Evaluation: An Uninvited Guest?

An examination of the use of evaluation in Christian faith-based youth work

Nigel Pimlott

Frontier Youth Trust
MISSION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK

Many thanks to all those who participated in the research and helped compile this report.

Frontier Youth Trust is working with young people at risk towards justice, equality and community; we are a Christian network dedicated to advancing the Kingdom of God. Based upon our direct experience of youth work and research we also support, resource, inform, advise and train those working with and on behalf of disadvantaged young people. FYT believes that the most effective youth work is built upon Christian principles.

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Foreword

Evaluation (the E word!) in my experience raises some fairly polarized and powerful emotions, comments and actions!

I have seen skilled and competent youth and community workers quake at the mention of evaluation to the extent that they seem to go into headless chicken mode, undervalue their work, practice some sophisticated forms of avoidance, or just spend hours engaged in the complex semantic nuances that explore the difference between an 'output' and an 'outcome'!

On the other hand I come across workers who have become very skilled at using the numbers, flexible evidence gathering processes and systems to the very best interest of their practice, their colleagues and, perhaps most importantly, the young people they serve.

Nigel's publication is a timely contribution to the Christian youth work sector that offers clearly presented statistical and anecdotal reflection upon how evaluation is perceived and used by us and then goes on to offer ideas that will help us as a collective entity, and as individuals, to move forward positively engaging with a phenomena which is, I would suggest, here to stay. I commend this research to you.

Shalom

Dave Wiles
Chief Executive Officer
Frontier Youth Trust

Section 1
Summary Report

In one sense, evaluating the success or otherwise of activity is as old as creation itself. In the beginning God looked, monitored and evaluated - and 'saw that it was good' (Gen 1: 31). In another sense, evaluation is a relatively new term and its impact upon work with young people is only just beginning to become established.

Some might argue that evaluation sometimes appears to sit rather awkwardly within the organisational culture of many churches and is, in essence, 'uninvited'. An uninvited guest at a wedding, party, family celebration or evening meal can present a major challenge. Reactions to the unexpected visitor may well differ according to who they are and the context. Jesus was at the centre of several incidents and controversies regarding the inviting or otherwise of guests.

In secular work evaluation has become an ever-present reality, but it's prevalence in Christian-based settings has yet to be established. This Frontier Youth Trust (FYT) research has been undertaken to appraise the impact of evaluation in such settings. Its findings are summarised below:

1.1 Findings

- Evaluation is seen as more important than not by Christian youth workers

- Nearly all workers evaluate some aspect of their work

- Evaluation is perceived as more important by those doing community-based work with young people than those doing church-based work

- Evaluating outcomes is seen as a priority

- Evaluating the number of young people going to church is only valued by those working with Christian young people

- Improving work with young people is the main motivation for undertaking evaluation

- Doing funded community-based work impacts the motivation for evaluation

- The personal growth and development of young people is seen as the most important aspect of work to be evaluated

- Schools workers consider the number of young people coming to faith is more important to evaluate than other workers, raising interesting ethical and legal questions about their motivation in undertaking this work

- There appear to be varying degrees of understanding regarding the definition, purpose and practice of evaluation.

1.2 Process

Between September and December 2007 a wide variety of youth workers took part in a survey commissioned by FYT. The questionnaire used is set out in Appendix A.

Youth workers were approached both by email and in face-to-face contact situations.

In total, 207 workers responded to the survey.

1.3 Results summary

Importance

Respondents were asked to indicate how important evaluation was in their work. A score of 1 indicated that it was not important at all, whilst a score of 8 indicated that it was very important. The average scores are indicated below:

The extent to which evaluation is important	
Type of Work	**Ave**
1. Church based Christian young people	5.8
2. Church based non-Christian young people	6.0
3. Community based non-Christian young people	6.6
4. Schools Work	5.6
5. Mix of work	6.1
6. Other	6.7

The results clearly indicate that whilst evaluation is considered more important than not by all workers, it is markedly seen as more important by those working in community based settings with non-Christian young people.

It might be considered that this is because this type of work is more likely to be externally funded by secular funders who have more exacting requirements relating to grant monitoring and evaluation than those who work with young people in purely 'Christian' settings where anecdotal evidence would suggest that the work is more likely to be internally funded.

