



The
United
Reformed
Church



They've asked me to be a
**children's &
youth work
elder**

Throughout this booklet we have used the term 'Children's and Youth Work Elder' (C&YW Elder). This is a term that is recognised by many across the URC, particularly among those who serve the denomination in the area of children's and youth work; the term has been used on the Church Annual Returns for several years and those Elders with particular responsibility for children's and youth work are listed on the URC database as C&YW Elder. However, we do recognise that neither the Basis of Union or The Structure make any provision for this role – all Elders are equal and all share all the responsibilities of Eldership – what we have titled 'C&YW Elder' is an Elder fulfilling **all** the duties of an Elder but **with** the additional and particular responsibility for children's and youth work. Throughout the booklet we use the term C&YW Elder as shorthand for 'Elder with particular responsibility for children's and youth work'.

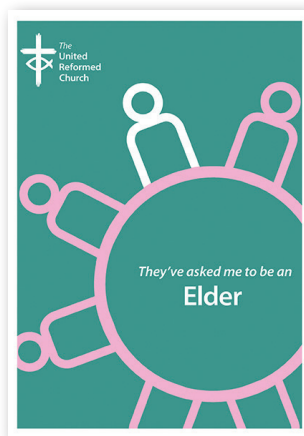
They've asked me to be a children's & youth work elder

Introduction

All churches are encouraged to have an Elder with particular responsibility for children's and youth work. This booklet has been primarily written for those who have been asked to consider a call to being such an Elder for their church – although it will also be useful for those who have recently taken up the role. Throughout this booklet we have used the term 'C&YW Elder' as shorthand for any Elder with particular responsibility for children's and youth work. Please see the paragraph on the inside front cover for more information on this.

This booklet focuses on the particular tasks and required skills of the C&YW Elder and has been written to be read in conjunction with the *They've asked me to be an Elder* booklet. C&YW elders are full members of the Elders Meeting – they fulfil **all** the duties of an Elder but **with** the additional and particular responsibility for children's and youth work. *They've asked me to be an Elder* explains what Eldership is, as well as detailing the core roles, responsibilities and expected characteristic of all Elders. Taken together these two resources should help you decide if you are being called to be an Elder.

And, it's worth remembering these golden nuggets of wisdom from an experienced C&YW Elder: 'As a C&YW Elder you are an Elder first, C&YW Elder second ... a passion for children and young people is crucial – and your age is completely irrelevant!'



The additional key attribute for C&YW Elders

Over and above the attributes listed in the *They've asked me to be an Elder* booklet there is just one additional, essential, attribute: to have a passion for, and commitment to, the welfare and spiritual growth of all children and young people connected to your local church. If this sums up you, then read on!

Specific tasks for C&YW Elders

In essence the role of C&YW Elders is to help the local church take its C&Y work (more) seriously and help ensure the work is meaningful, viable and effective – making sure that children and young people have a voice and that their views are represented. At their most effective C&YW Elders act as a bridge between the children and young people, the C&YW workers and the Elders/Minister.

'Include news about children and young people everywhere'

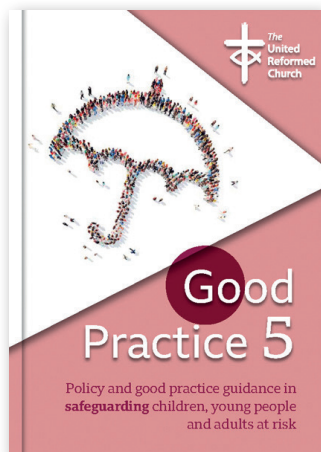
There are some key things you can do to help ensure this happens:

- *Ensure that children's and youth work issues are on the agenda of all appropriate meetings.* Although some churches will have designated and regular C&YW information slots in all meetings, many will not. As a C&YW Elder it's your responsibility to ensure that every Elders Meeting and every Church Meeting is fully updated on C&YW activities. Encourage engagement with children and youth work and, where appropriate, share C&YW issues/events/successes in weekly church notices too.
- *Include news about children and young people everywhere* – in services and on notice boards, newsletters, websites, social media – and include them in the prayers.
- *Communicate regularly with all C&YW volunteers* and develop the church vision with them. The most effective C&YW Elders are both

communication channels and conduits for change – so you could start by asking the volunteers what they want to achieve in the work, what changes they would like to see, and how they think the church can best support them in their work.

