



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

# **YOUTH AND CHILDREN GROWTH RESEARCH**

**Research amongst churches which have grown  
in their under 16 Average Sunday Attendance  
(ASA) 2014-2019**

**Sample: 217 churches**  
Jan-April 2022

# CONTEXT

In Feb 2020, GS2161 was presented to General Synod, outlining the most recent findings concerning under 16 attendance in the Average Sunday Attendance figures, reported as part of the annual Statistics for Mission.

The paper recognised that in 2018 we reached a new stage where nationally, Sunday attendance for 0-16's dropped below 100,000 for the first time ever. The analysis of the 903 churches that had reported more than 25 under 16's showed that these churches (6.4% of the total returns that year) represented 44% of the under 16 attendance for the whole Church of England.

Further analysis showed that these churches were predominantly:

- Large (44% of the 903 returns reported having over 200 in their all-age attendance, compared to only 3% of returns nationally)
- Employ youth, Children and families workers (56% employ a youth, children or families worker compared to 4.5% of churches who have less than 25 under 16's)
- Have strong links to schools (40% had a strong link to an affiliated Church of England School)
- From an evangelical tradition (55% of the returns with 25 or more under 16s were evangelical, compared to 29% central, 12% Anglo-Catholic and 4% cathedrals)
- Urban (82% of parishes with 25 or more under 16's are in an urban setting compared to 36% of parishes nationally)
- Have big ministry budgets (55% of parishes with 25 or more under 16's had an average income of more than £200,000 compared to 5.7% of parishes who have less than 25 under 16's)

Following several amendments, the motion was passed as follows:

'That this Synod, recognising the continuing decline in numbers of under 16's engaging with Church:

- a. encourage dioceses to act urgently and consider practical ways they can support and resource those churches both with significant numbers of children and young people and with specific aspirations to increase their numbers of the same;
- b. encourage dioceses to make provisions to support and resource those churches serving communities which currently have small numbers of children, teenagers and young people;
- c. request dioceses to share good models of practice through churches helping to resource others so that we have many more churches engaging with children and young people;
- d. request the NCI's to commit funding for qualitative research on the data received to help understand best practice in a variety of contexts;
- e. encourage dioceses to explore new ways to grow new church communities with young people as a primary missional focus;
- f. request the Evangelism and Discipleship team to ensure this work is clearly joined up with Growing Faith; and
- g. request an update from the Evangelism and Discipleship team in two years with an analysis of progress in these areas.'

As a result of sub-point d, a group was formed to determine how this could be addressed. The group, which included General Synod representatives and national staff from the Evangelism & Discipleship team, Ministry, Strategic Development Unit and Research and Statistics, decided to commission a piece of research looking at growth instead of overall numbers.

When reflecting on the original data analysis presented to General Synod in GS 2161, various questions were raised following the debate, some of which we hoped to address in this research. Questions included:

1. While the data showed what was happening at services, what other activities supplemented and supported this? (e.g. service attendance, outreach programs, bible studies, external programmes, open-access groups, uniformed groups, choirs, social action projects)?
2. Was growth down to existing factors such as an already established youth ministry or lots of young families or was it more intentional than that?
3. What were churches that were growing actually doing with the children and young people?
4. When analysing the U16 attendance, are there over-represented groups (e.g. a disproportionate number of babies or junior school children)?
5. Were external factors responsible for the growth, such as external investment and resources, new leadership, changes to the parish makeup or other non-replicable factors?
6. What have been the barriers to growth, and how have they been overcome?
7. Has investment in either schools or families been a factor in the growth? (This joins up with Growing Faith Initiative as directed in point 6 of General Synods motion)
8. Was growth intentional or accidental?
9. What is the frequency of attendance of the young people? Are 80 young people attending once every four weeks or 20 attending weekly? What is their perceived connection with the Church?
10. What were the primary factors attributed to the attendance of under 16's (e.g. increased church family attendance, links with local schools, community engagement)?

### **Purpose of research summary**

Within GS 2161, an analysis of the 903 churches with 25 or more under 16's showed that over half (51%) had declined between 2013 and 2018, with only 394 (44%) having grown. Since the report, we also had access to the 2019 data set.

As such, the research aimed to look at churches where they had grown regarding their under 16's attendance to distinguish what factors contributed to this growth. By researching this in multiple churches, we hoped that themes would emerge, offering replicable principles that other churches could apply should they also wish to grow in their youth and children's ministry.

# KEY FINDINGS

## LEADERSHIP DECISIONS



### **Committed Leadership that sees youth and children's ministry as an essential priority is fundamental for growth**

In most cases, senior leaders had been key drivers behind the growth of youth and children's ministry  
Sometimes this looked like support and empowering, as well as broader vision setting for the church



### **Growth is the result of intentional choices**

Churches that have leadership committed to the vision of growing the ministry have made a host of successful changes and initiatives. This has encompassed a range of activities, such as toddler groups, craft activities, Messy church, mum's groups and (sometimes pooled) youth groups.



### **Employing a Youth or Children's Worker is the biggest common factor to growth**

Employing a family and children's minister is considered a key turning point for many churches in the growth of the children's and youth ministry.  
Churches are eager and willing to commit to the vision of growing the children's and youth ministry and see the recruitment of like-minded people, be that paid staff or volunteers, as integral to that success.

## WIDER CHURCH DECISIONS



### **Engagement from the wider church is essential to growth**

Churches that grew often reflected the importance of the youth and children's ministry being supported and developed by the wider church, rather than just paid staff or clergy.  
Churches reported that the biggest challenge they faced was a lack of volunteers.



### **Relational investment in families (as opposed to directly with children and young people) was a common theme amongst growing churches**

This either looked like reaching out to families as a whole through projects such as toddler groups or messy church, or investing in supporting and welcoming parents

## YOUNG PEOPLE DECISIONS



### **Perceptions of the church need to be tackled head on and involving young people in the discussion can help**

Churches need to be willing to adapt and change to be more accommodating to young people, children and families.  
Often the best way to achieve this is in discussion with the young people, children and families within the church

## INFRASTRUCTURE DECISIONS



### **Support is needed, even in growing churches and is wider than just financial support**

Churches need more support to achieve their vision.  
This goes beyond the financial support that is needed for recruitment, repairs and available space and includes training processes, support around safeguarding and shared resources. staff or clergy



# WHERE DOES GROWTH COME FROM AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

## Age breakdown in churches

While average Sunday attendance (ASA) is the metric that has been used, it only offers a broad category of 0-16. This lacks the nuance of knowing what growth might look like if it is isolated to one age group or more evenly spread.

