

Making Theological Connexions

Edited by Nigel Pimlott



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This short booklet seeks to examine what connection there is between the Government's Connexions service for young people and Christian faith-based youth work.

The booklet is designed as a tool to help youth workers and others theologically reflect upon the Connexions service and to examine how the service impacts their youth work both in practice and in ethos.

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The Connect Spiritual Development Project is a partnership between Frontier Youth Trust, YMCA and The Church Army.

Introduction

What is Connexions? (CNXS)

Connexions is the government's new support service for all young people aged 13 - 19 in England. The service aims to provide integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for this group and to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life.

Connexions is not only a service, but also a strategy for helping young people take their full and active part in society, so that unemployment is reduced, health is improved, crime reduced and social exclusion eliminated.

The success of Connexions depends on the involvement of young people - listening to and taking account of their views in the design and delivery of Connexions will be essential.

What will it do?

Connexions joins up the work of six government departments and their agencies and organisations on the ground, together with private and voluntary sector groups and youth and careers services. It brings together all the services and support young people need during their teenage years. It offers practical help with choosing the right courses and careers, including access to broader personal development through activities like sport, performing arts and volunteering activities. It will also provide help and advice on issues like drug abuse, sexual health and homelessness.

How will it work?

Connexions is being delivered through local partnerships working to national planning guidance. The partnerships will cover the same geographical areas as the Learning and Skills Councils. They will have flexibility to meet local needs using the design that works best. Delivery of the service will be managed and monitored by local management committees, which usually cover the same areas as local authorities.

Connexions offers differentiated and integrated support to young people. All young people will have access to a personal adviser. For some young people this may be just for careers advice, for others it may involve more in-depth support to help identify barriers to learning and find solutions brokering access to more specialist support. The personal advisers will work in a range of settings, schools, colleges, one-stop shops, community centres and on an outreach basis.

The above information is taken from the Connexions web site:

www.connexions.gov.uk/partnerships/index.cfm?CategoryID=3

CNXS is based upon 8 key principles

- Raising Aspirations
- Meeting Individual Need
- Taking Account of Young People's Views
- Inclusion
- Partnership
- Community Involvement and Neighbourhood Renewal
- Extending Opportunity and Equality of Opportunity
- Evidence Based Practice

It does appear, that perhaps for the first time, there is a coherent approach from central government to working with young people. These eight core principles are ones which would be compatible with most approaches to youth work. They would be values to which faith-based practice could readily subscribe, and indeed it could be argued that they should already be at the heart of all effective Christian youth work.

Implications for faith based workers

CNXS is not a short-term solution to a long standing problem. It is new, it is coherent and it is here to stay for the foreseeable future. The lines of practice around which youth work has historically existed have been redrawn. Failure to engage with the CNXS service on either a conceptual level or with a local partnership will potentially leave individuals and organisations isolated from mainstream services for young people.

The Church has often been reluctant to engage with statutory services for a number of reasons. In some cases differences in values and ethos have made co-operation difficult, there has often been suspicion on both sides regarding approaches, motivation and professionalism. The time demands of building effective working relationships have also been a factor for churches relying primarily on volunteer staff. Trust has also broken down on occasions when a change of Government has led to a change of policy, leaving projects and participants high and dry and hampering future engagement.

There have been assurances that the CNXS service is here to stay and it would appear that failure to work in partnership with CNXS could have long term implications for faith-based (and for that matter any) organisations working with young people. Many faith-based organisations are ideally placed to help deliver the CNXS service. They are in contact with young people, know the geographical area, understand the problems and issues affecting young people and in many cases have volunteer and paid staff doing some remarkable work.

If CNXS is about genuine partnership then faith-based organisations need to take their place at the heart of the local CNXS partnerships.

The following pages seek to explore some of the theology, which might be applied to the CNXS service.

What is Theological Reflection?

There are many ways of doing theological reflection and there are many definitions about what the term means.

For some theological reflection is about the relationship between Christian tradition, current events and God.

“For me, theological reflection is a three way conversation among our ancestors in the church, my everyday experience and God.”

Roberta Bondi

Others see theological reflection as a tool to make sense of what is happening in the world.

Theological reflection means bringing a faith perspective to the realities we look at in order to work for social justice.”

James Hug

Yet others have provided a more precise definition.

