

When Samuel Benjamin, 24, arrived at St Hugh's Church in Northolt three years ago as one of London's first youth apprentices, he was "shocked".

"There was one girl, about 10 years old, and everyone else was 70 or 60," he says. "There was no youth budget, youth worker or youth minister. I realised I was starting from scratch."

For the first 18 months it seemed that little changed. Samuel and four young people from a Bible study group played football on the local estate and got to know local youngsters. Relationships were built.



He followed this up with a Youth Alpha course, a Saturday youth group and encouraging young people to take part in services. Today, three years on, 25-30 people come to the youth group, 10-12 attend Sunday services, and many more still kick a football about together in the nearby park.

"I'm extremely satisfied," says Samuel, "but hungry to see more. I wouldn't say that people are searching for God, but God is searching for them. It's a small, insignificant church, but God seems to be doing so much here. I want to encourage people who feel small and insignificant. I believe God is looking for them, to make them big and bless them."



So far, 16 youth apprentices have been appointed by the Diocese to find ways to reach out to the young people in their communities.

Samuel believes that his own troubled background helps him understand and support the youngsters with whom he works.

“I had a fractured relationship with my father,” he says. “Life was difficult growing up. I went off the rails really early on. I got into trouble with the law more than once.

“The fact that the impossible was made possible for me has put a hunger in my heart to bring that message to young people that what you think is impossible, is possible through the love of God. My dad turned his life around and came to faith before he died.”

One person who knows the change that the love of God can bring about is 14-year-old Karen Gayed. Painfully shy at school, she didn’t talk in lessons until the age of 10. Now, thanks to Samuel’s encouragement, she’s begun to lead worship at St Hugh’s.

“I used not to be able to speak in front of two people and now I was leading worship in front of the whole church,” she says. “It was so cool. I felt God was helping me. I really enjoyed it and I want to do it again. Samuel has definitely pushed me outside my comfort zones. I have got way more confident.



âI would say that I definitely want to learn more about God and the Bible now. He makes his lessons so interesting and different. He makes it fun.â

Working alongside Samuel is 27-year-old Petra Metry. The vicarâs daughter currently works in financial law in the City, but in her spare time she has become a youth volunteer, running discussion groups, encouraging youngsters to develop their talents and gifts, and running a girlsâ club.

âI love it!â she says. âI will be honest and say that I have been on a rollercoaster with my faith. But the last three years have definitely shaped me

âI work with young people because this is the age when they are being built. It can change the rest of their lives. I feel strongly that you can take a child from a broken home where society thinks they are nothing, but God wants to target them and help them.â

She adds, âThese are the children I havenât had yet. I feel protective over them.â



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