

How to make it happen in your church

By Adam Hince and Paul Crothers

There are times where any new initiative simply feels like hard work! Youth Pastors and Leaders are always getting mail about conferences, mission programs and potential new ministries for them to try ... we know, because we get them too!

The **Urban Summer** project is a fantastic opportunity for the young people of your church to be a real blessing to the community in which they live. AND – it's not that hard to get together. But, like all things, preparation needs to start early.

Both of us have involved our Youth Ministries in the program the last few summers, and we both saw how people and organisations from our local communities benefited from and appreciated our efforts. But in addition to that it was what God did in us as we got out and served. For our young people Urban Summer has definitely become a highlight of the year. And for us as youth pastors it is exciting to be part of something that identifies closely with Jesus' heart for the needy. It is also exciting to see our young people begin to understand and embrace this counter culture aspect of following Jesus.

What we're offering here – is a bit of a "to do" list for people wanting to do an Urban Summer Project. It's not the bible, but some tips that will ensure that you do a worthwhile project, that your young people experience as much as possible of Jesus in it ... and that you don't spend the next months swimming in admin trying to make it happen!!

Understand the Concept!

This might seem obvious – but it's important that the Youth Pastor/Key Leader understands the nature of the program. The heart behind Urban Summer is to be servants in our local community with no strings attached. The focus of Urban Summer is to serve the needy, the poor and the disadvantaged in our community and / or support organisations that work with them. Basically it is all about practically demonstrating the love of Jesus to people who may otherwise have no opportunity of seeing the 'good news' in action.

In our busyness as youth pastors / youth leaders it is often easy to forget the importance of building up good connections with organisations in our local community, especially those who work with young people. Urban Summer provides a great catalyst to establish and enhance relationships between your youth ministry and other youth orientated organisations in your community.

Identify A Project.

This might already be in your head. As a guide, you should look for projects that will be of no direct benefit to your young people or the church! Urban Summer projects should be a *gift* to your community.

Driving around your suburb, reflecting on its demographics, thinking through the young people involved in your existing programs, considering a way of serving needy families that your youth ministry already connects with and even thinking right outside the square and trying something you've never seen done - but have dreamed of ... might be where you begin.

Take the time to meet with or at the very least phone the people or organisations you want to offer assistance too. A good starting point is your local council. Speak to

community development officers, youth services coordinators, local councillors or even the Mayor!

You could also contact the other service providers in your area. A web or yellow pages search will soon identify who they are. It may be easier to look for opportunities to assist a program that is already happening in your community rather than trying to come up with something completely new.

Another place to look is with your local schools. Contacting Principals and offering a week of service has been well received by both of us!

Sharing with your congregation the vision behind Urban Summer and asking them if they know people in need who might benefit from an Urban Summer type project is another great way to seek out opportunities to serve.

You could also simply get your young people together, share the vision with them ... and then see what they would like to offer to their community. This would probably lead to the greatest amount of "buy-in" and ownership from them.

In the Croydon Hills experience it has been good to have variety of jobs to do. A mixture between your hard labour type jobs (eg. gardening and maintenance) and the not so hard labour type jobs (eg. visiting elderly in nursing homes) is a must. Due to potential hot weather in January it is important that you are still standing at the end of the week and not completely physically exhausted.

Build the Team

Like camp leadership teams, coffee shop teams and beach mission teams ... the team for Urban Summer needs to start being built now. In the past most churches have undertaken projects themselves, but there are a few churches that have combined to do bigger projects and allow the young people of their churches to mix and experience greater diversity.

The experience of Croydon Hills in combining with Lilydale Baptist, Kilsyth South Baptist, Mooroolbark Baptist and Mt Evelyn Christian Reformed Church was an incredibly positive one. Not only were great connections made between the churches but a powerful statement was made to our community as local churches combined together.

We recommend sharing the concept and vision with your church SOON, then start sharing the concept more specifically with people. Last year at Boronia Baps – we focused on those who didn't go away to missions or camps. Our project (the boat) meant that people didn't have to take time off work to do it But that won't always be the case.

You'll need to get your team together ASAP. The reality is that the Youth Pastor/Key Leader is the best person to pilot the ship, but you will find that some of your leaders will really warm to the vision/concept ... and they just might be the people who can lead the team.

Once you've got the keen people together – you need to ensure that you have the "skills" that you need in your team! For example ... if you're going to renovate a room for a local school – make sure you have some builders, painters, and generally handy people either on the team – or available to train and coach them as needed.

Then – start to build towards the Urban Summer week. Lots of meetings aren't necessary, but ensuring that people roster the time off, that they don't forget about the project and over commit in January and that you're getting the preparation that you need done along the way is important.

Equip the Team

This about more than just teaching people how to plant trees, paint walls or make garden beds! As you can see in the other Urban Summer material – this summer we are incorporating a journal, some teaching material and some combined events to help all participants fully experience Jesus in this project.

Its not just about the task – we believe that Urban Summer can have a tremendous Spiritual Impact on the young people of your church.... potentially opening their eyes to expressions of ministry that they may simply not be otherwise exposed to.

We recommend that Youth Pastors free themselves from the logistics of the projects as much as possible to ensure that the spiritual/team impact of Urban Summer is given as much exposure as possible.

Conclusion

At Deeper, there are plenty of resources and information for your benefit – and to help you communicate the concept to the people in your church. If still you're unsure, make sure you speak to one of the churches that participated last year and gather whatever info you can.

Urban Summer is an alternative to other mission and ministry opportunities that are available to the young people of churches in Victoria. Its different, its accessible, it's fun and its meaningful. We encourage Youth Pastors and Key Leaders to at least grapple with the vision and concept, and explore the possibilities for their local area.