

Future Vision – Empowering Children

To some of us, working in schools is considered to be the responsibility only of teachers and occasionally parents as part of their associational duties, so to discover the work being undertaken by Future Vision one cannot be but impressed with the range of teaching that is provided by their dedicated team of volunteer members.

Future Vision is an independent registered charity based locally which works as an associated member of Scripture Union, a national Christian organisation. Their work is wide ranging - from weekly schools' clubs to numerous collective worship sessions and lessons or helping out with school visits. There are two paid workers but most personnel are drawn from volunteers representing the various churches throughout the district - people with considerable experience in education, or with no previous experience at all.

Ian Copeman, the Senior Schools worker, who leads the initiative locally explained: *"Our after school and lunchtime n:vision clubs are run in 7 schools and open to any child regardless of their faith and whether they go to church or not. It is "free at the point of delivery", meaning there is no cost whatsoever to school, child or parent."*

School club activities include eating together, playing games and quizzes, collective worship participation and opportunities to discuss aspects of faith and its relevancy today. The schools welcome Future Vision's involvement and there is clearly a close partnership which aims towards being able to provide a service that integrates within the current schools' club system and curriculum.

In addition, Future Vision runs *"n:Vision" club*, based at Springlands' Woodhall School. This Monday evening club (6.00 – 7.30pm) is for children aged 5-12 years, regardless of religious connections. It is independent of any school and is designed to *"en-vision"* children - in other words to empower them to explore aspects of Christianity, Bible stories, and to give them opportunities to think in such a way as to help enhance their lives. As one tot said: *"you want to give us BIG ideas!"* to which the answer came: *"Yes, spot on!"* The youngster summed it up well.

"Open The Book" is yet another initiative which has been launched into six schools in the area. Run by teacher Jo Longhurst, Jo takes her teams into the schools to present Bible stories in a dramatic format during the schools' times of Collective Worship.

A pilot project of *"Lifepath"* is due to be launched, with the help of four Sudbury schools in June. This is a key stage 2 initiative intended to offer pupils the opportunity to explore the Christian faith through the life path of a well known local historic Christian or group of Christians; in this case Simon of Sudbury who was Archbishop of Canterbury, and a lot

more, until his execution by the insurgents during the peasants' revolt in 1381. It is a springboard to encourage youngsters to reflect on their own life path. As Ian explains: *"The most important angle is the opportunity for pupils to explore spiritual development but, as part of the programme, we are hoping, with the help of Dundee University, to have Simons of Sudbury's skull reconstructed, however, we need funding to see this happen – at least £1,000. This project will be so exciting for the children and the town if we are able to do raise enough funds to do this."*

What is impressive is seeing such an exciting and viable partnership with the schools, parents and teachers being supported by Churches Together in Sudbury & District. It is heartening to hear about children responding so enthusiastically and asking probing questions about life and faith, as Ian concluded: *"kids today will ask sensible questions, they're not shrinking violets"*. Although resources are limited, and reliant upon charitable donations, it is encouraging to know that such initiatives are happening for the benefit of future generations to come.
