Cotham Parish Church is a liberal and inclusive Christian congregation which celebrates the full diversity of human identities, including LGBT+ and the God-given variety of faith journeys. We are prayerful, kind, creative, committed to social justice, lively, open-minded, multi-generational, talkative, and quite good at making coffee...

This “Student Welcome” project came about as a result of a request from a group of students who are regular worshippers at our church. They felt that we could extend our welcome to local students, particularly those who feel isolated, or not comfortable with evangelical expressions of faith. They and we
hope that we might become a sane and loving resource to a wider group of students at this formative stage of their lives, and that others might be encouraged merely by knowing that this distinctive church is active in their community.

The project has two phases and you kindly gave us £250 for phase 1 which was a free “Welcome to Cotham” brunch on 7th October 2018.

This event was put together by a team of c 10 volunteers ranging in age from 12 to 70+, including 3 current students.

We created a project plan and took a well organised approach to publicity and catering. We put up a large banner at the top of St Michael’s Hill, made social media contact with various student bodies, liaised with the High Kingsdown Community Association, and put c 300 invitations through local doors, gave out c 200 more including via the multi faith chaplaincy.

In our application to you we thought we might get between 10 and 25 students attend. We had 12 attend on the 7th. They came for our Harvest service, and stayed for the brunch, chatting with several members of our congregation. There was a really lovely atmosphere with no-one rushing away. We were further encouraged when c 3 more new faces attended church on the 14th. So as at today, we’ve engaged with 15 people who probably wouldn’t have found us otherwise. Some of these have already come back for further events such as our Monday food and discussion group. As far as I’m aware they are all from Bristol Uni.

So, some positives that have already come out of the project are:
- c15 students attracted to our liberal and inclusive church.
- Several hundred more will have heard about us.
- We’ve developed a stronger relationship with the High Kingsdown Community Association.
- We’ve learnt that our publicity can work (we’ve always been quite publicity shy).
- We’re encouraged to run more student focused events in future.
- We’ve begun a relationship with the community liaison office of the university and hope this can be developed in the future.
What didn’t go so well:

- We’d prepared beautiful follow up leaflets, and intended to get people’s email addresses for follow up but, too busy chatting, we didn’t manage to give these/ get these consistently. Next time we’ll make sure this is more actively managed.
- We forgot to take any photos of students whilst they were here. Sorry! Will learn from this for next time.

Looking ahead, here are some of the things that we’ll be doing to continue maintaining good community relationship:

- We’ve created a “tea, toast and mindful space” event which will run every Thursday from 5pm. All are welcome and we hope this will be a positive meeting space for students and other local people.
- Our stronger relationship with High Kingsdown Community Association means we’re discussing creating a Homeless Lunch, a Community Ceilidh and finding other ways to support these neighbours. As you’re probably aware High Kingsdown comprises a lot of students, and non students.
- We’re hoping to shift the “opening hours” of the church from 9.30-11.30 every weekday to 12-2pm every weekday to make it more accessible to local people and students.
- We will run future events which specifically invite students into our multi-generational and diverse community.

We’re very grateful for Bristol University, High Kingsdown Community Association, to our volunteers, to Ed Davies at the multifaith chaplaincy for their support of our endeavours here.

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