

Putting Hope into Young Lives



Mike Schultz from Bathurst Church of Christ shares how a \$5000 Synergy grant has helped establish a Teen Drop-in Centre, which has resulted in God's hope reaching the unchurched youth community



Our church is located in an area where there are a significant number of teenagers at a loose end on Friday and Saturday nights. These teenagers have been responsible for negative behaviour such as vandalism and graffiti in the area. Almost all church youth groups in the Bathurst area tend to be geared more towards Christian kids and consequently they can be a difficult place for non-Christian kids to fit into and feel a part of.

Our goal with the Drop-in centre was to establish a well-manned, secure drop-in place on Friday evenings for kids in

the neighbourhood and then attempt to bring these kids to Christ both through our example and via a 15 minute 'God Slot' time each evening.

Almost all of the funds allocated were used to purchase equipment which included a Pool Table, Fuzball Table, Table Tennis Table, X-Box machines and games, TV's, and DVD player, Computers & Cabling, a drinks fridge etc. The church office now has four online networked computers set up at a work station taking up one entire wall of the office. These computers were donated by a

local business complete with monitors. We are currently using via a network, the wireless broadband connection belonging to one of the members of our church who lives nearby. This enables the kids to play games against one another online. The computers have also been useful for our homework help corner on Tuesday afternoons. A group of six adults and a few older teens are involved in running the centre, including my wife and myself.

The church people have embraced the project amazingly and it has been great to see so many people becoming excited about what's happening. We provide a meal for the kids each night and many of these meals are supplied through a roster system by church folk who don't get physically involved in the supervision.

The centre has been operating now for about five months and we regularly get 15-16 teenagers, sometimes as many as twenty. Almost all of these are non-Christians and come from non-

church homes in the local area. Some of the kids come from a local teen refuge called Veritas House.

The program is fairly regimented with a meal served at around 7:30pm and this is followed by a video clip and discussion about God or the Bible. The kids aren't required to stay in for the "God Slot" but all games have to cease for that fifteen minute slot. So far we've not had anyone leave. I've been using a series of short 5 minute video clips about God and Creation and some of them have asked really good questions. When there are other special

youth outreach events on, we endeavour to plug them into these activities as well.

We have the Teen Centre advertised in the free diary section of the local paper but most of the kids have come through word of mouth promotion from other teenagers. I have been thrilled to see some of the really difficult teenagers from the local high school turning up regularly and behaving respectfully and fitting in. This is particularly rewarding because I do some casual teaching there and it's helped me to build a relationship on a different level with these kids.

