

# extending your local youth ministry

**Tim Hawkin's book "Fruit that last" outlines the most common contemporary implemented or strived for youth ministry model in Australia - a big gathering Friday night largely aimed at outreach with a gospel presentation in the midst of a flurry of fun casual activities, supplemented by small groups that meet to more seriously intellectually work out the deeper issues of life. Although appreciating the results gained, many are wanting to achieve more than that structure seems to provide...**

Surprisingly the best contemporary research in proposing a way forward is being done by the secular sector. 'Positive youth development' is a catch phrase in government circles in Australia and internationally, and encompassed within that is the valuing of the spiritual component of every human individual. Internationally, the Forum For Youth Investment<sup>1</sup> is investing in research and promoting approaches that bring about lasting change in youth development and empowerment. Effective mentoring and facilitating personal growth on an individual basis is vital for effective youth development including in regards to their spiritual growth.

## **A whole life discipleship approach**

This piece of 'truth' would be no surprise to the first followers of Jesus Christ, who not only heard the 'right answers to spiritual questions' but also saw intimately how following God was lived out by a good teacher in all areas of life, in various circumstances and with various groups of people. The approach involved seeing the fun and exciting sides of life and ministry, as well as the more mundane - demonstrating how God is in the everyday things as well as in the more impressive sides of life. It involved sacrifice, commitment, and even discipline. It involved doing things that were against the flow of the current society, and at times removal from normal society. Outreach, evangelism and discipleship were all done together as an ongoing process - not as distinct stages so often followed today.

In today's fast-paced world, a whole life discipleship approach would begin its focus on the leaders, the disciples - on their experiences, talents and interests and their relationships with any would-be disciples. It is about allowing regular time where all areas of life are sought to be developed (mentally, physically, spiritually and socially - Luke 2:52), and individual goals of the disciples are mutually identified and can be pursued. It is an approach that is attractive to youth but doesn't sanction, as Eugene Peterson describes it, "the two worst features of adolescence: self-absorption and cultishness."<sup>2</sup> And it treats outreach and discipleship in the same way - because it is about promoting growth in all areas of life.

Programs like the traditional Brigade programs have a great track record in attracting and involving youth of all backgrounds - no matter their social, ethnic, religious, capabilities or subcultural membership. It provides something for the fringe-dwellers as well as the popular ones - because of the freedom provided for individuals to pursue their individual goals within a group context. Certain areas of growth also develops best within a single-gender environment though the program itself does not require that. Because the approach encourages broad program content, intergenerational interaction, and individual responsibility from an early age, the individuals that grow through Brigade programs are more adaptable and skilled leaders. And with the local church setting the spiritual content, the approach is suitable for any setting.

## **The brigadeaustralia.org youth network membership**

The whole life discipleship approach can be adopted by any church freely to complement their existing youth ministry. A church that is interested in the approach, or already using the approach may choose to affiliate itself with the brigadeaustralia.org youth network for greater support and guidance, and access to network resources, efficiencies and events.

## **how does your church connect to the network?**

To explore the possibility of how your church youth work can benefit from the Brigade Network, contact the Brigade Australia office on 1800 819 704 or email: [info@brigadeaustralia.org](mailto:info@brigadeaustralia.org)

<sup>1</sup> [www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org) // <sup>2</sup> "Wisdom of Each Other" (1998) p90.