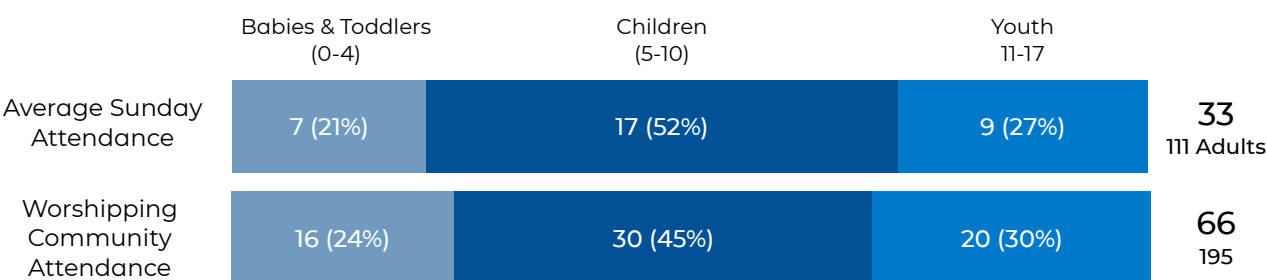
Within worshipping community data, there is a breakdown, recording children (0-10) and young people (11-17) separately. A fuller explanation of Worshipping community data can be found in the methodology.

When speaking to churches, we asked them to break down both their average Sunday attendance and their worshipping community into four sections; babies and toddlers (0-4), Children (5-10), youth (11-17) and adults (18+).

It is worth noting that when recording ASA for the Statistics for Mission (SfM), ASA is calculated using the average of the 4 Sundays within the month of October. For this, we asked those filling in the form to use their good judgement as to what would be an average attendance.

Across the 217 churches, on average, 33 under 18's attended on a Sunday, making up 23% of the Sunday attendance. Primarily, attendance amongst under 18's was made up of children (5-10), with 52% falling within this age category.

When looking at worshipping community data, numbers in all categories roughly doubled, growing to 66 under 18's, making up 25% of the total worshipping community.



It is worth bearing in mind that this is a mean average breakdown of growing churches rather than a breakdown of churches in general.

Additionally, as a mean average, it does not account for the wide variance even amongst growing churches which is reflected in the tables below.

Average Sunday Attendance

	0-4	5-10	11-17	18+
<b>None</b>	4%	2%	5%	0%
<b>1-5</b>	53%	15%	40%	1%
<b>6-10</b>	26%	26%	30%	0.5%
<b>11-15</b>	7%	23%	12%	1%
<b>16-20</b>	5%	12%	6%	2%
<b>21-50</b>	5%	18%	6%	24%
<b>51+</b>	0%	4%	1%	71%

Worshiping Community Attendance

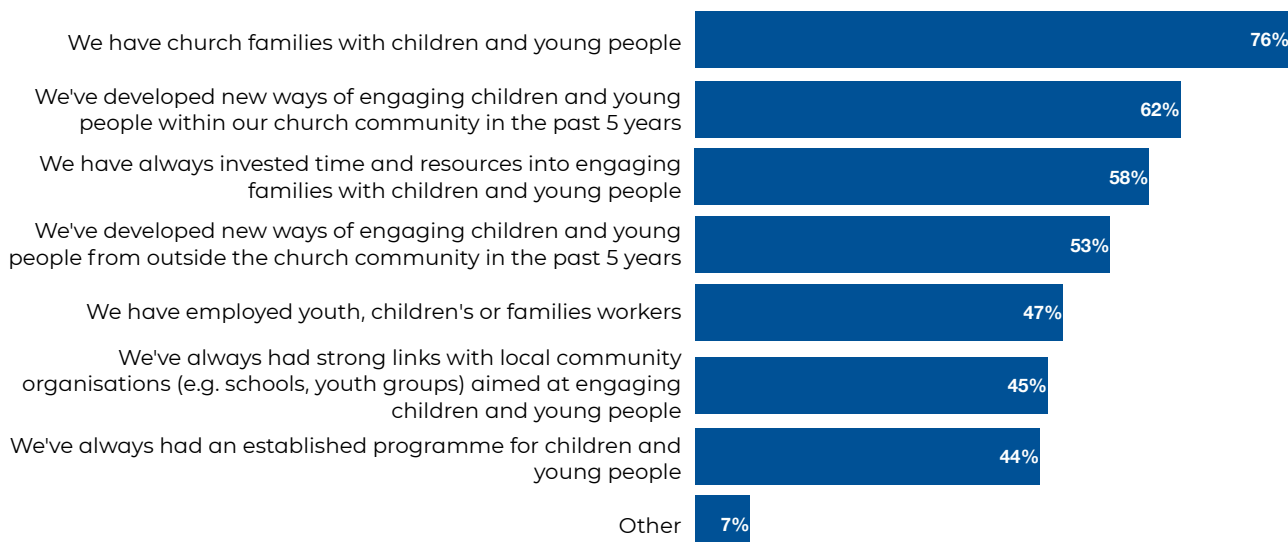
	0-4	5-10	11-17	18+
<b>None</b>	2%	0.5%	3%	0%
<b>1-5</b>	25%	5%	19%	1%
<b>6-10</b>	30%	16%	27%	1%
<b>11-15</b>	14%	19%	17%	0.5%
<b>16-20</b>	11%	15%	12%	0.5%
<b>21-50</b>	13%	37%	16%	8%
<b>51+</b>	5%	8%	6%	89%

### Current engagement with Children and young people

One of the other areas that the Statistics for Mission data doesn't reveal is where children and young people come from; be that discipleship and retention of church-based families or ways of growing from evangelism and outreach into the community.

As such, we asked churches to choose from a list of statements which best described their church's current engagement with children and young people. Churches were able to select multiple options.

The highest answer was an engagement primarily focused on those within the church, with 76% of churches saying they have church families with children and young people.