What is evaluated

Workers were offered a range of work aspects and requested to indicate what they actually evaluated in their work. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

What is evaluated						
Type of Work	nothing	numbers	yp coming to faith	success against goals	outcomes	other
Total – actual	6	90	35	71	121	22
%	2	26	10	21	35	6

It is clear that the 'outcomes culture' has spread to the Christian sector in a significant way. This, combined with many workers evaluating 'success against goals', indicates that the sector is perhaps more sophisticated in its approaches and methodologies than might generally be perceived. Whilst this is counterbalanced by significant respondents simply evaluating 'numbers', the practice of embracing modern management and strategic tools would seem to be fairly widespread.

Why evaluation is undertaken

In terms of motivation, workers were asked to indicate what prompted them to evaluate their work. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

Why is evaluation undertaken					
Type of Work	doing good job	improve work young people	satisfy funders	satisfy church & others	other
Total – actual	42	154	35	29	19
%	15	55	13	10	7

It is encouraging to note that evaluation appears to be predominantly undertaken to improve work with young people rather than because a stakeholder has decreed that it should be done. Whilst there is an indication that such stakeholders have such expectations, these do not appear to be stifling and inhibiting.

It is slightly disappointing to note that relatively few workers are practicing evaluation to establish if they are themselves doing a good job. Whilst understandable that their focus is upon the young people they work with it would have been hoped that more workers would have sought to use evaluative processes to develop their own practice.

Most important things to evaluate

Respondents were asked to indicate what the most important things to evaluate in their work were. They were advised to pick and rank their top five priorities. Their answers were then awarded 5 marks, 4 marks, 3 marks, 2 marks and 1 mark in order of their rankings. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

Most important things to evaluate		
Type of Work	Total marks – actual	%
a. Number of young people coming to faith	310	12
b. Amount of justice for young people	112	4
c. Number of young people going to church	80	3
d. Personal growth and development of young people	701	28
e. How discipleship impacts young people	235	10
f. Number of activities and/or things for young people to do and go to	118	5
g. Young people being healthy	79	3
h. Young people being kept safe	225	9
i. Overall well-being of young people	418	17
j. What young people achieve in life	189	8
k. Other	39	2

Confirming the desire to improve the work done with young people, the most important element of work to be evaluated is clearly seen to be the personal growth and development of young people. This, alongside the desire to improve the overall well-being of young people suggests to a clear holistic approach to the work from many workers.

It is also clear from the questionnaires completed (many respondents also added additional comments and notes) that theological motivations significantly impact the results. For example, those with a clear evangelistic focus consider the numbers of young people coming to faith as paramount, whilst those with a more social action theological premise view other aspects as key.

Perhaps confirming a relatively new cultural trend, attendance at church is not regarded as highly important.

1.4 Recommendations

- Profile and use of evaluation in church-based settings relating to work with Christian young people needs to be increased

- Evaluation tools need to be more accessible and appropriate for church-based settings

- Training needs to be provided to enable workers to undertake effective evaluation

- Time needs to be given to evaluation in working methods and contracts

- Action should be taken to promote the telling of good news stories, sharing of good practice and ideas and the impact that evaluation has upon work, workers and young people

- The results of effective evaluation should be used more to promote the sector, exert leverage on policy makers and extract funding for ongoing work

1.5 Conclusions

Whilst recognising that this research has been undertaken with a relatively small sample of workers, it would appear that evaluation is not the uninvited guest that it might once have appeared to be. Whilst there is further work and development to be undertaken if evaluation is to have further impact on developing work with young people, this research confirms the significance of evaluation in the practice of many of the respondents.

Whilst not explicitly evident from the results above, it is clear from the actual questionnaires that the use of terminology about and understanding of evaluation is mixed. Respondents clearly understand different terms and definitions in different ways. For some a young person coming to faith underpins all other aspects of work undertaken and without such a conversion little value is placed upon the work undertaken. For others, the development and well-being of young people takes precedence over anything else. Clearly such contrasting views potentially cloud the objectivity of the evaluation undertaken.

This research, together with anecdotal, practical and experiential evidence from the field reveals a need to further explore the use and value of evaluation in Christian faith-based youth work. Definitions need to be explored further and tools to undertake evaluation across the breadth of youth work need to be made more readily available. If supported by effective training, adequate resourcing and a commitment from employers and line-mangers to implement evaluative processes it is considered that evaluation will form an important element of work with young people and position the Christian sector in a strong position to influence the wider youth work community and effectively serve the young people it seeks to work with.

