

Ruth's Fifth Newsletter from XLP, South London

Hello!

I do apologise for the delay in sending out my Easter Newsletter, things got quite hectic and I have only just had a chance to update you all now! As some of you may know, I have been away from XLP over Easter and was summoned to Jury Service also, so missed an extra week of term but am back on it now! I hope life is treating you well and you're counting all the blessings God is giving you everyday! ☺

A big event which took place just before the Easter holidays was the Lewisham XLP Arts Showcase. If you remember in previous letters, I have mentioned about the Arts Showcases being held within each borough, but just to remind you... XLP audition young people within the schools in which the different teams work, to perform in the XLP Arts Showcase run once in each borough and then an annual final towards the end of the year. Lewisham borough was the last showcase to be held before the final in July at the Mermaid Theatre. Each member of my team and I were assigned two or three acts who we mentored and sort of chaperoned throughout the show and rehearsals the week before. The acts I was looking after were two dance acts; two cousins and two friends, and five girls who had formed an Indie-style band. In rehearsals our job was to see each act perform and then work with them to help improve and really make the most of their opportunity to perform. This was really enjoyable as we had such a great chance to build relationship with our acts and have some great conversation. They listened well and took our advice seriously.

On the actual night we had to sit with our acts and tell them when to go on and off stage and just generally be encouraging and supportive. One of my dance acts (the cousins ages 14 and 11 years) were so excited and they kept asking me if they would get a chance to meet their role models 'Diversity' (winners of Britain's Got Talent 2009) if they won! They were so smiley and cute, I really felt like their Mum for the night and was so proud of them! The whole evening went brilliantly. There were 11 acts in total and there is always a guest act which in our case were a brilliant up-and-coming dance group from Lewisham, who everyone thoroughly enjoyed watching perform! The eventual winners were a drama group of about 11 young people who had written a sketch all around discrimination. It was very original and there was definitely some amazing potential! Along with the winners, three other acts will go through to the final. This was the same for each borough to give us around 12 acts for the final!

Our team recently started doing some in-class support at Northbrook School on a Tuesday afternoon for two lessons. We were initially doing reading support but this was only for one half term and so this was changed over to in-class support. Kerry, my borough leader had told us not to expect very good standards of behaviour in these lessons and that the students would

most likely be worse than the lessons we already help out with at Addey and Stanhope School. As the young people we work with in Northbrook are so friendly, I sort of dismissed what she had said and thought it would be fine and probably no where near as bad as Addey and Stanhope. How wrong was I!!!! I have been put with a Year 7 Spanish (no clue why – I don't speak a word of Spanish!) and Science class and I have honestly never seen anything like it! I have been working with them for the past few weeks now and it is like World War III breaking out every single lesson. Students are fighting in lessons, throwing large, dangerous objects around the room, constantly speaking over the teachers, listening to loud music on their iPods, using their phones very blatantly, and the list goes on... The teachers tend to be off a lot as there is a lot of striking going on within the school and so there is a huge lack of consistency within the class. One of the kids in my class said to me; 'I'm never going to do well in my GCSE's because we never have the same teacher'. Most of the supply teachers will act as though they are blind to some of their bad behaviour which is going on in front of them and say the students are a waste of time. It has been a good lesson if the students have written their names at the top of a page. I feel very unsupported as an in-class support worker present in the class and completely useless because I don't have the authority to stand out as a teacher, but I'm not there to be their friend either so it's really difficult to get a good pitch on things and gain a good rapport from the students. I have been praying about the situation a lot as this part of my week really isn't a very enjoyable part and one which I dread coming. I want to be used in a place where I can be effective and not just assist the teacher in trying to be a crowd controller and so I'm not sure whether to carry on as I don't feel I can be effective in this place, but I also don't want to give up on them.

Last week, David Cameron came to see some of the work of XLP by visiting the XLP Bus on an estate in Peckham. The bus has been on this particular estate for over 10 years which no one else has ever managed to do. He interviewed Patrick Reegan, met the Southwark borough team who work on the bus and some of the other staff at XLP too! This was a fantastic visit and a wonderful opportunity to share with the Conservative Party Leader the vision of XLP and how we want God to use us and equip us to encourage his kingdom and peace in this community.

A big incident which you may have heard or read about on the news was a 16 year old boy who got stabbed to death in Sydenham this week, just around the corner from where I live. This has been a big topic of conversation over the last couple of days and has really frightened me and a lot of the young people we work with on the nearby estate. The boy was the cousin to a family of young people who come on the bus at this estate every week. I feel very unsafe and unnerved at the moment and quite reluctant to walk around by myself even in daylight. There are still large areas of land cordoned off with police patrolling, there were also forensics earlier on in the week.

I'm getting baptised by full emersion tomorrow which is very exciting!! I'm pretty nervous as well as it's all just sinking in that I'm actually getting baptised! My family are coming down for it and we are having a big bring and share lunch after the service. The other XLP student working at my church is also getting baptised, along with two other members of the congregation. I have been informed that the water isn't heated and it takes place outside so it's definitely going to be an experience anyway! I'm really looking forward to sharing my testimony of what God has done in my life and how he has brought me to this point. I am hoping there will be pictures taken and maybe a video so in my next newsletter I can attach some for you to see!

I hope you are well and I look forward to seeing some of you over half term.

Thank you once again, so much for all your prayers, I have a list below:-

1. The young people making up the acts taking part in the Arts Showcase Final. For their protection and inspiration to perform and rehearse during the run up period
2. Northbrook School – wisdom for myself with the in-class support situation and for strength, encouragement and perseverance for the teachers and head teacher of the school
3. For God's light, hope and comfort to shine in the tragic situation happening in Sydenham at this time

With all my love and God's blessings,

Ruth xx