

Ruth's Second Newsletter from XLP, South London

Hi people!

I hope you're all well and life has been good since my last letter. I also hope life isn't getting too hectic and stressful with the run up to Christmas as it draws near.

Well... I don't really know where to begin since then! Life has been so so SO busy you wouldn't believe! It's been full of challenges and times of sheer perseverance, but it has also been very rewarding with times of great encouragement and joy. I will firstly start with the work going on at Northbrook school. We spend most of our time here out of all the time we spend in schools, so relationships with the kids are really developing and conversation is now not just 'Hey, how are you? How's your day been?', but it's getting to a much deeper level. We're getting to know the regular kids so well and are able to pray for them about specific issues in their lives. We use a French teacher's classroom each week to hold our lunch clubs in. At the start of the year, this teacher was so unfriendly and purposefully made our lives difficult each time we came to arrange the classroom for the club, for example, she would say we could never use the projector which made things hard when we wanted to show a DVD clip. The other week though, she came into the classroom to get something and began laughing and joking with us and even cracked a smile!

We started a reading support programme at Northbrook for one lesson a week just after half term which finished last week. We were assigned a specific kid who we met with every week and mentored with their reading. These kids, who are all in Year 7, have reading ages between 5-8 years old. I was really gutted we had to finish our sessions with them this half term because I was just getting to the stage where my kid felt really relaxed and comfortable and the session didn't purely involve reading, but also involved getting to know each other and him opening up to me.

As we are only working in Addey and Stanhope school once a week doing in-class support and one lunch club, it's so much harder to get to this level of relationship with the kids. The group of kids which attend lunch club are also a lot more unpredictable as there aren't particularly any regular attenders. The girl who I support in music is getting on really well. At first she was difficult to engage with in conversation and was a bit disobedient. She is now much more conscientious with her work and has more respect for me as she obeys what I tell her to do, for example, getting rid of her chewing gum when I tell her. The music teacher regularly expresses how grateful she is that I'm there helping in her class as she has noticed a big difference in this girl's work and attitude. Recently, the receptionists at this school told our team leader how friendly we were which is quite a big deal as they normally don't want to know.

Since I started in September I have found working on the XLP bus on the estates the most challenging aspect of the work this year. Some of the stories kids have been telling me about their lives has often reduced me to tears as I hear about the situations of their families and what they see as normal life. It has been an overwhelming eye-opener. One example of a girl I work with has a younger sister with leukaemia, a father who sexually abused her brother and physically assaults her mother, and she has a tube in her neck which is keeping her alive. Another girl is a permanently excluded kid from school who is now in a PRU – Pupil Referral Unit. The kids call this ‘Centre’ as they don’t like to be labelled as someone who goes to a PRU. For many kids, being excluded from school marks the downward spiral towards involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime. Around 60% of 10-16 year olds involved in anti-social behaviour or crime have been excluded from school at some point. Many of these young people end up in PRUs, which are the responsibility of local authorities. This particular girl has been known for being rowdy and disrupting things on the bus, but I have been getting to know this girl really well and can see the Kingdom of God in her which I am really trying to grow. She still tries to push boundaries but is becoming calmer.

I have just begun mentoring two girls from the older age church youth group; Barn. One of these girls is extremely stubborn, doesn’t want to listen to anyone’s opinion but her own, and dismisses anything which isn’t to her liking. She would call herself an agnostic and doesn’t want to admit to some of the things we tell her to be right. The other girl would call herself a Christian, but I feel is waiting to live her faith for when she becomes a missionary, which she feels is her calling. She hates talking about her faith to her school friends and gets very embarrassed. I took them out for coffee last Tuesday and had really great conversation with them just about general life. They were very open with me right at the start so I hope God will really start to use me to help change their hearts and attitudes as the weeks go by.

Over the last couple of Saturdays we have held two days away for the church youth groups. Barn (15-18s) had a Freedom in Christ day away and YMAD (11-14s) had a Youth Alpha day away. These days were so encouraging and successful. Not many youth turned up to Barn day away but those who did really met with God and it was evident he was doing some amazing things in their lives. YMAD day away was also so great as lots of the kids who don’t normally ask serious questions but just cause trouble, were asking me things they genuinely wanted to know the answers to, asking also for prayer for certain situations. One boy who is known to be a handful, came up to me and asked me to explain how he could get the Holy Spirit, so I explained and prayed with him.