“Theological Reflection is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue, that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.” (Killen & de Beer p.viii)

This booklet has chosen a particular model of reflection looking for parallels between the Christian faith, good and holistic youth work practice and the Connexions Service. We have taken some of the central themes, concepts and roles found within the gospel and sought to reflect on the extent to which these are manifested in the Connexions Service.

It is not intended to draw strict comparisons between components of Connexions and the gospel, but merely look for the images, metaphors, issues, roles and stories which might resonate with both. By doing this we are able to draw out practical implications for Christian living by correlating lived experience with Christian understanding.

Killen and de Beer (*The Art of Theological Reflection*) highlight the extreme viewpoints of being completely certain about something (standpoint of certitude - where belief bears no resemblance to reality) and alternatively, being completely overwhelmed with uncertainty (standpoint of self assurance – where uncertainties dominate so much that we rely solely on experience) This booklet has sought to straddle these two viewpoints and approach the subject from the ‘standpoint of exploration’ which involves questioning, seeking to understand and attempting to

make sense of the experience of Connexions to date in relation to Christian paradigms.

Three big questions underpin this booklet:

- What does Christian Faith have to say about Connexions?
- What does Connexions have to say to our faith?
- What are the implications for youth workers and churches in addressing these questions?

Specifically, we will be looking at critiquing Connexions, exploring theological themes within Connexions and looking for any signs of God within the service. This type of reflection could be applied to any piece of youth work, social work or other similar discipline. Indeed, many of the reflections and observations could also be said to be true of youth work generically. Space, however, does not allow further analysis of this dynamic.

By definition, this approach is more likely to reveal shortcomings in the service as it is comparing it to the values and principles of the Kingdom. In doing this, the purpose is not to run down Connexions, merely provide reflections for further thought which will aid good practice and further development.

Connexions and a Theology of Optimism

Some might argue that Christian youth work is different from secular youth work. It is also suggested that the faith of a Christian youth worker provides a unique motivation for the youth work they do.

“Christian care for young people is based on the value each individual has as an ‘object of God’s redeeming love’ (Warner 1942:45). The Christian youth worker is seen as a servant of the kingdom of God rather than of a political or social agenda.”

Carole Pugh

Whilst it may be tempting to separate ‘Christian’ and ‘Secular’ the value of doing so must be questioned. It is perfectly possible to be ‘Christian’ and work in a secular context. The table below highlights the possible range of expressions that a Christian youth worker might be engaged in. These expressions are not always exclusive and a Christian youth worker may be working in a number of settings at the same time covering more than one of the criteria set out.

Youth work with no spiritual content.	Youth work with a spiritual but not necessarily Christian content.	Youth work based on Christian principles focusing on a social action approach.	Christian youth work adopting an evangelical approach.
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Taken from www.infed.org

This could well be the case for a Christian youth worker who is engaged with CNXS. They may be working for a church (perhaps facilitating bible studies and worship sessions), undertaking schools work (highlighting spiritual and moral issues), involved in a community drugs project (social action) and helping CNXS engage at risk young people. In each of these cases the ‘spiritual’ dynamic of their work may have a different emphasis, whilst their Christian faith should underpin all their work. This has been my personal experience.

I wear different hats at different times whilst always seeking to be faithful and to work with integrity with regard to my beliefs. I am seeking to be incarnational in my ministry. If this philosophy can be adopted, then numerous exciting opportunities can arise by engaging with CNXS and the vision behind the CNXS strategy and service.

The following table draws on a few of the key aspects of the CNXS Service (taken from *A Vision for 2006*, DfES). It highlights a specific aspect of the service and also presents possible opportunities for faith based groups to engage with that aspect of the service. The suggestions are not exhaustive, merely suggestions as to how we can practically express incarnational faith within the CNXS service.

