



Methodist Recorder article by Alex Lea, British Youth Council Rep

My name is Alex Lea, and it has been an incredible privilege over the last year for me to represent my fellow young people in the Methodist Church as a British Youth Council (BYC) Rep. I'm a member at Crownhill Methodist Church, in the Plymouth & Devonport Circuit and the Plymouth & Exeter District and, whilst we're tucked away down in the South West, the Youth Rep programme has opened up opportunities for me to hear the voices of children and young people and to do important work across the whole Connexion.

There are two major aspects to being a Youth Rep – the bits specific to our particular role, so for me this is my BYC work, and then the more general parts, hearing the voices of children and young people and helping them to speak into large and important conversations within the Church.

After being elected at 3Generate in November 2018, my role really began in January, when all of the Reps came together at Cliff College for the first of our three annual meetings. At these meetings we have discussed lots of important issues relating to children and young people, including the 3Generate report to Methodist Conference, which is when the Manifesto was presented, and how to respond to and discuss issues such as the Marriage and Relationships report and the global climate emergency. We also helped to plan some of the “hearing the voice” sessions at 3Generate (more on that later!!) and got the chance to bond as a team and take part in prayer and worship together.

On returning to Plymouth from our group meetings, I still managed to find myself an awful lot to do. Until August this year I was part of the ONE Programme, on a one-year internship with a performing arts based organisation called LifePlay Learning. I used some of my time there to put together a programme for taking the news about 3Generate out into local

churches, speaking to wider congregations and doing some creative and engaging “hearing the voice” activities with young people. I also created some resources to display in churches that gave a “who, what, where, why, when and how” of 3Generate, as well as talking about the Youth Reps and the Manifesto. Going into churches, talking to both the adults and the young people, engaging them with 3Generate and the issues young people are passionate about, is at the very core of what it is to be a Youth Rep, and even as I move into 2020 no longer being a Youth Rep (my term finished at 3Generate last month), this is work I’ll still make an effort to carry on doing.

Speaking of 3Generate itself, at the time of writing it’s been just over a week since I returned from this year’s event at Southport, and I couldn’t be more excited. It was really satisfying to see over a thousand children and young people speaking their minds and telling the Church about what mattered to them. The Reps were spread out across the site this year, and were tasked with hearing the voices of children and young people in whatever activities they were involved with, and then feeding this back to “the wall”. The wall was made up of cardboard bricks with different ideas or important issues raised by those attending written on them, with stickers that others could add to show they agreed or disagreed.

I was based in the sports and physicality venue, where we had a number of organised workshops, as well as hockey, tennis, football, netball and basketball, and a number of activities on the beach. We even set up a “post-match interview” area, where we’d speak to the children and young people who were taking part about sport and faith, as our way of hearing the voice. My personal highlight of the weekend though was the 9am Saturday morning beach run led by Trey Hall – I’m a massive parkrun fan and run a lot in my spare time, so I already knew it was something I would enjoy, but seeing 50 young people of all different abilities have a go, encourage and help each other, and then join in our group prayer afterwards truly blew me away.

Now that my time as a Youth Rep is up (by the time you read this I’ll have just had my 25th birthday, so I was too old to stand for re-election this year), I feel really happy looking back at an incredible year. I’ve gained a lot, made a real difference, and made so many new friends. Being a Youth Rep is something I’d recommend to anyone.