I have been getting heavily involved in the worship both at youth group and on a Sunday morning. I lead once a month on a Sunday in the main service and lead in Barn every other week which is pretty exciting and I love it! I have also been doing quite a lot of dance with girls

from church. We're putting on a Christmas dance next Sunday 13th Dec during the service and also at an afternoon talent show the church are hosting. I really wasn't sure how many girls would come to rehearsals or even be interested when I first made an announcement in church, but I have 10 girls who are going to perform in the dance on Sunday!

Yesterday evening saw the first of the Arts Showcases held by the Greenwich team! This was an amazing event, a lot of work and very tiring, but awesome. It is such a great opportunity to give the young people a platform to perform and to really empower them and encourage them to develop the talents and gifts they have. It's a great night which displays God's glory through these young people. There were 13 acts put on by kids from the different schools the Greenwich team work in, and a variety of talent was shown ranging from Diablo dudes to dance groups. The winners were two girls who performed their own composed song; one who played keys and one who sang. They will now go through to the Arts Showcase Finals held in a massive venue in central London at the end of the year. My team (Lewisham... I expect you all to have known that already!!) will be holding our showcase in March and starting auditions for acts in January time. Once our acts have been picked, we each get assigned a few who we look after and mentor which I'm incredibly excited about! Last night I lead the vocal warm ups for all the singers involved!

The week starting 14th Dec, my last week before I come home for Christmas, sees our XLP Christmas Tour. This is an exciting but extremely demanding week. Each year the staff at XLP write a Christmas play which we perform to every school XLP work in! We are given parts and have to learn our lines and have our dress rehearsal tomorrow. Each day we have to be at the allocated school by 7.30am and do on average 3-4 performances a day!! This year, the play is a modern nativity based around an angel who has a sidekick called Bob. This angel is very trendy and a bit too cool for school and his sidekick is a bit ditzy. They have a Joseph and are trying to find a Mary so we see various people auditioning for the role of Mary in the nativity. The judges trying to find a suitable Mary are the X Factor judges of which I have been given the part of Cheryl Cole!!

Last month we had a retreat day which happens once/twice a term and a different borough team host this day. Southwark team hosted the first one which is a day where all the staff and students at XLP come together and worship, eat and pray together and have some teaching and input. We also get involved in some very funny games which mean getting pretty messy and making a complete fool of ourselves! It's a great day where we can share together and have a good laugh and catch up as we spend most of our time just with the people in our borough teams.

I could go on much longer about everything that has been happening but I think that is a good summary of what has happened inbetween my last letter and now! I am back for Christmas on

19th Dec for two weeks and would love to answer any questions you may have which I haven't included in this letter. God is really doing some amazing works here in London and I have so much to be thankful and to praise him for. The work I am doing here is all about seeing which places Gods kingdom can be glimpsed in the situations and lives of these young people, grasping hold of them and developing them by showing God's love to build self esteem and image. Having to rely on and trust in God in a way I have never experienced before is really strengthening my faith. I have such a passion to want to spread the word of God and to see revival in this city.

Prayer Points

I would love you to pray for:-

1. Mentoring with the two girls from Barn youth group, that I would be able to show them how much God loves them and how important it is for them to be sharing God's word in their school to their friends
2. Energy to get through Christmas tour and the next couple of weeks before I break up, without fading out as this will be a very tiring two weeks as my team are doing assemblies this week which means early starts
3. Perseverance and passion for working with the kids on the estates with the XLP bus
4. God will give me the words to say and eyes to see the kids I work with at Northbrook and Addey and Stanhope so I can reach them and develop the kingdom through the love of God

Photos



Worship at Freedom in Christ day away



Youth Worker, Calum, speaking at FIC day away



Games at FIC day away... who could eat the most bread in a minute...



... who could down a jug of water the quickest... i won HAHA!



Retreat day



Games on retreat day... who could knock the plate of first...



... who could eat a polo in a pile of whipped cream with no hands the quickest...



... who could get an after eight from forehead into mouth with no hands the quickest...!



Southwark Team leading worship at retreat day