- Advocate a proper budget for children’s and youth work in your church – perhaps offer to assist the treasurer in costing out the work.

- Safeguarding is a really important part of church life and, while you are unlikely to be the church’s safeguarding coordinator, you will need to both develop a good working relationship with that person, ensure that all staff and volunteers working with children and young people attend basic safeguarding training delivered by the synod and make yourself familiar with the United Reformed Church’s safeguarding policy. So do download and read **Good Practice 5**, and, if it is not yet on the Elders’ agenda, ask that safeguarding be included in a future meeting.



- *Become/ask someone to become your church’s point of contact so information can flow between Church House, synod and the local church.*
- *Ensure children and young people are represented where appropriate in the committees of the church and synod – this includes consulting with those working directly with the children and young people to identify those who would be effective in these roles. Larger churches might consider forming a youth committee or even a Junior Eldership, chaired by the C&Y Elder. This part of the role is all about ensuring children and young people feel heard and part of church.*

- *Canvass opinions and feedback to the Elders Meeting* – for example children may have strong views on key church policies including the marriage of same-sex couples and disinvestment from fossil fuels. Let children and young people know their opinions matter; let them know they've been heard. Views can be gathered via an anonymous suggestion box and/or an annual questionnaire – the latter could be used to gather opinions on many aspects of church life including the content of church services, all children's and youth work groups C&Y, as well as specific issues.

- *Develop a C&YW strategy for your church.* Help your church to consider its strategy for work with children and young people

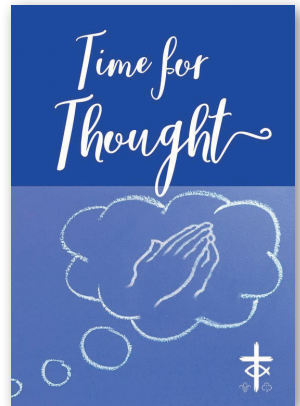
'One tactic ... producing a regular newsletter for all involved/interested in C&YW'

and then work to develop a viable, effective plan! Obviously, all churches will have a different starting point – but what's important is a clear vision of where the children's and youth work is going. One C&YW Elder said he started with the simple vision of 'growing the C&Y work in the church' and this developed into a plan to increase the number of volunteer leaders and workers as an essential precursor to increasing the number of children and young people reached. One tactic they used was producing a regular newsletter for all involved/interested in C&YW. Your synod and Church House staff will be available to help further, see the 'Further information and support' section on page 11 for their contact details.

- *Build and maintain links with all children's and youth groups who use the church premises.* Whatever the groups are – bumps and babies, toddler groups, dance classes, sports clubs, art and craft, singing and music, youth groups – make sure you introduce yourself to them and swap contact details so you can stay connected (email, phone, WhatsApp – whatever works best for you all). Consider whether you could build links through shared fundraising or social events?

Such events can be included in church notices and prayers. Some churches might have a vision to integrate all the C&YW in the church so C&YW Elders might be looking for common ground as a basis for developing closer ties – holiday clubs during the Easter and Summer school holidays are worth considering.

- *Strengthening links with uniformed groups connected to the church.* If there are Boys' Brigade or Girls' Brigade groups associated with church someone should be their chaplain, and they should give a report each year to the church meeting. Consider how the church might support these groups in their discipleship of children and young people. If there are Guide and Scout groups associated with the church ensure someone is in regular contact with the leaders, and ask for a report each year for the church meeting. It may be helpful to connect with the **URC Guide and Scout Fellowship**. Find ways to make these groups more visible to the rest of the church, for example through parade services and display boards. Identify ways the church could offer them opportunities to help with badge work, for example helping serve refreshments or tidy the garden, and ways church members could offer to share their expertise to the groups.



- *Supporting your church's outreach to children and young people.* If your church is involved in running **Messy Church, Pilots** or **Friends On Faith Adventures** (FOFA) then we recommend building links with the leaders to offer support and help them feel connected to the church. Include them on the church website, in notices and prayers. Offer them opportunities to share with the church what they are doing. Ensure that they church is supporting them financially and prayerfully and sees these activities as part of their mission.