CNXS Vision and Challenge	Opportunities for Faith Based Groups
High quality service for young people	In the past some faith based groups felt excluded by the processes relating to statutory youth service provision. The new CNXS agenda has created more of a level playing field for those faith based groups committed to high quality and best practice to be involved.
Young people at the heart of the service	Many faith based groups have had young people at the heart of their service for many years. In deed some groups have pioneered this way of working. CNXS provides an opportunity to develop such practices.
Partnerships the chosen way of working	Faith based groups are usually very committed to their local community and know in detail what is happening locally. This provides an excellent resource for any partnership working
Sharing information with partner agencies	It has been almost impossible in the past for faith based workers to access information from statutory sources which would help their work with young people. As systems are established for an effective flow of information, this will enhance the service all partners are able to offer young people.
Services tailored to local needs	The 'Heineken' effect is upon us! In other words, faith based organisations can reach the parts other organisations cannot reach. Local people who are part of local groups, being committed to local communities are essential elements of effective social inclusion.
Performance targets outcome driven	More often than not faith based groups do effective work with young people. In the past many have not recorded or monitored their work. If these skills can be implemented then they will be ideally positioned to help CNXS meet its targets.
Reduce numbers 16-18 year olds in NEET*	Given the right encouragement, faith based groups can be some of the most effective providers of training and employment opportunities.
Improve young people's behaviour	Many youth workers will acknowledge that behaviour often only improves in the security of effective relationships built with young people. Faith based groups can

	provide these consistent relationships better than most.
Reduce number young people involved in crime	If this vision is to become a reality, a long term consistent approach is required – not a knee jerk short term scheme. Local churches are their for the long haul and can offer that consistency.
Better outcomes for young people from black and ethnic minorities	Perhaps this is one of the big challenges for faith based organisations. There is still much work to be done to firmly establish that ‘there is neither Greek nor Jew’ etc in our church structures and church expressions.

*NEET – Not engaged in education, employment or training

Youth Work and Liberation Theology

Liberation theology, a term first used in 1973 by Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Roman Catholic priest, is a school of thought originally prominent among Latin American Catholics. The essence is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ demands that the Church concentrate its efforts on liberating the people of the world from poverty and oppression.

Liberation theology thrives in countries which are blighted by poverty. It emphasises issues of social justice and takes a very hands on, pragmatic approach to oppression and injustice. Although space forbids an in-depth study (see Bibliography for some recommended further reading on this subject), we can make the following observations about links between liberation theology and youth work in Britain today.

It is clear, particularly in areas of social deprivation and hardship, that many youth workers end up working from a liberation theology perspective. In other words, they often become the 'liberators' of young people who might be considered oppressed and potentially excluded from both society and the church.

Youth workers tend to act in a liberation style because they are practitioners. The practicalities many youth workers face can bring them into conflict with both Church and statutory authorities. Many people equate issues concerning behaviour, drug use, damage to buildings and lack of respect for authority with anti social behaviour. In the eyes of many youth workers, they are responses to oppression and brokenness.

Youth workers often have to work in a place of tension, making difficult value judgements. The desire to help young people through building intentional and genuine relationships with them often appears at odds with the desire to challenge behaviour and address issues.

This tension for the Christian youth worker is augmented when they become so passionate about seeking justice for young people that they lose sight of their own need for objective theological reflection on the issues and the situations.

CNXS, seeking as it does to reach out to those who find themselves marginalized and excluded, could be perceived theologically as an ideal vehicle for a liberation approach. It could however, be argued that CNXS is primarily designed as a means of social control, to develop conformity amongst young people. These opposing viewpoints raise key questions, not only for CNXS, but for the Church. Are our churches primarily seeking to liberate or to encourage conformity?

CNXS – liberator or control mechanism? The answer to this question will greatly affect how we perceive the organisation from a Christian point of view.

Where is 'Salvation' in CNXS?

If we begin to take a thematic approach in our theological reflection on the CNXS service, it is interesting to look at the concept of salvation from a CNXS perspective. In the CNXS context, who is 'salvation' for? On one level it is for a specific group of young people:

"While the main clients for the CNXS service will be all young people aged 13-19 in England, particular priority will go to the young people who are at greatest risk of not making a successful transition to adulthood."

Introducing CNXS Course Manual

On the other hand, CNXS is a universal service for all – an inclusive service for all young people.

The circumstances from which CNXS offers 'salvation' and 'deliverance', are those which generally contribute to poverty and social exclusion, namely:

- Low income
- Unemployment
- Offending
- Poor health

This process of 'salvation' and 'deliverance' can have two-fold benefit. Firstly there will be a benefit for those young people who gain something from the service and secondly, society as a whole will be delivered from the problems caused by young people becoming excluded, which so often results in under-achievement, criminal activity, substance abuse and health problems.