Nigel Pimlott
January 2008

Main Report

Section 2
Process

2.1 Background

Youth work has undergone many changes in recent times particularly with regard to how the work is planned, organised and managed. One of these changes has been the increasing use of evaluation as a strategic tool to determine the success or otherwise of a particular piece of work, project or initiative.

As a consequence, Frontier Youth Trust (FYT) has seen a steady increase in demand to deliver training relating to the discipline of evaluation. Such requests vary in nature and range from requests to explain the topic and provide tools to undertake effective evaluation to more complex requests to help establish evaluative processes and models for an organisation.

'The youth forum I co-ordinate is a relatively new group to evaluation.'

Whilst undertaking such training it has become apparent that a range of views are prevalent regarding the value, practice and dissemination of evaluation and evaluative methods. Often workers are keen to practice evaluation but sometimes simply don't really know how to. Others are perhaps more resistant to using

'I'd like to think that we prayerfully consider what we are going to do and therefore the plan reflects what God wants us to do.'

evaluation and see it as intrusive, expensive and not something Christians should be practicing. The latter view is often supported by the argument that the key demand on the worker is to follow and be obedient to God, not determine the effectiveness of any work undertaken.

Irrespective of the views held about the subject it is clear that it is being increasingly discussed amongst churches, youth workers and other stakeholders. This research seeks to further these discussions by providing a research-based backdrop to help explore this subject. It is hoped that this will help inform policy and act as a spur to develop practice and promote new resources and training as appropriate.

'We see evaluation as essential, but are not great at it. We are, therefore, working on methods to evaluate.'

2.2 Introduction

Some might argue that evaluation sometimes appears to sit rather awkwardly within the organisational culture of many churches and is, in essence, 'uninvited'. An uninvited guest at a wedding, party, family celebration or evening meal can present a major challenge. Reactions to the unexpected visitor may well differ according to who they are and the context. Jesus was at the centre of several incidents and controversies regarding the inviting or otherwise of guests.

As a guest at a wedding, He performed His first miracle (John 2:1-11). He invited some working class and uneducated fisherman to His rabbinic training programme (Matt 4:18-22), He dined with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:11). He invited himself to dine with social outcasts such as, Zacchaeus, (Luke 19:1-10), He invited five thousand men, plus women and children, for an open air lunch and supernaturally provided the food (Matt 6:30-44). An uninvited woman anointed his

feet after a meal (Luke 7 36:50). All these incidents were culturally controversial, cut across expected norms and challenged the etiquette of the day. In perceiving Jesus as an unseen guest perhaps evaluation can metaphorically be considered in a similar light.

Jewish culture had many expectations regarding hospitality. It is interesting to note the importance of who invited who, the need to honour protocols and those in authority and exclude those not invited or wanted. This is exemplified by the first century Jewish wedding tradition where the bride's father gave out a special garment to invited guests to honour them and distinguish them from any potential gatecrashers[1]. In illustrating how evaluation might be seen in work with young people, this wedding celebration metaphor helps us reflect and consider whether evaluation is seen as a guest of honour or an uninvited gatecrasher?

If evaluation is given a place of honour, it will form an essential part of any strategy. It will be given early prominence in an organisation's plans, resource will be given

'Evaluation is good practice, aids sustainability, gives us stories and statistics for marketing what we do and gives us information to celebrate and pray about.'

to it, it will have a place at the decision-making table and its attendance will be celebrated. In contrast, if evaluation is an uninvited guest, it will be prevented from influencing organisational activities, will be seen as a drain on resources, robbing other vital areas and might be thrown out altogether.

Occasionally, uninvited guests may be welcomed and entertained. Sometimes their surprise arrival is genuinely valued whilst on other occasions such hospitality is undertaken with a smile, but with internal, begrudging feelings of resentment. Perhaps the true measure of evaluation's welcome is our feelings towards undertaking such processes, whether they are welcomed, enjoyed and appreciated

'The danger is that we can be so concerned with what we are going to write in our evaluation that it totally precludes all else.'

or conversely reluctantly accepted and engaged with as quickly and with as little effort as possible?