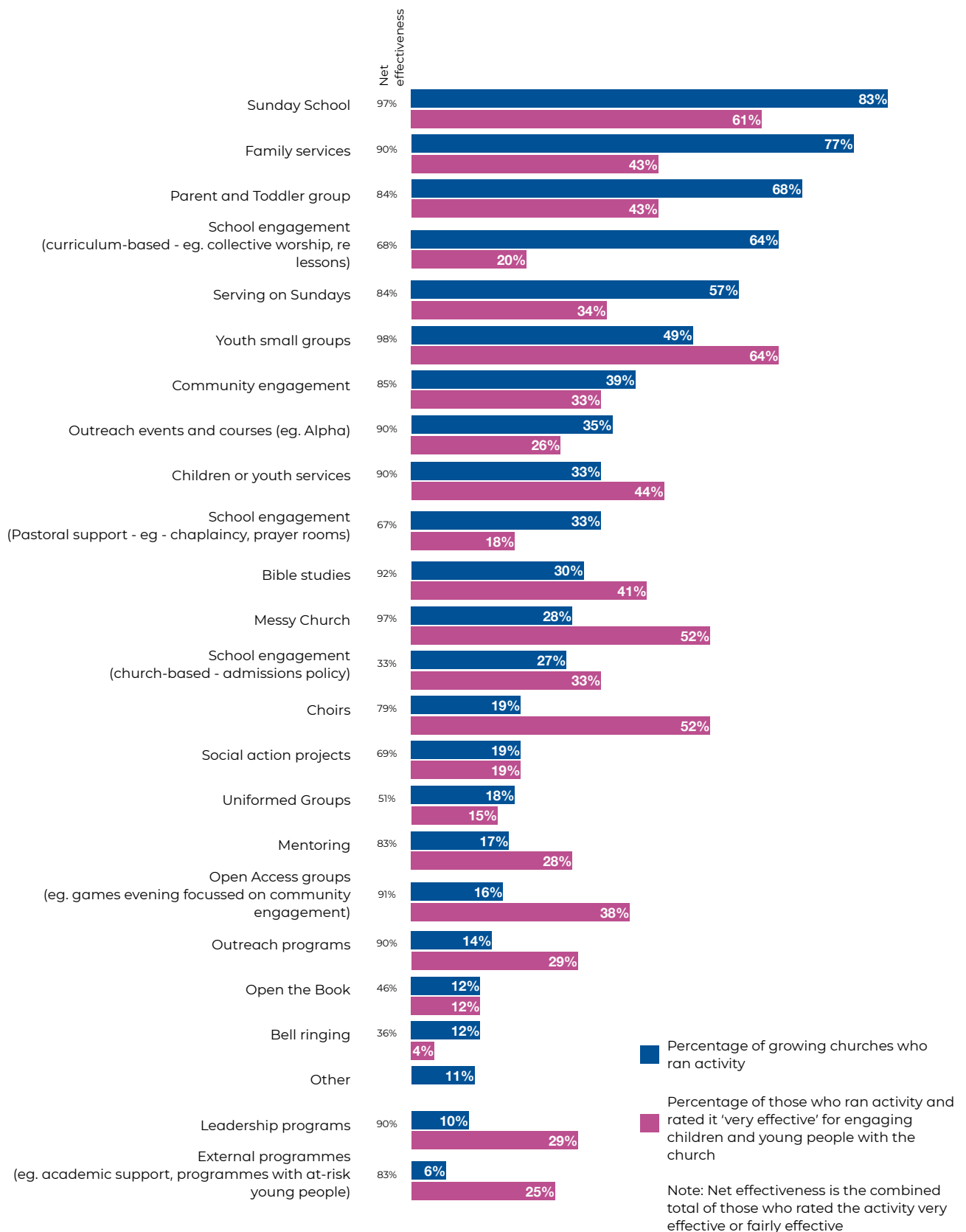


### Current engagement with young people, children and families

Another area that the Statistics for Mission data doesn't reveal is what activities comprise a church's engagement with young people, children and families.

We asked respondents which activities their church participated in and how effectively they saw it in engaging children and young people with the church. While Sunday School (83%), family services (77%) and parent and toddler groups (68%) were the most common activities for children and young people, when thinking about net effectiveness in engaging young people

with the church, small groups (64%), Sunday school (61%) and Messy Church (52%) were seen as the most effective.



## Metrics for growth

Growth is a potentially ambiguous term and could be measured in many ways. As such, we asked respondents to indicate which of a list of measures they perceive to be the primary indicators of youth and children's growth within their church.

The most popular answer was numerical growth which 58% of churches saw as the primary indicator of growth.

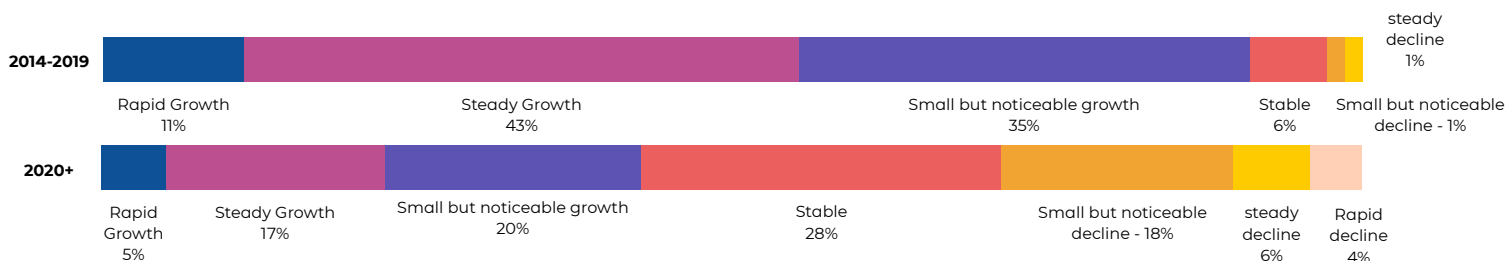
This was followed by 45% who saw the increased weekly engagement of young people as the primary indicator of growth, 41% who selected perceived spiritual growth or active engagement in faith, 34% who selected increased youth and children's activities, 29% who selected increased wider involvement in the church, 24% who selected increased numbers of youth and children volunteers within the church, 13% who selected increased numbers of confirmations and baptisms, 4% who selected other measures and 2% who selected that they didn't know.

## Areas of Growth

When asked where growth had happened, 84% reported having seen growth mainly in Sunday service attendance. 50% reported growth in Church-based youth groups, 30% reported growth in outreach events and courses, 21% reported growth in community-focused youth groups, 20% reported seeing growth in other service attendance (eg. midweek), and 18% reported growth in other areas.

## Perceptions of growth

When designing the research, we were very aware that while the growth data looked at 2014-2019, the COVID 19 pandemic had had a huge impact on churches' abilities to engage with children and young people. While this research didn't focus on the pandemic, we asked churches to reflect historically (2014-2019) and how they felt attendance had changed since then. Interestingly, even in churches that reported numerical growth, their perception was that this wasn't the case, with 6% perceiving numbers being stable and 2% perceiving a decline in numbers.