John Calvin's vision to change the whole of Geneva society can be drawn upon here as a theological example of how salvation can be viewed not simply from an individual perspective, but from a societal one.

In the context of CNXS, salvation comes via:

- Education
- Independent living

Salvation is equated with:

- Happiness
- Further education
- Good employment opportunities and positive career choices

There does appear here to be an assumption that for young people, further education and employment are a prerequisite for happiness and fulfilment. A recent senior manager for a local CNXS partnership stated that 'CNXS is an economic service'. In other words, it is about economics, increasing the capacity to earn wealth and having a benefit for society as a whole. This viewpoint focuses on an external rather than internal change and benefit. It would be interesting to consider

how the outworking of CNXS, particularly with regard to the relational aspects of the work, might contribute towards young people's confidence and self-esteem

From a CNXS point of view, the process of salvation is achieved in 3 key ways:

- Education and training
- The influence of some form of mentor (discipleship?)
- Achievement

Here, it is worth exploring 'Who, (or what) 'saves' the young person?' Is it the individual themselves, taking responsibility for their own learning and development and thus working out their own salvation? Or, is it the Personal Advisor, who comes alongside with advice and wisdom, thus bringing the revelation necessary for transformation? (See **Christ and CNXS** and **The Holy Spirit as PA?**)

Christ and CNXS?

A key concept in any piece of theological reflection is to examine the 'role of Christ' (or a Christ like figure) in a theory, structure, or hypothesis. The CNXS service allows us to do this quite simply. In this section we are not suggesting that a CNXS Personal Advisor is a Christ like figure, merely reflecting upon the concept of the centrality of the role.

In the past a vulnerable young person could find themselves in contact with a vast number of professionals - teacher, social worker, education welfare officer, drugs workers, Youth Offending Team worker, health worker, careers officer, youth worker to name but a few. To avoid the confusion and complexity this brought about, CNXS seeks to appoint a Personal Advisor to work consistently and seamlessly with an individual young person and all the organisations involved in that young person's welfare. Through this approach, the service seeks to ensure a sense of continuity and consistency as the process (of 'salvation') is undergone.

It is interesting to consider the role of a Personal Adviser (PA) and compare them to a 'Christ'-like figure.

CNXS describes the role of a PA as:

- Engaging
- Enabling
- Co-ordinating
- Advocating
- Supporting
- Brokering
- Working Together

It could be argued from a theological perspective that the PA could be perceived as:

- Saviour
- Redeemer
- Lord
- 'I am' In the Gospel of John, Christ reveals himself through the 'I am's'
- Intercessor
- Mediator
- Prince of peace

We must beware of stretching the analogy too far and endowing the PA with the qualities of a messianic figure. However, there are other similarities. Jesus worked with people where they were and not where He (or others) thought they should be. PAs seek to do the same. They look to treat all young people as individuals, seeking to engage them where they are at, in ways in which the young people themselves would like to be engaged. Furthermore, the goal is to draw young people in from the margins of society - to bring them to a place of fulfilment and acceptance.

Jesus made it clear that He only did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19). It would be interesting to consider who or what constitutes the PA's Father figure and whether that relationship works in the same way?

Holy Spirit as Personal Adviser?

Having addressed the issue of the role of Christ we now turn to analogies with Holy Spirit. If we begin by looking at the Greek word 'parakletos', which Jesus uses in John 14:25 to describe the Holy Spirit, there appear to be several parallels which can be drawn with the role of the PA. This word, often translated 'counsellor' or 'comforter', was the term used in a court of justice to denote legal aid, representation and advocacy. It speaks of one who comes alongside to give help or assistance. Again, it must be stressed that these are merely reflections not attempts to attribute CNXS to be a new part of the trinity!

The role of the Spirit in the life of the believer is a complex one, which appears to fluctuate and change depending on the circumstances and the individual involved. Ambiguity surrounds the workings of the Spirit and it is often difficult to discern and describe the precise activities of Holy Spirit, but the bible illustrates at various times the ways in which the Spirit operates. From this we can draw out the following as key aspects of the work of the Spirit:

- Equality
- Partnership
- Teaching
- Comfort
- Guidance
- Advice
- Respect
- Relationship
- Support
- Wisdom
- Advocacy

It is evident that the PA could be seen as a figure who has the potential to work in these ways. The PA comes alongside an individual, working with them in different ways at different times, adopting various roles depending on the situation.