[1] (*The Adam Clarke Commentary* cited in www.studylight.org 2007 [online])

2.3 Methodology

FYT has the privilege of having substantial networks and opportunities to talk to and communicate with youth workers across a wide-range of diverse perspectives. These contacts were accessed to undertake this questionnaire-based research because of the:

- Good variety of worker contexts
- Diverse theological perspectives held by the workers
- Ease of access to the workers
- Speed of response required
- Realisation that workers are busy and don't always respond to complex processes and lengthy surveys
- Need to have an informal and ethical approach
- Desire to have consistency of questions
- Need to achieve a representative sample from the field
- Research time and cost restraints

A confidential questionnaire was used and this is set out in Appendix A. Between September and December 2007, 207 youth workers took part in the survey. Youth workers were approached both by email and in face-to-face contact situations.

64 workers responded by email and 143 in face-to-face situations. Not everyone answered all the questions whilst many offered comments, thoughts, insights and opinions in addition to the answers they gave to the questions. Some of these have been included in this report and can be found in the blue text boxes.

Email contacts were those held by FYT staff. Contacts were simply emailed the questions and asked to return the completed questionnaire. The survey gained its own momentum in that email contacts sent on the survey to their own colleagues and contacts.

> *'Evaluation helps us determine gaps in youth work provision.'*

In face-to-face situations, the questionnaires were put out on participants' chairs and they were invited to complete the questionnaires, placing them on a table when finished. No one was pressurised to do this. These face-to-face situations included the following:

> South Yorkshire Youth Work day conference - Sheffield
> Heart for Young People day conference – London
> SPEC day conference – London Colney
> Making Effective Relationships day conference - Lowestoft
> Responding to Challenging Behaviour training events
> > North Shields
> > Mountsorrell
> > London
> Youth work degree students
> YMCA youth workers

The type of workers who responded included:
- Volunteer workers
- Employed workers – including church based, organisation/project based, community focussed
- Area/regional denominational workers
- Workers from a diverse theological base – including evangelical, charismatic, liberal, emerging church, Christian but no church affiliation, traditional
- Workers from a broad denominational spread including; Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Baptist, Quaker, Free Church, New Church, Pentecostal, Black church, United Reformed Church.

The research achieved its objectives, but clearly has some limitations in terms of its spread and complexity. These would include:

- Relatively small sample size – a bigger sample would be more insightful
- Apparent lack of understanding of some terms and concepts by respondents
- Email response rate being lower than the face-to-face response rate
- Questionnaires having a limited appeal in that they are paper based and only use one learning style

Improvements could have been made by using a larger sample, providing further explanation of the terms used and overcoming occasional technological

inconsistencies in email protocols which rendered a small percentage of some returns unusable. It is, however, considered that the research answers given by respondents achieved the desired outcomes and are on the whole accurate and honest.

Section 3
Results

3.1 Key findings
The following are the key findings of the research:

- Evaluation is seen as more important than not by Christian youth workers

- Nearly all workers evaluate some aspect of their work

- Evaluation is perceived as more important by those doing community-based work with young people than those doing church-based work

- Evaluating outcomes is seen as a priority

- Evaluating the number of young people going to church is only valued by those working with Christian young people

- Improving work with young people is the main motivation for undertaking evaluation

- Doing funded community-based work impacts the motivation for evaluation

- The personal growth and development of young people is seen as the most important aspect of work to be evaluated

- Schools workers consider the number of young people coming to faith is more important to evaluate than other workers, raising interesting ethical and legal questions about their motivation in undertaking this work

- There appear to be varying degrees of understanding regarding the definition, purpose and practice of evaluation.

3.2 Importance
Respondents were asked to indicate how important evaluation was in their work. A score of 1 indicated that it was not important at all, whilst a score of 8 indicated that it was very important. The scores are indicated below:

The extent to which evaluation is important									
Type of Work	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**Ave**
1. Church based Christian young people			3 7	6 14	11 26	7 16	9 21	7 16	**5.8**
2. Church based non-Christian young people	1 3		1 3	3 10	5 17	7 24	5 17	7 24	**6.0**
3. Community based non-Christian young people	1 3		1 3	3 9	3 9	5 14	6 17	16 46	**6.6**
4. Schools Work		1 11		1 11	3 33	1 11	1 11	2 22	**5.6**
5. Mix of work			5 8	7 11	8 12	19 29	12 18	15 23	**6.1**
6. Other					2 29	1 14	1 14	3 43	**6.7**
Total – actual	**1**	**2**	**10**	**20**	**32**	**40**	**34**	**50**	**189**
%	**0**	**1**	**5**	**11**	**17**	**21**	**18**	**26**	

The results clearly indicate that whilst evaluation is considered more important than not by all workers, it is markedly seen as more important by those working in community based settings with non-Christian young people.