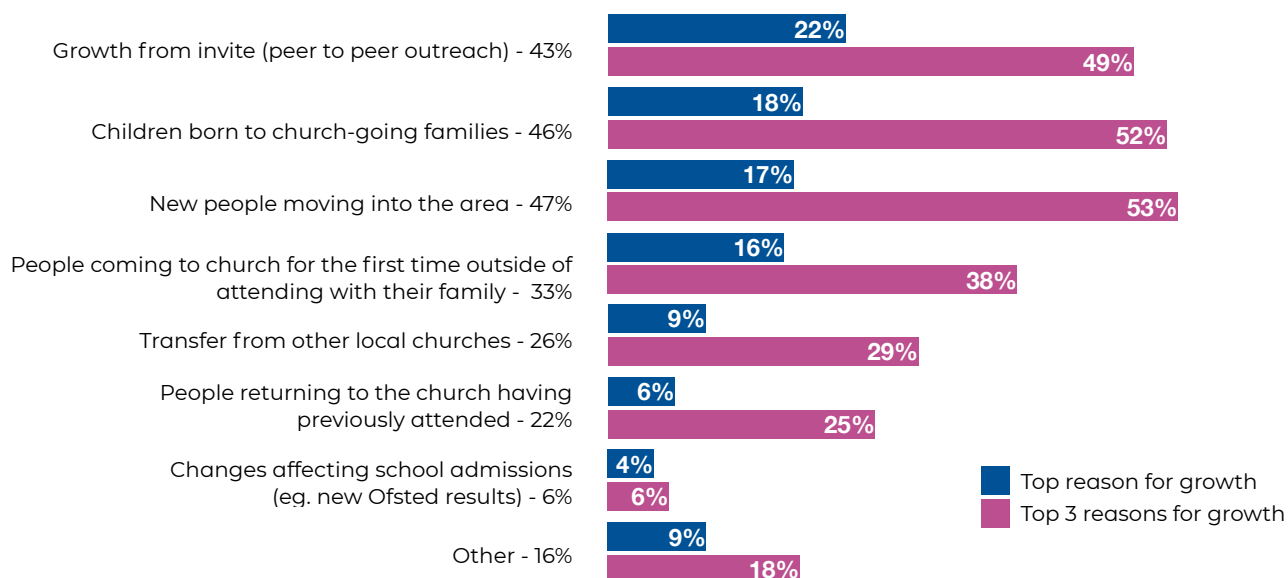


## Origins of growth

When asked about what people saw as the top contributors that had led to growth, new people moving into the area was the biggest reason for growth (47%), closely followed by children born to church-going families (46%), growth from invite (peer to peer outreach) (43%), people coming to church for the first time outside of attending with their family (33%), transfer from other local churches (26%), people returning to the church having previously attended (22%), changes affecting school admissions (eg. new Ofsted results) (6%) and 16% of respondents who selected other reasons.



Further to this, churches were asked to rank their answers, indicating the top 3 reasons that had led to growth. When analysing which options were selected at the top contributor, while new people moving into the area, children born to church-going families and growth from invite (peer to peer outreach) remained the top reasons, the order was reversed with growth from invite being the top answer outside of



The theme of growth from invite and peer-to-peer outreach was something that came through in the qualitative research. One church talked about how they had initiated an invite-driven service at Easter:

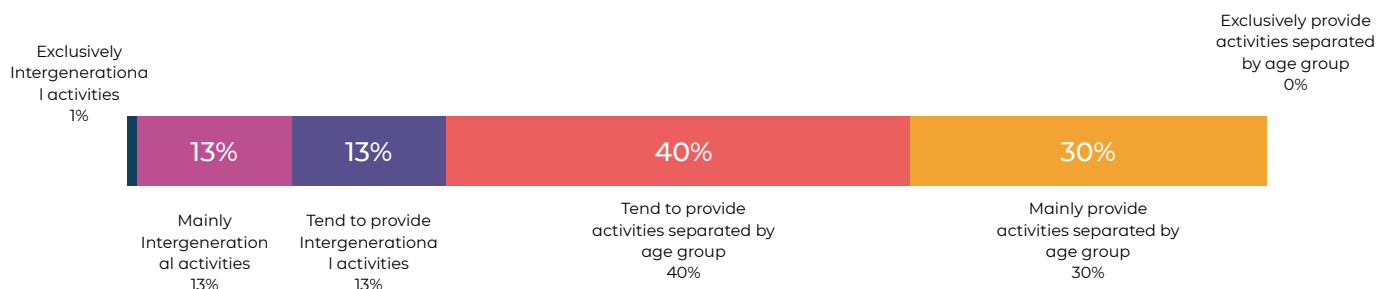
*"We've got the children as part of the craft one week making invitations for a school friend, so every child that comes to Pulse, our after-school club went away with an invitation to give to another school friend, who then came along with their parents. We've got the Easter break now but we're hoping that those families who came and had a great time will come back again after Easter and join us"*

St Mary w Emmanuel, Hailsham

## Intergenerational ministry

Intergenerational ministry is one of the models of youth and children's ministry that has been actively researched and endorsed in the last decade. This is where, rather than separating groups by age (typically seen in groups such as Sunday school classes), worship and other activities seek to cater for all ages together.

Within the research, we looked to unpack this, looking at how the growing churches approached this. While there was evidence of intergenerational ministry, the vast majority (70%) reported that their engagement with children and young people tended towards or were mainly separated by age group.



One church in the qualitative research talked about how they separate out the young people by age group as a way of trying to create community:

*So the way we do it, we all start together at ten o'clock and by about ten past we're sending the kids upstairs to what we call junior church. I think the change was made when the curate came. Basically if you're nought to eighteen, you all went to junior church upstairs, and then from there, they did a little bit together and then separated out into age groups. So they were trying to create a community of young people.*

St Philip (Northdown Park), Margate

# 1. COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

One of the most striking things to come through in the research was the role senior leadership plays in facilitating growth. As we will look at, intentional choices to invest more in youth and children's ministry were another critical element in stimulating growth. However, when asked who, if anyone, initiated the choice to increase ministry with youth, children and families, the top answer was the vicar (93%). The PCC played a key role 56% of the time, the congregation (those attending on a Sunday) played a key role 46% of the time, church staff (such as youth or families workers) were key 33% of the time and parishioners (those living in the parish irrespective of attendance) were key 6% of the time.

While this shouldn't be a surprise in some ways, we are often led to believe that change is initiated by employing specialist workers such as youth or family workers. However, this seems to suggest that it is unlikely to grow in this area unless senior clergy seek to prioritise youth, children's and families ministry.

In the qualitative research, one church recalled the commitment to the vision of the vicar when setting up a family service:

*"It's just trying, just making the effort, you know? The vicar and the volunteer that started the 5:30 family service, when they started it they announced it and the first week nobody turned up, but they agreed, 'We'll keep going until Easter'. Then the next week four turned up, and it kept growing to where the church was full, and you had more at the family service than you did at the two previous services."*

St Michael's Church in Middleton

Further to this, when asking about the senior leader, it is interesting to note that in 45% of growing churches, the incumbent has changed since 2014. While this is not evidence of cause and effect, it does suggest the opportunity for a new vision and strategy for the church.

Additionally, in 24% of growing churches, the senior clergy had taken on additional leadership roles (e.g. Area Dean or participation in the Senior Leadership Development Programme). Again, while this is not evidence in itself, it does suggest that in nearly a quarter of growing churches, the good leadership of the senior clergy member had been noted and sought to be developed or used in a broader context.

Furthermore, in a third of the growing churches, the clergy team had grown, and in 12%, the church had clergy with specific oversight and investment in children's and youth ministry. While this is strongly linked to increased support, it is interesting to note that investment had been made at a clergy level.

