

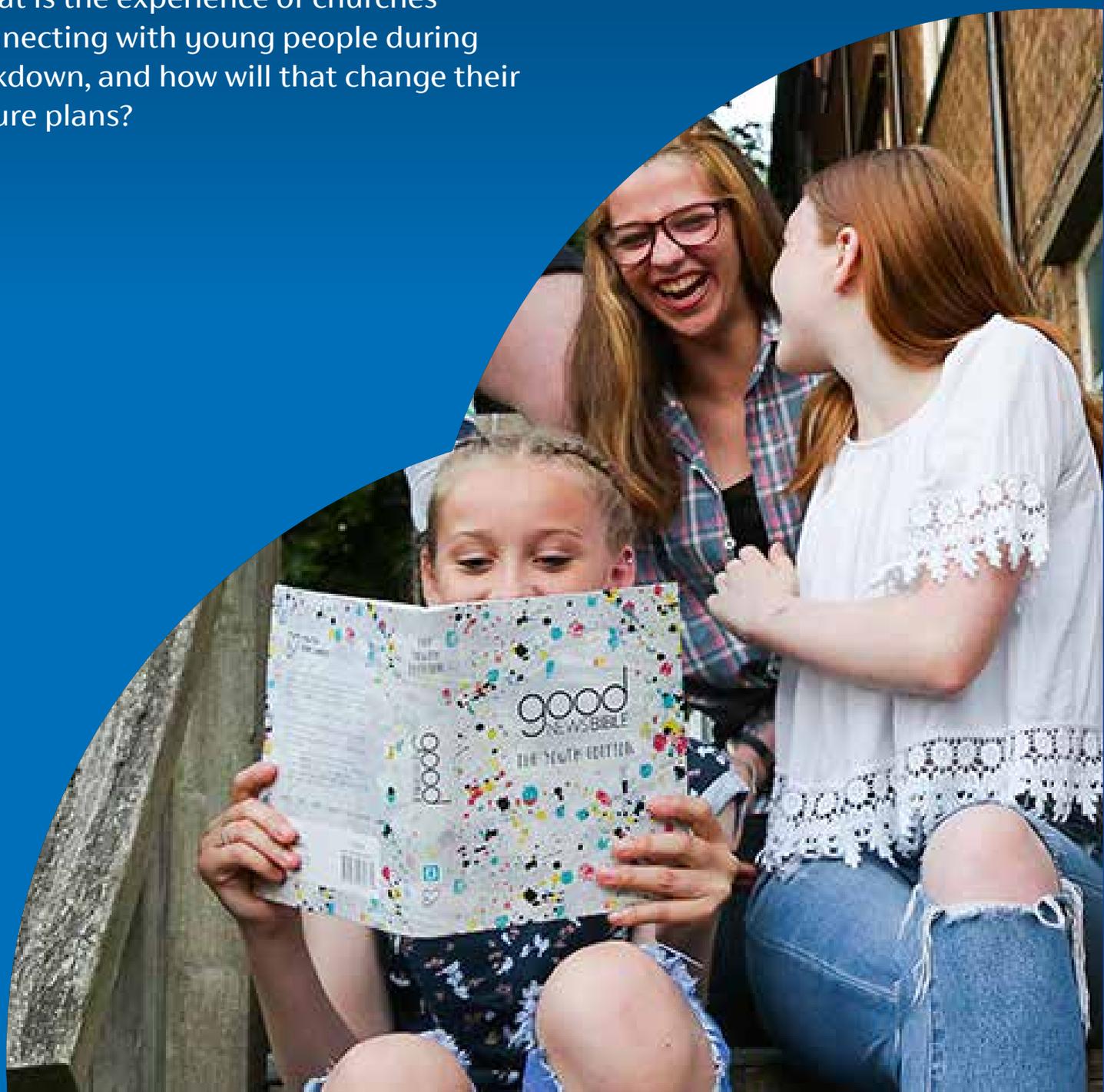


BENEFACT
TRUST

New research

Growing lives

What is the experience of churches connecting with young people during lockdown, and how will that change their future plans?



Survey response summary

During June 2020, an electronic survey from Benefact Trust was e-mailed via the Qualtrics platform to organisations who had benefited from an Benefact' grant since 2016.