In terms of determining if evaluation is 'invited' or not, it is noted that evaluation is considered less important in work in schools and with Christian young people than in other contexts. This is somewhat concerning, but indicative of the suspicion that in some church settings evaluation is not as invited as it might be.

'We often talk about the quality of our youth work, but we don't put hard measures on it. If we are filling our youth groups each week that is seen as success.'

It might be considered that this is because this type of work is more likely to be externally funded by secular funders who have more exacting requirements relating to grant monitoring and evaluation than those who work with young people in purely 'Christian' settings where anecdotal evidence would suggest that the work is more likely to be internally funded.

'Evaluation is very important to our partners. We, therefore, evaluate and let them share it (i.e. the information).'

It is also of interest to note that the majority of workers undertake a mixture of work with young people rather than just one particular type of work. The design of the research did not enable the workers working in these 'mixed' contexts to declare if they approached evaluation differently in their different contexts.

3.3 What is evaluated
Workers were offered a range of work aspects and requested to indicate what they actually evaluated in their work with young people. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

What is evaluated						
Type of Work	nothing	numbers	yp coming to faith	success against goals	outcomes	other
1. Church based Christian young people	2 2	22 26	15 18	16 19	25 30	3 4
2. Church based non-Christian young people		21 36	6 10	13 22	15 25	4 7
3. Community based non-Christian young people	2 3	15 21	5 7	16 23	28 39	5 7
4. Schools Work	1 8	1 8	1 8	2 17	5 42	2 17
5. Mix of work	1 1	29 27	7 6	21 19	43 39	8 7
6. Other		2 18	1 9	3 28	5 45	
Total – actual %	**6** **2**	**90** **26**	**35** **10**	**71** **21**	**121** **35**	**22** **6**

It is clear that the 'outcomes culture' has spread to the Christian sector in a significant way. This, combined with many workers evaluating 'success against goals', indicates that the sector is perhaps more sophisticated in its approaches and methodologies than might generally be perceived. Whilst this is counterbalanced by significant respondents simply evaluating 'numbers', the practice of embracing

modern management and strategic tools would generally seem to be fairly widespread.

This outcomes approach is most marked (39%) by those who work with non-Christian young people in community settings. This is again

perhaps indicative of external stakeholder demands requiring more diligent and encompassing methodologies.

The number of young people coming to faith is seen as most important by those working with Christian young people. This appears to be a misnomer in that it would be expected that these young people have already come to faith. Perhaps this suggests an insular approach to the work undertaken and points to supporting the notion that most 'evangelism' is done to people who are already Christians.

3.4 Why evaluation is undertaken

In terms of motivation, workers were asked to indicate what prompted them to evaluate their work. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

Why is evaluation undertaken					
Type of Work	doing good job	improve work young people	satisfy funders	satisfy church & others	other
1. Church based Christian young people	6 12	33 65		7 14	5 10
2. Church based non-Christian young people	6 14	26 60	4 9	4 9	3 7
3. Community based non-Christian young people	13 20	28 43	14 22	5 8	5 8
4. Schools Work	3 21	7 50	2 14	1 7	1 7
5. Mix of work	12 13	55 58	13 14	10 11	4 4
6. Other	2 17	5 42	2 17	2 17	1 8
Total marks – actual %	**42** **15**	**154** **55**	**35** **13**	**29** **10**	**19** **7**

It is encouraging to note that evaluation appears to be predominantly undertaken to improve work with young people rather than because a stakeholder has decreed that it should be done. Whilst there is an indication that such stakeholders have such expectations, these do not appear to be stifling and inhibiting.

It is slightly disappointing to note that relatively few workers are practicing evaluation to establish if they are

themselves doing a good job. Whilst understandable that their focus is upon the young people they work with it would have been hoped that more workers would have sought to use evaluative processes to develop their own practice.