Finally, 8% of growing churches had planted churches, and 7% were plants themselves, while 7% of growing churches had grown in the number of churches in their benefice.

## 2. INTENTIONAL CHOICES

One of the other strong themes that came through in the research was that growth resulted from an active, intentional choice, as opposed to something that happened organically.

When asked if there had been an active choice to engage more in youth, children and families work in your church in the past five years, 88% of growing churches said yes, compared to 10% who said no and 2% who said that they didn't know.

In the qualitative research, one church said:

*"It all about being intentional about it, but also it's got to be deliberate. You've got to be intentional about doing children's and youth work. Adults, generally speaking, will come to church, regardless. But I think children and families particularly, you've got to explicitly provide something for them in order for them to feel like it's home, and they want to come ... I think a combination of the leadership being actively involved and us being very intentional about going about it."*

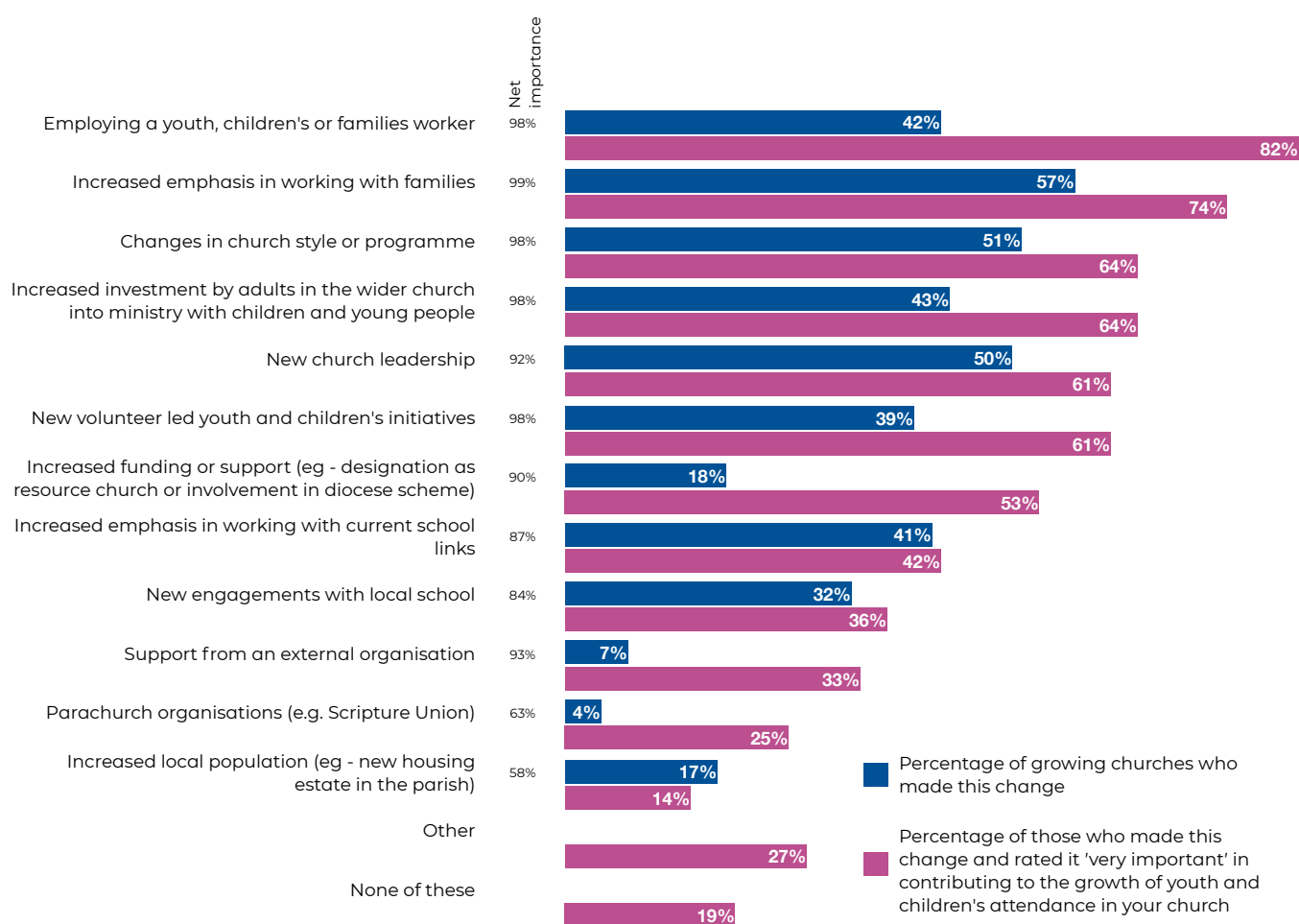
St John's Ellet

When asked to describe the growth of the church's children and youth ministry, 39% said that the growth has been a result of specific changes made within the church, 48% said that the growth had been a combination of organic and specific changes and just 11% who said the growth had been organic growth over time (not a result of specific changes). 2% of churches said that they didn't know.

It is important to point out that this doesn't evidence that change in itself leads to growth, but it's the kind of change that matters. This leads us directly to our next few key findings.

### 3. EMPLOYING A YOUTH OR CHILDREN'S WORKER

When asking churches which, if any, changes have taken place within your church community, the top answer was Increased emphasis in working with families (57%), followed by changes in church style or programme (51%), new church leadership (50%), Increased investment by adults in the wider church (43%) and employing a youth, children's or families worker (42%). However, when asked about how important that decision was in contributing to the growth of youth and children's attendance in your church, 82% of those that had employed a youth, children's or families worker rated it as 'very important' in contributing to the growth of youth and children's attendance in your church, with 74% rating increased emphasis in working with families as very important and 64% rating both changes in church style or programme and increased investment by adults in the wider church as very important.



Note: Net importance is the combined total of those who rated the activity very important or fairly important



In the qualitative research, the role of youth and children's workers came through repeatedly, as shown in the quotes that follow:

*"Having somebody paid to coordinate the youth side of things and devoting time to that, I think that's made a difference. ...Helen [the children's worker] has been here maybe eighteen years, or something like that. I think that's a long term investment that starts to pay off."*

St Stephen, Selly Park

*Getting a full-time youth minister and a part-time children and families minister, was really significant. When we first made those appointments, we had about 45 children and young people on our books, five years later, we've got 90, 95. So, our children and families numbers have doubled in the five years that we've had these roles in place.*

St Andrew & All Saints, Malvern Wells & Wyche

*Our family and children's worker ... can concentrate wholeheartedly on the children and on the families. So, she has a house group for the parents as well as the toddler group and Sunday school, and she goes into the school every Wednesday for a whole morning ... My new curate, he was a youth worker, so we realised that there are about four of our children now that are at that age where they need more discipleship, proper discipleship, so he started a youth group that now there are probably about five or six children in that.*

St Cuthbert, Great Glen, Glen Magna

## 4. INVESTMENT IN FAMILIES

As we have seen in the previous section, increased emphasis in working with families was the most popular change that had taken place in growing churches, with 57% of growing churches listing this as a change they had made.