Even the ambiguity we see in the working of the Spirit finds a parallel with the role of the PA. At the time of writing there remains much confusion about exactly what a PA does. The flexible, adaptable nature of the job requires an approach which can be altered to suit different circumstances.

The area of personal responsibility is also a key one to consider in this regard. Just as the Spirit does not remove responsibility from the believer, the PA seeks to enable and equip the young person to take responsibility for their own life and make wise and informed choices.

Reflecting on Key Words

This is a list of some of the key words and phrases that CNXS uses in its publicity and training material. Take a look at the list.

Best start in life	Assessment	Self-development
Advice	Career exploration	Outreach
Planning	Clients	Flexibility
Implementation	Career management	Transition
Review	Integration	Inclusion
Guidance	Excellence	Contract
Access	Targets	Combating exclusion
Education	Personal adviser	Making a difference
Support	Partnership	Card
Equip	Success	

Although time and space do not allow an in-depth analysis of these words and phrases, it is an interesting exercise to spend some time reflecting upon them and their significance. The following questions might be helpful:

- To what extent does this word or phrase reflect Christian values?
- Where is God in this word or phrase?
- How might the CNXS understanding of this word or phrase compare with a Christian understanding of it?

It might be an equally interesting exercise for Christian workers to spend some time reflecting on words and concepts, which do not explicitly appear within the CNXS framework. A few examples would be:

Healing	Protection	Justice
Spirituality	Peace	Spiritual Development
Grace	Unconditional love	Compassion
Forgiveness		

This second list perhaps highlights the differences between CNXS and generic faith-based youth work. CNXS is about advice, a service, education and training. Whilst it no doubt seeks to be holistic, in reality it isn't. We could argue that many of the problems socially-excluded young people experience need 'healing' - healing of rejection, abuse, hopelessness and apathy.

CNXS emphasises education and training for young people so that they can obtain good jobs. There is a danger here, as we have already considered, that the 'salvation' CNXS is seeking to offer is fundamentally about economics. How does this kind of approach, addressing almost exclusively material needs, begin to speak to the spiritual and emotional needs of young people?

Those of us who work in areas of the country experiencing high levels of social and economic disadvantage understand that throwing money at a problem is only part of the way forward. Many problems are endemic and whole communities need healing

and restoring to what God intended. We cannot escape the fact that we live in a fallen world.

Underpinning the way Personal Advisors work is the Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR) process. Putting it briefly, the process seeks to identify a young person's relative strengths and weaknesses across a range of issues: life skills, self image, motivation, relationships, risk of offending, housing, income, health, basic skills etc. This 'mapping' helps Personal Advisors determine what help, if any, a young person needs. The list is helpful and enables some sort of assessment to be made across the four key areas; education and employment, emotional and behavioural development, personal health and family and environmental factors. The weakness lies in the absence of spiritual and faith matters.

This lack of attention to 'spiritual' factors is a major weakness in the CNXS strategy. Bearing this in mind the question must be asked, can CNXS ever be redemptive? Or at best will it only offer sticking plaster and not true, long term, sustainable solutions to hurting people and communities? Furthermore, has it the redemptive capacity to do what the government wishes? Only time will tell. Initial reactions, analysis and opinions are mixed.

More information about this APIR can be found via CNXS web site and resource catalogue.

Metaphorically Speaking

There are several metaphors which can be helpful to us as we consider CNXS from a theological perspective.

Firstly, we can consider CNXS from the point of view of life as 'journey'. We could look specifically at how different aspects of journeying are reflected in the challenges and opportunities encountered by young people in our society. The choices and directions taken by young people have a very specific effect on their destination, and we could argue that the role of the youth worker, and perhaps that of the CNXS pa is to accompany young people on this journey, sharing their travelling experiences and encouraging them as they explore particular paths and face specific challenges. CNXS could also be seen as a kind of signpost on this journey, particularly relevant in times of transition, when decisions about particular direction need to be made. In fact, one of the major roles a PA has is that of 'signposting' a young person towards appropriate help and advice.