The impact on evaluation of having work externally funded can be clearly seen with those respondents who work in community settings recording the highest percentage (22%) for this being a motivation to evaluate.

'I evaluate to challenge our church leaders and members!'

Perhaps expectedly, evaluation is more markedly motivated by the church (and its leaders) in Church-based settings.

3.5 Most important things to evaluate

Respondents were asked to indicate what the most important things to evaluate in their work were. They were advised to pick and rank their top five priorities. Their answers were then awarded 5 marks, 4 marks, 3 marks, 2 marks and 1 mark in order of their rankings. Both the actual number of responses and the overall percentage figures for each response are indicated:

- a. Number of young people coming to faith
- b. Amount of justice for young people
- c. Number of young people going to church
- d. Personal growth and development of young people
- e. How discipleship impacts young people
- f. Number of activities and/or things for young people to do and go to
- g. Young people being healthy
- h. Young people being kept safe
- i. Overall well-being of young people
- j. What young people achieve in life
- k. Other (please specify) ………………………………………………………

Most important things to evaluate											
Type of Work	a. Number of young people coming to faith	b. Amount of justice for young people	c. Number of young people going to church	d. Personal growth and development of young people	e. How discipleship impacts young people	f. No. of activities/things for young people to do and go to	g. Young people being healthy	h. Young people being kept safe	i. Overall well-being of young people	j. What young people achieve in life	k. Other
1. Church based Christian young people	98 / 17	22 / 4	46 / 8	173 / 30	56 / 10	30 / 5	9 / 2	27 / 5	89 / 15	26 / 4	2 / 0
2. Church based non-Christian young people	40 / 11	21 / 6	7 / 2	106 / 29	30 / 8	16 / 4	12 / 3	39 / 11	73 / 20	21 / 6	5 / 1
3. Community based non-Christian young people	36 / 7	22 / 4	8 / 2	140 / 28	28 / 6	25 / 5	24 / 5	64 / 13	87 / 18	56 / 11	6 / 1
4. Schools Work	26 / 22	1 / 1	5 / 4	27 / 23	16 / 13	6 / 5	4 / 3	9 / 8	10 / 8	12 / 10	4 / 3
5. Mix of work	106 / 12	40 / 5	13 / 2	227 / 27	97 / 11	39 / 5	25 / 3	80 / 9	140 / 16	73 / 9	12 / 1
6. Other	4 / 4	6 / 7	1 / 1	28 / 31	8 / 9	2 / 2	5 / 6	6 / 7	19 / 21	1 / 1	10 / 11
Total – actual / %	310 / 12	112 / 4	80 / 3	701 / 28	235 / 10	118 / 5	79 / 3	225 / 9	418 / 17	189 / 8	39 / 2

Confirming the desire to improve the work done with young people, the most important element of work to be evaluated is clearly seen to be the personal growth and development of young people. This, alongside the desire to improve the overall

well-being of young people suggests to a clear holistic approach to the work from many workers.

It is also clear from the comments and notes on the questionnaires completed that theological motivations significantly impact the results. For example, those with a clear evangelistic focus consider the numbers of young people coming to faith as paramount, whilst those with a more social action theological premise view other aspects as key. From anecdotal answers provided by some respondents it is clear that a desire to see young people coming to faith appears to underpin the rest of their work.

'Whilst the social role of the church does benefit the young people that we serve, nothing benefits them more than the opportunity to hear the gospel.'

Perhaps confirming a relatively new cultural trend, attendance at church is not regarded as highly important. Even in church-based work with Christian young people (where it might be expected that church attendance is important) the percentage recorded is relatively low (8%).

Section 4
Recommendations

The research has revealed that evaluation is, and is becoming more so, a valuable tool in the strategic approaches that workers are taking to Christian-based youth work.

'There is certainly a need for more creative thinking around the area of evaluation.'

In order to further the use of evaluation in such work, the following recommendations are made:

- The profile and use of evaluation in church-based settings relating to work with Christian young people needs to be increased

- Evaluation tools need to be more accessible and appropriate for church-based settings

- Training needs to be provided to enable workers to undertake effective evaluation

- Time needs to be given to evaluation in working methods and contracts

- Action should be taken to promote the telling of good news stories, sharing of good practice and ideas and the impact that evaluation has upon work, workers and young people

- The results of effective evaluation should be used more to promote the sector, exert leverage on policy makers and extract funding for ongoing work

As a response to these recommendations FYT will seek to work with others to address these key issues and implement strategies to disseminate further this research and its key findings.