Please don't feel completely overwhelmed by that list, we've tried to make it as comprehensive and detailed as possible. You're not expected to write a strategy that includes all of the above, and then action it in six months, and neither are you expected to do this work alone. You are part of at least two teams – the Elders and the C&YW leaders' teams – so work with them, read through that list, prioritise and build those priorities into your strategic action plan. And don't forget that support is available at both synod and Church House level – see the 'Further information and support section' on page 11.

Developing your effectiveness as a C&YW Elder

You will already be interested in children's and youth work but below are some quick and easy steps you can take to develop your interest/deepen your knowledge of this field.

1. One of the most important things you can do to develop your effectiveness is make contact with your synod's C&Y lead worker. All synods have a Children's & Youth Work specialist on their staff – in many, but not all, synods these are known as the Children's & Youth Development Officer (CYDO) and in this booklet CYDO is shorthand for the synod C&YW specialist, whatever their job title.
2. **Subscribe** to the URC Children's & Youth Work bi-monthly newsletter. It's free and full of helpful, up-to-date, information including book recommendations.
3. Subscribe to a magazine relating to children or young people; *Premier Youth and Children's Work* is recommended. You can **subscribe** here, or even request a **free copy**. *Roots* is also recommended. Ask your church if they would consider paying for subscription(s) on your behalf.

4. Regularly check out the [Children's & Youth Work pages](#) of the URC website.
5. Attend any local (synod) or national training events and encourage others to come too.
6. Promote training for the volunteers – suggest the church pays for this. Talk to your synod's CYDO about running a training session for your church/or a group of United Reformed churches in your area.
7. Take time to speak with children and encourage the pastoral care of children and their families.
8. Keep looking for/researching new opportunities such as mid-week worship, Pilots, new resources and funding possibilities.
9. Ensure that all major children's and youth events at your church are attended by at least one Elder – perhaps encourage each of the other serving Elders to attend at least once such event every year.
10. Organise an annual dedication service for all C&YW volunteers and leaders in your church. A sample service is [here](#).
11. Say thank you to all the volunteers every year – a simple card goes a long way and you may even like to consider a party (e.g. a Christmas party/summer barbeque)
12. Keep a cradle roll in your church – and ask someone to mark infant baptism/dedication anniversaries for the first few years following the baptism or dedication service – perhaps with a card from the church and invitation to a suitable group for the age of the child.

The Child Friendly Church Award

Your church may already be a recipient of this award which recognises the steps taken to ensure children and young people are welcomed in all areas of church life. If your church is not yet involved in this why not consider

applying? It's a reflective process which encourages the church to recognise all that already happens, and to identify some areas to strengthen in the future. The award lasts for five years and then needs to be reviewed for re-awarding. Your church will receive a certificate and plaque upon successful completion. Your CYDO will be happy to support you and the church through the process and we encourage all United Reformed churches working with children and young people to consider applying.



Training, preparation and development

There is no specific, nationally run, training for the C&YW Elder role so contact your CYDO to ask if anything is available locally. See page 8 of *They've asked me to be an Elder* for information on general training provision for all Elders.

Check out the excellent resources available on the [URC Children and Youth webpages](#) and [URCLE](#) such as *Common Ground*, *Where are the children?* and *One Body*. URCL is the URC's online training platform – the best way to access the C&YW resources mentioned above is to use the link in this text. If you need help accessing it then please contact the children's and youth work department at Church House – they will be able to help you further.

Further information and support

Synod support

As mentioned above the C&YW synod staff are excellent sources of support and help – a full list is [here](#). In synods where the position is currently vacant there will be another member of synod staff who is temporarily covering the role.

If you are not already in contact with your CYDO we do recommend you contact them. Tell them you're considering becoming/are the C&YW Elder and ask to be added to their mailing list and enquire what support/preparation/training opportunities there are. And then take advantage of all available help!

Synod Pilots Officers (SPOs) are useful contacts too – they have a direct link to central church staff and they may organise synod wide activities. A list of SPOs is [here](#).

The children's and youth work staff at Church House

Sam Richards – Head of Children's and Youth Work and Lorraine Webb – Children's and Youth Work Programme Officer are both based at Church House in London and may be able to answer your questions – call them on 020 7916 8683 or email at children.youth@urc.org.uk.



This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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