Furthermore, 77% of growing churches said they ran family services, the second most common activity for children and young people, and 68% ran parent and toddler groups.

However, within the qualitative research, what came out strongly was an emphasis on working not only with young families but specifically with parents. What follows are several quotes that help highlight this emphasis on investing in families

*"There is an opportunity, I would suggest, that is all about the home and it's about parents and carers relearning that they are the main providers of discipleship."*

All Saints, Eastleigh

*I led one of the family services last Sunday ... and you're not just aiming it at the children, you're aiming it at the parents as well, because they're learning as much about religion and faith as the children are, because some of these families have probably not been in church for a long, long time.*

St Michael's Church, Middleton

*Our worker, only joined us last autumn ... part of our objective for year two of her work was to try and create some more family events in the summer ... barbecues and that, so we can bring both parents together, because when things take place in the morning, there's often one parent who's working ... our objective is, to bring all our children's worshipping communities together at certain events, so we can have a big celebration, so people understand that even though they might not attend church on a Sunday morning, they are just as much valued members of the church community.*

St Augustine, Slade Green

## 5. WIDER CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

While we have seen the importance placed on senior leadership and employed staff, engagement from the wider church is evidently important to growth. When asked about changes that had led to growth, increased investment by adults in the wider church into ministry with children and young people was the fourth most frequent change, with 43% of growing churches saying they had done this. This was only beaten by an increased emphasis in working with families (57%), followed by changes in church style or programme (51%) and new church leadership (50%).

However, when asked about how important that decision was in contributing to the growth of youth and children's attendance in your church, 64% of those that had seen increased investment by adults in the wider church into ministry with children and young people rated it as 'very important' in contributing to the growth of youth and children's attendance in your church.

Wider engagement from the church also came through as a strong theme within the qualitative research, as shown in the following quotes:

*"It's paramount, it's absolutely paramount for us. It's a key priority. It's our key missional priority for how we engage with the wider community, and it's a key priority for the congregation in terms of its self-understanding of mission and how it resources mission."*

Holy Trinity, Weston

*I think strong leadership with good support and encouragement and increasingly that becomes challenge as well. So, it becomes other people taking on a leadership, which is pushing me rather than me pushing... as the people who take on leadership change in terms of who they are. Then I think I become the one who is being challenged more than doing the challenging. Which is a really good dynamic*

St Chad, Wolverhampton

*We've been blessed with an awful lot of people coming and joining us in the last couple of years, and I think they've caught our vision of we really want to invest in the younger generation, so we put out a giving campaign four years for Helen's roles and the money came in for it. So, we haven't really had to apply for grant funding for our children and families minister roles at all, so far, just because our congregation's been growing and people have given to a vision which they believe in.*

St Andrew & All Saints, Malvern & Wyche

## 6. PERCEPTIONS NEED TO BE TACKLED

An interesting theme in the qualitative research was the need to tackle perceptions of the church. Further to this, frequently, churches that had done this had used young people and children in the church as key partners in identifying barriers to people engaging with the church and looking at how they can best be overcome.

The following two quotes from the qualitative research help to demonstrate this, looking at the challenge of welcoming and engaging with the church's position on sexuality:

*"they feel like it's okay to be here because there are children around and the clergy have got children and people needed lots of reassurance and yes, I think we underestimate maybe, that we think that people know they're welcome and they don't necessarily."*

St Peter, Earley

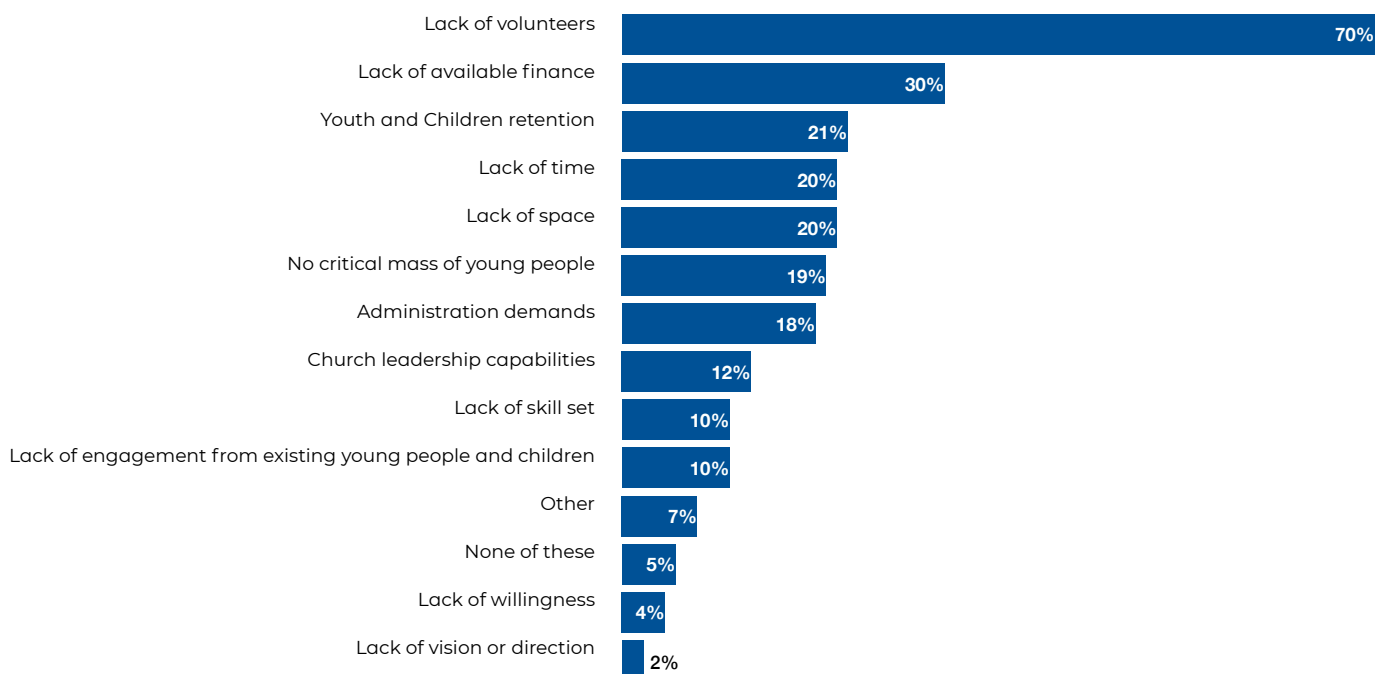
*"I think the church has got a huge, what we might call a sort of credibility issue with the [sexuality] debate. Regardless of which side of the argument we are, we're not to take sides, but whatever you believe about God's intention for human relationships and sexuality, there's a job to be done with our young people, to bring them along in that conversation. Because that is a credibility issue. I think one of the things young people crave is authenticity and relationship. And if we're not authentic and real with our young people, then they'll look for that elsewhere. So I think that's a huge one."*

Holy Trinity, Weston

# 7. SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR GROWTH

While the sample group for this research was churches that had evidenced growth, this did not mean that they had not faced challenges. The theme of the need for support came through in the findings, with churches noting various challenges they had met when looking to grow their church's youth and children's ministry.

