

# THE SIX PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE SALVATION ARMY YOUTH MINISTRY



What does 'good' youth ministry look like? Youth ministry has taken different forms across history, especially in response to times of great social change. International and Australian research suggests that effective youth ministry is dependent on how youth ministers relate to young people, how they teach and model faith, and how they help young people live their faith and engage with the modern world.

But what does good Salvation Army youth ministry look like? Within the wider Christian Church, the Salvation Army has a unique theology and mission, with a dual focus on service and evangelism to those on the margins of society. What distinctive beliefs, values and practices does effective Salvation Army youth ministry have?

To explore these questions, the Youth and Young Adults Ministry Team engaged in lived experience research with Salvation Army youth leaders about their experiences in youth ministry. As a result, we identified six categories of effective youth ministry practice. Effective Salvation Army youth ministry:

- Knows its purpose
- Focuses on young people
- Prioritises wellbeing
- Is missionally responsive
- Builds resilient disciples
- Activates and develops leaders

Let's unpack what these look like in practice.

## **KNOWS ITS PURPOSE**

Effective youth ministry has a clear understanding of what it is trying to achieve, and this shapes everything that happens. This looks like:

- Leaders and young people articulating why the ministry exists
- Activities of the youth ministry achieving their purpose
- The ministry's values reflected in their behaviour
- Their strategy is regularly reviewed so that it meets the needs of young people

## **FOCUSES ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

Effective youth ministry puts young people and their experiences at the centre of all they do. This looks like:

- Young people have fun and invite their friends
- Young people are listened to and involved in decision-making
- They allocate resources to invest in young people
- They celebrate young people and advocate for them

## **PRIORITISES WELLBEING**

Effective youth ministry cares about young people and their needs. This looks like:

- Young people are safe in their youth ministry
- Young people are supported with all aspects of their wellbeing

- Leaders have the skills to confidently respond to issues
- They have a system to ensure that young people's pastoral care needs are met

## **MISSIONALLY RESPONSIVE**

Effective youth ministry seeks to engage with young people where they are in the world. This looks like:

- They engage with the community outside of their program/church
- Leaders and young people understand the needs of their community and look for ways to serve
- They welcome and include all young people and their ministry reflects the community they are in
- Young people are involved and contribute to mission

## **BUILDS RESILIENT DISCIPLES**

Effective youth ministry helps young people to grow as followers of Jesus. This looks like:

- Young people engaged with the story of God in Scripture
- Young people with a sense of connection with God and engaged in spiritual practices
- Young people making decisions in their lives based on their faith
- Young people with connections to leaders and the wider faith community

## **ACTIVATES AND DEVELOPS LEADERS**

Effective youth ministry is dependent on recruiting and developing the right kind of youth leaders. This looks like:

- Young people have opportunities to develop their leadership skills
- They plan for new leaders and leadership transitions
- Their ministry has clear expectations for all leaders
- Their leaders are connected to a community who encourage and support each other

We would encourage you to think through how these characteristics are expressed in your youth ministry.

- What do you do well?
- What do young people appreciate about your space?
- Where are you seeing God move?
- As you seek to develop and improve, what category is an opportunity to grow?
- Who can you learn from?

There is a reflection tool available on our website to help you and your team work through each characteristic and the practices that reflect them. The Youth and Young Adults Ministry Team can help you use this as a tool to evaluate your youth ministry and remain accountable for the goals you set.

Not every youth ministry we examined excelled at every practice. But the more we develop in each of these categories, the better we'll be able to engage with young people and help them follow Jesus.