'Metamorphosis' is also an important metaphor when it comes to considering the work of CNXS. The teenage years are in many senses a key time of change. Young people are maturing emotionally, physically, sexually, mentally and spiritually. These changes have all kinds of implications both for the young people themselves and for those who work with them. CNXS can be seen to encourage change of certain kinds, although as has already been mentioned, the focus is on specific aspects of change. It is interesting to consider how faith-based work responds to the changes young people experience. Are faith-based approaches more holistic, or do they simply focus on different aspects of the metamorphosis?

The metaphor of 'shepherd' is one that is a familiar one in Scripture (Psalm 23, John 10 are examples) and one that may be helpful in reflecting on the role of the CNXS PA. The picture here of one who guides, watches over, protects and cares for, might contain within it some aspects of this role. We might here wish to explore the 'power' issues involved in this kind of work with young people. To what extent does the PA lead and to what extent do they come alongside? In looking at this metaphor, we could also consider the role of CNXS as an organisation 'shepherding' young people on a larger national scale.

'Light' as a metaphor could give us quite a lot of material for theological reflection. The extent to which CNXS is seeking to bring illumination and revelation into the lives of individual young people and the extent to which it succeeds in doing so, gives us some food for thought. How guidance and showing the way can be compared to bringing light is also an interesting area to consider. Does the use of this kind of metaphor imply that young people are in darkness? Is a lack of education or training a form of darkness? What is the nature of the light that CNXS is seeking to bring? What values does this reflect?

We have looked only briefly at these areas. There is much more scope for reflection and there are many other possible metaphors that could be considered.

CNXS is Like the Church!

I recently attended a CNXS training course. The session began with the tutor explaining that the course was going to be presented according to the vision of CNXS from the Connexions Service National Unit. The tutor went on to say that she knew that this was not how things worked out on the ground, but this was the pure vision – how it was meant to be. As the session went on a real sense of frustration developed within the group. What we were hearing bore little resemblance to the day-to-day realities of the way CNXS was outworking at grass-roots level.

This parallels my experience of the Church. We have some pointers, some models, some miracles, some great stories from the Bible and from history, but my own personal experience so often seems to fall short of these. God's original blueprint for Church is great, but it seems to run into trouble when it hits the street, when it encounters real people, with real problems where sometimes there are no answers.

This is not to run down the Church. As I have grown older, I have come to appreciate the philosophy that, 'best will do'. We cannot be perfect all the time, especially where people are involved. Church is evolving – it is fluid and it has different expressions, different styles and different emphases in different contexts. In a similar way CNXS is evolving and we can expect to see it outworked in very different ways in different communities and contexts.

The Church, reflecting the love, glory and grace of God should be a model of equality of opportunity, justice, accessibility, unconditional love, salvation, and a host of other things that sadly become distorted when we humans become involved. In a similar way CNXS struggles to express the values it claims to hold as fundamental. Politics, inter-agency striving, financial implications, competitiveness and defensiveness can all become barriers to effective working.

It is an interesting exercise to take some time to consider the kind of church that would most effectively facilitate CNXS. Take a moment to reflect again on the core values that were identified earlier and think about the outworkings of CNXS, which are familiar to you. In which denominational – or non-denominational - setting would these be most effectively expressed?

It is also interesting to make comparisons between the respective missions of the Church and Connexions. Areas of commonality can be found when we consider values such as: being 'all things to all people' (1 Cor 9:22), reaching the lost (Luke 19:10), empowering the oppressed (Luke 4:18) and seeking to give hope for all (Col 1:23).

How is Failure Handled?

Like millions of others I have watched the 'fly on the wall' documentary about Jamie Oliver's fantastic attempt to offer some excluded young people the chance to work professionally as chefs in his new restaurant.

Many young people applied, many were rejected, some were chosen for the training and some of those graduated from the course. Some dropped out along the way. Viewers shared in Jamie's trauma at not being able to motivate some of the young people. Jamie simply couldn't understand why a young person would not respond to the opportunity given.

The truth is, these 'failures', as well as providing compulsive viewing, demonstrated the magnitude of the challenge that faces those who seek to engage with these kind of young people: the extent to which individuals have become disenfranchised and the low level of aspirations held by so many!

How we deal with young people 'failing the system' is an important dynamic. Are they abandoned if they do not come up to the mark or is there a plan 'B'? The redemptive capacity of any programme like CNXS is crucial. It will be interesting to see what happens to those that continue to fall through the system as the CNXS service develops.

