

Southwell and Nottingham diocesan vision for Growing Disciples Wider Younger Deeper includes The Potting Shed Church, started in 2017 as part of a Strategic Development Fund (SDF) grant.

Tucked down a lane in rural Nottinghamshire is a large barn, home to the SDF-funded Potting Shed Church since 2017. Though it's chilly, hay bales dotted around the barn lend a cosy feel. The church was commissioned to be a resource church for the area with a focus on families, and it has now flourished into a group where people of all ages, newborn to nineties, are welcomed.

All of the Sunday gatherings are held in the barn, a familiar space for many in a way that traditional church isn't, and the church's main Sunday offering is an all-age gathering – but not as many know it.

“I can remember very well the stage of going to the all-age church service once a month when our children were little,” says the Revd Alison Jones, the church's Pioneer Minister, who has four children. But this, she says, is different: “The children and adults have come to expect that they're going to be in the same worship space all the time. We've had some really intimate moments of being open to God, which is exciting to see.”

“Many of the parents are new to faith,” adds Adam Parkes, the Potting Shed's worship team leader. “We didn't want them to feel like the children just go off and get what they need there. It's about discipling them to be able to disciple their family at home, to experience stuff together, stuff they can do together at home.”

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Guitar service with children and adults on bales of hay

Initially the team hosted gatherings at Harvest and Christmas. The “gatherings” (rather than “services”) continued as they moved into the barn on a Sunday. “Gathering” was language that anyone could understand. That enabled people to join in, to feel welcome whether they did or didn't come to church,” says Emilie Rathbone, Operations Manager.

Among Alpha courses and bonfire gatherings is a toddler group, Little Seedlings, which also meets in the barn.

“For little ones and their families in a rural area, they could just come – and they knew what they were coming to, were excited about coming to a barn,” says Emilie, who leads Little Seedlings. “Gradually we began opening with a Bible story, and a craft alongside that.” The group has flourished, and many of the families have started coming to worship on a Sunday.

As well as being a place for families to gather for worship, the Potting Shed was also set up to be a resource church – a place that supports other people and churches. “We've seen families who come and are gently encouraged in the things they're facing in life. It has felt like a space that allows people to be open to what God is doing in their lives,” says Emilie, and Alison agrees.

“People come and see [the Potting Shed] as a safe place to explore faith. There's someone training to do Christian counselling, someone who's exploring mentoring. It might be that this is a place where people come for healing, or mentoring, or worship training, that sort of investment in people's lives, rather than just coming to a service.”

It's important to Alison that the church should resource others: “When I said that I'd come and do this, I said that my heart would be very much not pulling people out of villages into something else. I just had to trust that that would be the case.

“We've seen people come to faith from not being churchgoers. They have now gone into leadership and are enjoying engaging with their local church in the village that they're in, but also straddling the Potting Shed.”

Adam, who leads worship, agrees. “It feels like an important thing, that you're there to bless one another rather than to be in competition.”

Watch the full interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0GGaUDSTyw>

A green leaf outline with a brown stem used as the Renewal & Reform logo

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