Section 5
Conclusions

Whilst recognising that this research has been undertaken with a relatively small sample of workers, it would appear that evaluation is not the uninvited guest that it might once have appeared to be. Whilst there is further work and development to be undertaken if evaluation is to have further impact on developing work with young people, this research confirms the significance of evaluation in the practice of many of the respondents.

'We evaluate everything! What we are poor at is writing up the evaluation.'

Whilst not explicitly evident from the results above, it is clear from the actual questionnaires that the use of terminology about and understanding of evaluation is mixed. Respondents clearly understand different terms and definitions in different ways. For some a young person coming to faith underpins all other aspects of work undertaken and without such a conversion little value is placed upon the work undertaken. For others, the development and well-being of young people takes precedence over anything else. Clearly such contrasting views potentially cloud the objectivity of the evaluation undertaken.

'It is my belief that becoming a Christian and then becoming Christ-like is the thing most likely to achieve all the other desirable outcomes.'

Evaluation is a broad topic and, as we have already said, a relatively new discipline for many youth workers. As such it is likely that it will take some further time before evaluation becomes a truly invited guest in the role of the Christian youth worker. It will take yet more time before evaluation moves from being just a guest to being something that is part of the household. A good starting point to raise the profile of evaluation would be to encourage workers to develop their own reflective practice skills which are often implicitly evaluative in nature. Many workers might not identify such processes as evaluative even thought they practice them regularly.

This research, together with anecdotal, practical and experiential evidence from the field reveals a need to further explore the use and value of evaluation in Christian faith-based youth work. Definitions need to be explored further and tools to undertake evaluation across the breadth of youth work need to be made more readily available. If supported by effective training, adequate resourcing and a commitment from employers and line-mangers to implement evaluative processes it is considered that evaluation will form an important element of work with young people and place the Christian sector in a strong position to influence the wider youth work community and effectively serve the young people it seeks to work with.

'It is difficult to evaluate youth work. You can have small goals, but it is difficult to evaluate the whole picture until several years after a club has started.'

Nigel Pimlott
January 2008

I am currently undertaking some research about how we measure the success of what we do as youth workers and would really appreciate 5 minutes of your time to answer the questions below. Your answers will be treated confidentially. Please be as honest as you can and please feel free to leave out any question you prefer not to answer. Many Thanks. **Nigel Pimlott, Frontier Youth**

Please <u>tick</u> the appropriate box or <u>highlight</u> your answers below

1. How would you describe your work with young people?
a. Church based with <u>mainly</u> Christian young people ☐
b. Church based with <u>mainly</u> non-Christian young people ☐
c. Community based with <u>mainly</u> non-Christian young people ☐
d. <u>Mainly</u> schools work ☐
e. A mix of the above ☐
f. Other – please describe in a few words ☐
   …………………………………………………………………………

2. To what extent is evaluation important in your work with young people?

Not at all important   Very important
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

3. What do you evaluate in your work with young people?
a. Nothing ☐
b. Numbers attending youth club/sessions/church/bible study/project ☐
c. Number of young people coming to faith ☐
d. Success against goals, plans and/or targets ☐
e. Outcomes – that is, the <u>difference</u> you make in the lives of young people ☐
f. Other – please specify ……………………………………………….. ☐

4. If you do evaluate your work with young people, do you do this <u>mainly</u> to:
a. Indicate if you are doing a good job ☐
b. Improve your work with young people ☐
c. Satisfy people who have given you money and/or funders ☐
d. Satisfy your church, employer, vicar, minister, PCC, deacons or young people ☐
e. Other – please specify ……………………………………………….. ☐

5. Which of the following do you think are the most important things to measure in evaluating the success of work with young people?

Answer (please put your top five answers in order of most importance, the most important answer/letter being put first)
…………………………………………………………

l. Number of young people coming to faith
m. Amount of justice for young people
n. Number of young people going to church
o. Personal growth and development of young people
p. How discipleship impacts young people
q. Number of activities and/or things for young people to do and go to
r. Young people being healthy
s. Young people being kept safe
t. Overall well-being of young people
u. What young people achieve in life
v. Other (please specify) …………………………………………………

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