While the main aim of the survey was to give a deeper insight into what Trust beneficiaries feel the needs of communities coping with the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus crisis will be over the short and long term, respondents answering on behalf of churches (76% of the 840 respondents) were asked a set of supplementary questions.

These additional questions focused on churches' engagement with children and young people since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. Churches were asked about how many 0 to 18-year-olds are in their online worshipping communities, whether their engagement with this age group has increased or decreased during lockdown, what kind of youth-focused activities they have been able to run and how often, and the questions young people have been asking the most. The survey also asked churches what they felt the biggest issues facing children and young people in their community are at this uncertain time.

A big thank you to all of those beneficiaries who took the time to complete the survey, providing us with their experience and insights. A summary of the headline findings, and commentary from churches, is included in this brief research update.



- **638 churches** completed the survey
- **89% of churches** were **based in England** (the South East, South West and East of England had the highest number of respondents), 5% in Wales, 3% in Scotland, 2% in Northern Ireland and 1% Republic of Ireland
- **57% of churches** said they served a **mainly rural population**, and 50% a mainly urban population (some churches served an equal rural and urban mix)
- In terms of denominational spread, **66% of churches** said they were **Church of England**; 8% Methodist; 6% Baptist. Other respondents represented a range of denominations, were ecumenical or non-denominational
- In terms of level of need, **41% of church respondents** said the **level of deprivation** that exists in their community was low, 39% assessed the level as medium and 20% low

**Note that church respondents did not necessarily answer every question*



“We’ve been keeping in contact with schools and responding to their needs.”

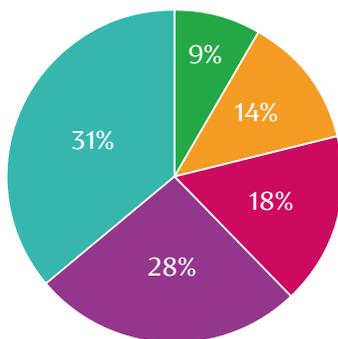
“We have a very active youth volunteer in contact with about 60 young people and about 15 more intensely.”

“We’ve worked with individual families, in partnership with our schools. We’ve created resources which can be picked up from safe spaces, or online. We’ve woven elements of our existing family worship into a Zoom platform. Small children find Zoom really tricky. No-one seems to have thought about this. We are trying to make things tangible. We have also seen people 'in the flesh' socially distanced.”

Engaging with young people during lockdown

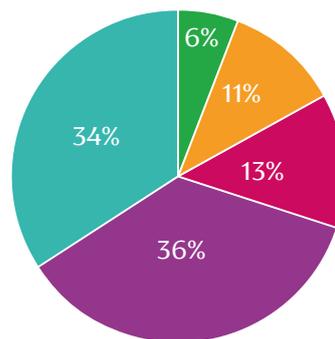
Q: Can you tell us the number of children and young people currently in your online worshipping community/community online?

Aged 0 to 10 years

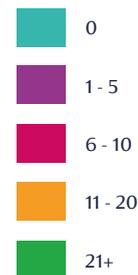


*582 churches answered this question

Aged 11 to 18 years

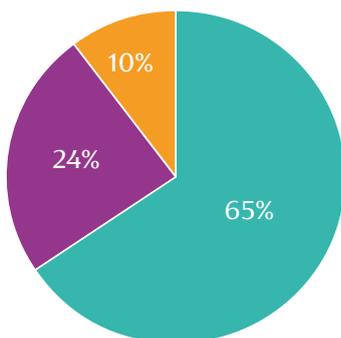


*564 churches answered this question



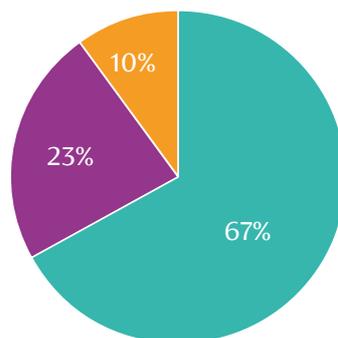
Q: Since lockdown and online services began, has your church experienced any change in the number of children and young people engaging with your church?

Aged 0 to 10 years



*585 churches answered this question

Aged 11 to 18 years



*572 churches answered this question



Research take-out:

Since lockdown began, around two thirds of churches have experienced no change in the number of children engaging with church, and around a quarter have experienced a decrease.

Some 69% of churches have at least some children (aged 0 to 10) in their online worshipping community, enabling them to maintain some level of connection with younger people during lockdown, but that figure drops to 66% for 11 to 18-year-olds.

