**THESE LAST 18 MONTHS HAVE HAD A MASSIVE EFFECT ON ALMOST EVERYTHING – INCLUDING KIDS MINISTRY. ONE OF THE BIGGEST AREAS AFFECTED IS ON OUR VOLUNTEER TEAMS.**

A lot of us in kids ministry are asking, ‘Where have all the volunteers gone?’. But do we know why they’ve gone or have we even stopped to ask?

My hope is to help you think through some ways to recruit team without guilt or shaming people into just filling our ratios, but also to provide tips on keeping those you have. I have also developed these ideas further as part of the Strong Foundations 12-week course available on [New Wine Online](https://www.new-wine.org/digitalhub/).

**1: KNOW IT // LIVE IT // SHARE IT**

*‘Without vision people perish’ – Proverbs 29:18*

We may know our vision but does everyone else? When sharing anything about your Kids Ministry do you share the reason why? When people know what you are about, do they become excited? Are you able to boil down the vision for the kids ministry into a sentence? Is it something you want to sign up for? Are you able to live it out? Does it align with the wider vision of the church? Past experience would also suggest that a big announcement from the front isn’t always the most effective way of recruiting and instead I would encourage you to pray for eyes to see the gifts. I suggest you observe people in and around church and call out the gifts you see in them that could serve the wider ministry to kids. When you have invited them to join, give them a little space to pray/process but also don’t just leave it to them to get back to you – remind them from time to time.

A huge lesson I have continued to learn is, ‘Don’t say people’s NO for them’. Don’t be worried about asking even if you think they are too busy – you never know they may have more capacity than you realise.

**2: EXPECTATIONS & COMMITMENT**

Once you have shared the vision and people grab hold of it, I think people need to know what they are signing up for. I have developed an outline for all my team so they know what is expected. Areas like timings of sessions, planning expectations, how we do team and when training is happening etc. I ask for a 1 or 2 year commitment from them and always ask which Sunday of the month suits them best (1 a month minimum), for example – *‘my best Sunday is the 2nd Sunday of the month. I say great!’*. Then they know that each 2nd Sunday they are down to serve and will expect an email outlining session and planning. This has worked really well for us as we have built from scratch.

**3: GIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

If people are to join your team, how can they grow? What are the opportunities for those joining your team that could not just help you with but equally enable their discipleship? Once we know what we are about, how can people flourish in the ministry? What skills do people have that fit in with certain roles that need fulfilling, or roles you could create due to their gifts? What are the opportunities for the youth in your church? When I was a teenager, I was invited by our curate’s wife to help in our mid-week 4-7s group. This encouraged me to become a leader and I learnt so much by watching and taking part. To the regular parent I was a junior helper, but I was learning all the time and being equipped because someone believed in me. Youth are brilliant and the kids look up to them more than us so I would encourage you to use them – (remembering they don’t count in our ratios until they are 18).

**4: KNOW YOUR TEAM**

Be mindful of your volunteers especially those who only do 1 Sunday a month, or who are new. Maybe they’re a parent who is great with their own kids but lacks confidence with other people’s children, or someone who’s never been a part of a kids ministry setting before. Sending out plans in advance is easy but as we know, being in person is another story! It is important to help others to flourish, but it’s more important to get to know your team and introduce people to each other so you become a unit and not a function, and then you’ll see the fruit. Especially in larger churches where lots of volunteers are on the rota, sometimes Sunday mornings can be so busy that it’s easy to lose sight of volunteers, how people feel, do they know what they’re meant to be doing, do they know everyone? A friend once said even as a parent, sitting in with their child during the session, no one spoke to them. Where this is our employment and familiar territory, it’s not necessarily for everyone else so sometimes it’s possible for volunteers to feel ‘lost in a crowd’, and then return home tired possibly wondering what they’ve accomplished. A debrief at the end with everyone, or a catch up during the week helps you as leaders to know where everyone is at, and the volunteers to feel valued and part of the team. And make sure no one leaves without being thanked!

**5: CELEBRATE THE WINS**

When you have a great session, celebrate it! Share the story among the team and also to the wider leadership of the church. Encouragement lifts people’s eyes and helps them realise what they are part of. One way I have done this is through WhatsApp group messages with team, and then a separate one with parents. This helps to get the story out and build excitement and expectation. Also during team training I have asked for what they are seeing God do in the sessions. Celebrate in those times, encourage one another and eat pizza or cake – or both!

**6: BE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER**

There is huge value of doing something as a team that is much bigger than your local context. Being part of something like New Wine Kids really helps in upskilling the team as well as giving fresh ideas. Training sessions do help in this but being part of United Kids gives you new children and team to work with as well as ideas you can take back to your local ministry. I was chatting to a friend the other day who said that the ministry in her church had been massively influenced because of her being a part of United Kids. I know we get tired in the world of Kids Ministry, and don’t always feel appreciated, but when you are part of a team within a venue filled with 600 5-7 year-olds, there is something of God which impacts you and spurs you on to go again in the local church.