When asking growing churches to reflect on the challenges their church had personally faced when looking to grow, the biggest challenge was finding volunteers, which 70% of churches said was a challenge. This was considerably higher than other challenges, with lack of available finance being the second biggest challenge (30%) and youth and children's retention being the third (21%)

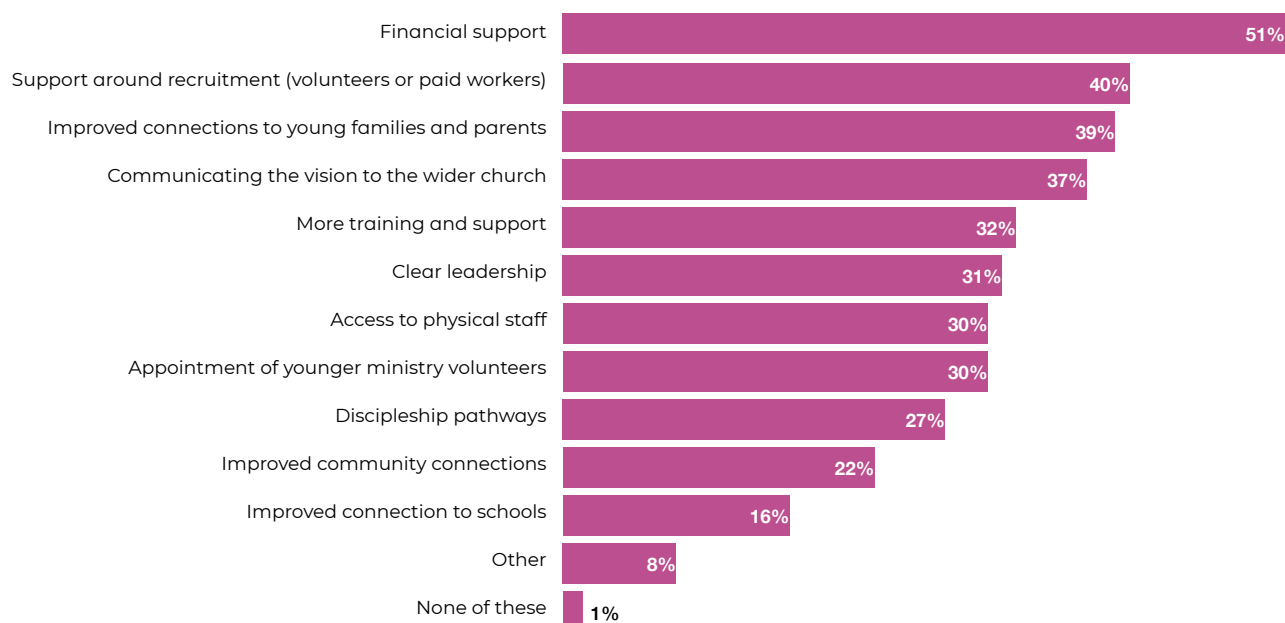


One of the churches in the qualitative research talked about the challenges that they faced in trying to recruit volunteers for the youth and children's ministry:

*Very often, especially with the older group, volunteers look at the material and they'll need more help with it or they won't feel confident about it ... one of my volunteers said, 'I feel like I need the sort of skills to be a teacher and I'm not a teacher and I don't have the right skills,'*  
St Peter, Earley

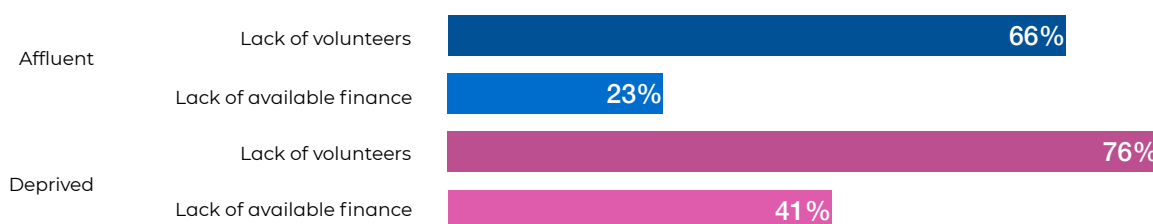
However, when growing churches were asked what support, if any, they thought was required to help churches more generally overcome these challenges, the top response was financial support, with 51% listing this as the support required to help churches grow, with support around recruitment in second (40%), improved connections to young families in third (39%) and communicating the vision to the wider church in fourth (37%). These parallel some of the other key findings found in this research that lead to growth.





While financial support was listed as the highest-rated support to help churches overcome challenges faced in growing their numbers of children and young people, it is interesting to note that there was only a slight contrast between churches from affluent and deprived settings as to how much they felt finance made an impact on growth. When asked what support they thought was required to help churches overcome these challenges, 48% of affluent churches listed financial support, compared to 56% of deprived churches.

Further analysis in this area shows that while finance could easily be perceived to be the biggest challenge in deprived churches, lack of volunteers was a significantly bigger issue, with 76% of deprived churches listing lack of volunteers as a challenge, compared to just 41% who listed lack of available finance. This was equally true of affluent areas, with 66% of affluent churches listing a lack of volunteers as a challenge, compared to just 23% who listed a lack of available finance



# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND REFLECTIONS

## **Models for growth**

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the aim of commissioning this research was to research factors common to growth in multiple churches. We hoped that in doing this, themes would emerge, offering replicable principles that other churches could apply should they also wish to grow in their youth and children's ministry.

As this paper has unpacked the findings, we hope it has been evident that our seven key findings have not come up in isolation. In almost all questions, we see the same themes repeated repeatedly.

Often churches wishing to grow in their children's and youth ministry will look to employ a youth or children's worker or often sight finance as a barrier to achieving this. However, what comes through in this research is that while employing a youth or children's worker can help grow and multiply numbers of young people and children, it is often an accelerant to growth rather than an ignitor.

For churches who are reading this and wishing to grow, this paper suggests a three-step process:

### **Church leaders prioritise youth and children's ministry and make intentional choices to initiate growth.**

Growth begins with the church leader prioritising youth and children's ministry. This often will look like being very upfront and vocal with the wider congregation and PCC in regards to the vision that is trying to be achieved, as well as a willingness to make decisions that may impact how the church seeks to spend its resources, how it seeks to engage with families or how it approaches changes to church style or programme as well as possible perceptions and barriers to those outside the church.

