **GSUS Live** is to enhance students' understanding of the key teachings of Jesus, which in turn may be the **start of a life changing process** for some young people.

Through the lesson **students investigate Jesus' teaching** on the subjects of fear, forgiveness and rejection. It includes Bible story animations, contemporary Christian songs, short films on historical and famous public figures. These are used



to help pupils look at **real-life issues** through a Christian perspective.

This is the second time that we have hosted the new style GSUS Live, classroom based version (as opposed to the lorry trailer mobile classroom-exhibition of previous years). We visited 2 secondary schools over 2 weeks with GSUS Live this time (normally three) running lessons for every year 7, 8 and 9 pupil (ages 11-14) at **Hampton Gardens Secondary School** and **Bourne Academy**, with a total of 1104 students experiencing the lesson over the two weeks.

At the end of each lesson, after the students have had time to work through the GSUS Live programme on the supplied GSUS Live tablet computers - we have a plenary time where students will write comments, questions and any other thoughts about the lesson on post it notes, which we then read out and answer and questions. This is one of our favourite parts of the lesson where we get to dig a bit deeper, find out where they are at, and help move the conversation on.

A student wrote on a post-it note the following question: "**Are you, or why are you trying to get us on Christianity?**" They came back during a breaktime later in the day to clarify that they hadn't meant the question in a negative way. They shared how before the lesson they didn't know what they believed, but that this had really got them thinking and now wanted to find out more, and how? Another said: "**I feel like I**

"This was probably the best RE lesson I've done."

– Student experiencing GSUS Live





have more faith in God. I generally feel, I'm not sure, like more awakened. I can't quite explain it."

During both weeks at Bourne Academy and Hampton Gardens we felt very welcomed by the RE teams. At Bourne Academy we had a number of students staying behind to talk about issues that the lesson had raised, talking through fears and struggles.

GSUS Live is always delivered where possible, with members of churches that are local to the schools, and we were thrilled to run this with Bourne Baptist Church team, CSK Church Hampton, Kingsgate and Peterborough Diocese (youth mission enabler Sam Higgins). For both these schools, involving local churches in helping to lead the lessons over the week has led to further connections and doors being opened for the team from the churches to support and work with the schools since GSUS Live was there.



Assemblies, Chaplaincy and Lunch clubs

BY **Matt Wild**

Over the last few months I have continued to lead assemblies, chapel services, and voluntary worship opportunities in schools.

As I arrived back from my sabbatical I was straight into a run of assemblies at **Nene Park Academy** – this coincided with coming down with Covid so once I was well enough I resumed these to ensure all the academy houses had their CROPS assembly!

The theme I chose was about how we all make mistakes or do things that we regret and if we had the chance to turn back time, and make different choices, that many of us would want to do that. I used a clip from the recent film 'Spider-Man – No Way Home' to explore this, where in the clip Peter Parker has an opportunity to be forgotten as a way of dealing with the mistakes that have been made, but this wasn't going to make things better. I suggested that forgiveness is better than forgetfulness because it's a way to have a fresh start, and to keep friendship with God and other people alive and showed how Christians believe that God made this possible through Jesus and that we can have a fresh start because of Him.

The alternative worship programme at **The King's School** continues to thrive. These voluntary worship and reflection opportunities include communion led by the chaplain a few times a term and now CROPS filling out most of the other weeks (6-8 slots per term). We see up to 20 students, many regulars attend from a range of year groups and there are many that hear about this from our weekly lunchtime activities club that come and try this out. Speaking of this opportunity, **Park Up** our King's School lunchtime club is constantly a buzz of games, great conversations and a space for students (mainly years 7-9) to find friends, not-always-quiet space (!), but also someone to talk to if they need to. We regularly draw 30-40 students each week!

I am still involved with the **Peterborough College** through my role on the chaplaincy team, though currently mainly by being available to meet and talk with students to one who need space to talk. This is more of a referral system with the senior chaplain aware that I can be available for male students needing support especially with less availability of male team on the chaplaincy team.

It was a joy to be back in **The Peterborough School** chapel during the first week of advent to lead the liturgy of the word (and preach the sermon) across both chapel services due to Father Toby being away during that week. My sermon carried the theme of 'waiting for the light' thinking about hope and expectation, to remember Jesus coming into the world for the first time, but also look forward to his return, when the problem of the world's darkness will be dealt with forever.

Want to support the work of CROPS?

CROPS relies on the donations of churches and individuals. You can give financially to support the work of CROPS in different ways. You can donate direct from our website, send a gift using this form, and / or use the standing order form on this page for setting up a regular standing order.

If you would like to discuss this further or would like us to email or post the forms to you please contact us via the office.

telephone: 01733 352701

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website: crops.org.uk



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