"I met a client last week who was addicted to heroin. I offered lots of help, advise and pointed out the consequences of his continued addiction. He listened and then said he didn't want any help and would take his chances."
Personal Advisor

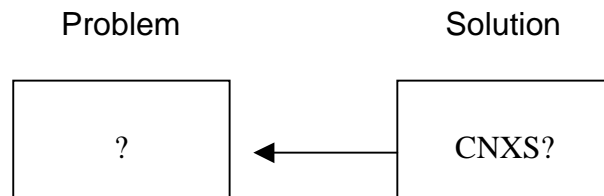
From a Christian perspective it has always been a personal goal to help people who seek my counsel to discover their own destiny and calling. God has a plan! Only time will tell if CNXS seeks to help those most marginalized to discover their own sense of vocation and calling or whether the goal will be to get young people into education and training at any price and whatever the course.

If the latter scenario is adopted, young people will remain unfulfilled and will continue to 'fail'. This was Jamie's experience. Some simply had no desire to work as chefs – from a Christian perspective we might say that they were simply not 'called' to this kind of work. They were unmotivated, unenthusiastic and unwilling. My prayer is that they will one day discover the thing (or things), which will motivate, enthuse and excite them.

CNXS is new. So far a full analysis of its success is not possible. How it handles failure would be one of my key criteria on how successful it is.

Are There Answers?

Is it acceptable to say there are 'no answers' to the problems of socially excluded young people? Can we ever hope to have a truly inclusive society? The reality is, we live in a fallen world. A fallen world consists of injustice, pain, suffering, poverty and lack of hope. Perhaps a better question would be to ask, 'Is CNXS the solution to the problems currently experienced by many young people in our society?'



Can this solution solve the problem? Are there other solutions?

Many voluntary sector organisations (and others) have worked for many years in ways that pre-existed the CNXS service. Without having the title, many youth workers have been PAs. The degrees of success they have achieved have been varied, but my own experience and research would indicate that the model of 'getting alongside young people' is a good one.

The challenge for both faith-based communities and CNXS is how to deploy limited resources to overcome massive hurdles which demand complex solutions. The temptation to take on too much and spread resources too thinly in the face of overwhelming demand has to be overcome. There is a major need to adopt flexible working hours, recognise that this type of work is expensive, and not become too overbearing in collecting and disseminating masses of management information.

A few things have to be done effectively. Confidence has to be built and stories from which we can learn have to be told.

Conclusion

The similarities between the CNXS service and the Church are striking.

Both have a great ethos and mission, both work in a fallen world and seek to deliver the individual and redeem society. Both have at their heart a desire to combat poverty, injustice and lost opportunity. The challenge for both is to make these ideals work effectively 'on the street'.

Inter agency (inter church) arguments can restrict the ability of partnerships to deliver their mission. Those in need of 'salvation' may not respond to the message. The way the message is delivered may in itself be off-putting.

The list and parallels are almost endless. The jury is still out on CNXS. Sadly, many have already made up their mind about the relevance and effectiveness of the Church and the news is not encouraging.

Perhaps there can be hope for both CNXS and the Church if faith-based organisations can rise to the challenge and do their best in helping the CNXS service be effective. The opportunities certainly exist in the way CNXS has been set up to encourage voluntary sector participation. If faith-based organisations can do this, the young people of our nation will be better off and you never know, but they and society as a whole, might just end up thanking the Church.

If churches bury their heads in the sand then they will only have themselves to blame if they are disregarded. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that in days to come youth workers and/or organisations will have to be registered with Government (and OFSTED inspected!). This is already the case with child minders and in other countries.

"The CNXS programme is not perfect, but it could be the best opportunity this government is going to give the church to get alongside young people and to make a difference because they are not going to be giving money to other areas of youth work."

Iain Hoskins Perspectives – Summer 2002

CNXS is here to stay, and although it has many flaws, it does offer the kind of opportunities for involvement that previous statutory initiatives have not. As people who have a desire to work both effectively and professionally with young people, surely we cannot afford to miss such an opportunity. Some organisations may find the 'good practice' issues raised by such involvement a challenge, others may discover challenges in values and perspectives. My experience, however, is that as we enter into partnership with those involved in this kind of work, we discover many who share our love for young people and our commitment to them, many who are as eager as we are to see effective, empowering work undertaken, and many from whom we can learn as we move forward in this new millennium.