### **Vision is captured by the wider church, who share and partake in the ministry.**

This is a harder step to achieve, but it is evident in the research that without this, growth can't be achieved. Communicating the vision for growing children and young people ministry effectively is likely to impact welcome, commitment to support the ministry in prayer, willingness to adapt to changes, willingness to volunteer and willingness to financially contribute towards this area of ministry as it grows.

### **A youth or children's worker embeds the ministry and multiplies growth.**

While churches shouldn't look to begin by employing a worker, it is evident in the research that as a church's youth and children's ministry grows, employing a youth, children or family worker can help embed and multiply this growth. It is, however, worth repeating that while this is desirable, employing a worker is often an accelerant to growth rather than an ignitor.

# METHODOLOGY

## Sample Selection

In order to decide which churches to talk to in detail, a filtering process was applied to the 12,203 returns submitted in Oct 2019. This excluded the Diocese of Europe and churches where an estimate had been made as to their return figures. It was decided to sample from those with a set of returns meeting the following criteria:

1. Those that had shown a positive - i.e. increasing - trend (be that statistically significant or not) in three measures: Child ASA, Child AWA, and Child USA, based on the output of a linear model fitted to the figures (data and estimates) from 2014-2019. (1624 total - 13.3%)

Note: this includes significant and insignificant growth as just filtering for churches with significant growth in Child ASA, Child AWA, and Child USA results in a final sample of 63 (0.5%)

2. Those for which the figures for Child ASA, Child AWA, and Child USA were higher in 2019 than in 2014. (1100 - 9%)
3. Those for which Child ASA, Child AWA, and Child USA was at least 10 in 2019. (431 total - 3.5%)

Note: when looking at all returns 3223 (26.4%) churches had at least 5 U16's in 2019 and 1783 (14.6%) had at least 10 U16's in 2019. If looking at churches meeting criteria 1 & 2 but only requiring 5 0-16's, 626 (5.1%) would be applicable

N.B. Within this research we are thinking about growth in terms of "the number", but we ought also to be aware of growth in terms of "joiners" – given that people age, there will almost certainly be both types of growth on display here.

This gives a set of 431 returns (of which 399 related to single churches) from which to take a sample.

The Church of England commissioned Savanta ComRes to conduct the research on our behalf.

## Quantitative research - Sample 217

All 431 'growing churches' were invited to participate in a 25 question, online questionnaire as part of the quantitative element of the research. This asked them about their understanding of what had led to the growth and what challenges they had faced in the process.

This happened between 10th January – 11th February 2022

## Qualitative research - Sample 20

Of the 217 churches that responded to the questionnaire (a 50.4% return rate), those that indicated they were willing to take part, were invited to participate in a further piece of qualitative research on a first come, first serve basis. This happened in batches so as to ensure a good spread of location, area type, church tradition, as well as changes that have taken place and challenges faced (as reported as part of the quant survey).

Through this process, 20 churches (9.2% of those who had participated in the quantitative research) participated in a 45 min interview with Savanta, exploring further the factors that had led to growth and how challenges had been addressed.

This happened between 21st March – 8th April 2022

## Sample break down

So as to ensure that the Qualitative research offered good representation, various questions in relation to church tradition, location and deprivation/affluence were asked.

In regards to the gender of respondents, 28% were female, 72% were male, and 0.5% opted not to say.

In regards to the age of respondents, 0.5% was 18-24, 6% were 25-34, 26% were 35-44, 31% were 45-54, 27% were 55-64 and 9% were 65+

In regards to tradition, 13% identified as Conservative Evangelical, 29% identified as Charismatic Evangelical (e.g. HTB, New Wine network), 14% identified as Open Evangelical, 8% identified as Evangelical (Other), 23% identified as Middle or central church, 16% identified as Liberal Catholic, 6% identified as Traditional Catholic, 1% identified as a Cathedral, 6% identified as 'Other' and 0.5% selected that they didn't know.

While wherever possible, the questionnaire was sent to the Incumbent/Rector, churches were able to delegate the completion of the questionnaire to others in the church who may have more knowledge in this area. 77% of those completing the questionnaire identified as the Incumbent/Rector, 2% identified as the Associate/Assistant Vicar, 1% identified as the Church administrator, 8% identified as the Youth, children and families worker, 4% identified as the Youth and children's volunteer, 2% identified as the Curate and 8% selected 'Other'

It is worth noting that while data around parish affluence/deprivation and urban/rural make-up is held nationally, respondents were offered the opportunity to answer based on their perceptions.

Those completing the questionnaire were asked to identify how they would describe their parish. 29% selected that their parish was in a city/town centre, 23% selected that their parish was on an estate/other urban, 26% selected that their parish was in a suburban area, 15% selected that their parish was in a market town or rural area, 6% selected that their parish was in a remote rural area and 0.5% said that they didn't know.

When asked about the affluence/deprivation of their parish, 6% selected that their parish was in a very affluent area, 29% selected that their parish was in an affluent area, 21% selected that their parish was in a narrowly more affluent area, 14% selected that their parish was in a narrowly more deprived area, 16% selected that their parish was in a deprived area, 13% selected that their parish was in a very deprived area and 0.5% said that they didn't know.

Overall, 57% selected that they saw their parish as relatively more affluent, while 42% selected that they saw their parish as relatively more deprived

## Worshipping communities

In 2012 the Church of England introduced 'worshipping community' data, to help record those who may be unable to attend church on a Sunday (possibly for health reasons or work commitments), but would receive communion at home. This has since been expanded, and as of 2020, worshipping community data was further expanded to include people who are regular worshippers at Church at Home services.

A full definition can be found at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/WorshippingCommunity.pdf>

A common question in regards to worshipping community data is in relation to schools. Schools are a bit of a grey area, which is generally left to the good judgement of the clergy, churchwardens, and others who fill in the forms. If they think the school is part of their worshipping community – if they have a similar pastoral relationship with the school students as they do with, say, children attending their Sunday school – then it would make sense to include them; if the school troops over to church once a month for an act of worship led by the head teacher because the school hall isn't big enough then churches are

encouraged not to include them. Ultimately, we trust people to know their situation better than we do and to be sensible – experience suggests that that trust is not misplaced.

Ultimately it's about attending worship. Hence the name! This is not restricted to Sundays and would include things such as fellowship groups, parent and toddler groups and other activities that have a distinct act of worship or prayer. A parent and toddler group where there was an incidental prayer – e.g. saying Grace before the lunch-club lunch is eaten – probably wouldn't count but if there's an element of worship (eg, singing a hymn together or a short talk), it would count.

There are probably some grey areas, all of which are best dealt with by sensible people thinking about their situation rather than pages of notes from the Research and statistics team.