Our survey also showed that of those 10% of churches that have experienced more engagement during lockdown, 52% had experienced an 11% to 50% increase in engagement (0-10 year olds) but that figure dropped to 38% registering an 11 to 50% increase in engagement with 11 to 18-year-olds.

For the 23% of churches that experienced reduced engagement, around half had experienced a decrease of up to 50% in engagement with both age group variants.



“We’ve been doing Bible stories on YouTube.”

“We have split the church into care groups and have weekly contact with all members of our church (90ish people) with WhatsApp, phoning, FaceTime or Zoom. We have had a festival for the church to keep in touch. Our service for holy communion is attracting audiences from around the world.”

“Children of primary age and younger find it very hard to maintain contact via Zoom/Skype/WhatsApp, etc. We are fortunate here in that we have strong links with over 50 children spread across our small parish of just under 3000 people. Many of these children, however, worship with us in the context of their schools, not in church on Sunday. A significant minority come to church on their own when we have Family worship. They have not been easy to maintain contact with during this period because of the ‘virtual’ nature of contact. Whereas we can easily knock on the door (and stand back) of the large number of elderly parishioners who are not online, we cannot replicate this pattern with our children and young people.”

Activities to reach young people

Q: Which of the activities listed have been the most important in helping you to engage with children and young people in your congregation/community during lockdown?

Top Ten

- 55%** Regular online services/worship
- 46%** Family focused online activities (for children and parents)
- 31%** = Online activities/challenges (for young people)
= Phone calls
- 28%** = Emails
= Conversations with parents
- 23%** Social media groups
- 18%** Faith at home online resources for parents to engage children with
- 14%** Youth minister/worker led social sessions through video conferencing
- 13.3%** Social media livestreams
- 13.1%** Providing food and other essential supplies
- 11.3%** Youth minister/worker led Christian teaching sessions through video conferencing

Q: How often do you run online or other safe activities during lockdown, specifically for children and young people?

- 24%** Only on a Sunday/day of service
- 21%** Twice a week
- 10%** More than twice a week
- 30%** We haven't been able to run any activities for children and young people during lockdown
- 14%** Other



Research take-out:

It's clear that online worship is the main way churches have engaged with young people during lockdown, but also interesting to note that almost half have been running family-focused online activities for children and parents, and nearly a third have developed online activities and challenges.

Our original **Growing Lives** research in 2019 revealed that only 7% of churches would offer online support to children and young people if they had all of the necessary resources and skills in place, but lockdown appears to have been a major driver for churches to embrace digital opportunities and engage with families online.



“The biggest issues facing children and young people... Not seeing friends in person. Social media overload. Lack of personal space.”

“We have been delivering 50 lunchboxes a week to families and distributing food parcels all over our city - food poverty is a real issue here.”

“Young people are feeling the pressure of online school work and school return.”

The questions young people are asking and the issues they face

Q: During lockdown, what has been the question most asked to your church by children and young people (please select the top five most asked)?

Top Ten

57%	When will I get to see my friends again?
50%	When can I go back to school?
32%	What will normal church be like in the future?
26%	If God is good, why does God allow bad things like a pandemic to happen?
22%	How can I help people in my community?
17%	How do I stop being lonely?
15.48%	= What happens to those who die? = How do I keep hopeful in this time?
14.86%	Is the coronavirus an act of God?
13%	How do I pray to God?
6.5%	How do I deepen my faith in this time?

Q: To the best of your knowledge, what have been the greatest issues currently facing the children and young people in your church community during lockdown (please select a top five)?

Top Ten

80%	Boredom	31%	Lack of exercise
52%	Too much screen time	29%	Family relationships
50%	Anxiety	13.48%	Lack of spiritual guidance
45%	Loneliness	8.3%	Parental unemployment
32%	Struggles with friendships	7%	Poor sleep



Research take-out:

The top two things weighing on children and young people's minds are when they will be able to see their friends and go back to school, demonstrating the importance of real-life social interaction to them.

Hardly surprising then that 80% of the churches who responded felt that boredom is the biggest issue facing children and young people during lockdown, and around half cited anxiety and loneliness as key needs.

Interestingly, around a third of young people are interested in what church will look like in future and more than a fifth have asked how they can step up to support their communities during lockdown.



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