



Helping churches and schools bring RE to life in Reading and beyond

REinspired's Volunteer Training Session – September 2018



The place was buzzing as we started our training early that morning; our speaker, Julie Easton, a teacher of 25 years and currently an RE Coordinator at a local primary school, gave us a full account of her research into RE and Autism. It was so encouraging to have 55 of our Reading volunteers who came to hear our speaker and be part of our training for primary and secondary school sessions this term – thank you for coming; we are extremely grateful to have you working alongside us.

Julie spoke to us about why it is important to choose their strategies in helping children who have autism to learn about RE; using a timetable rather than random lessons gives reassurance; using figures, or little people, to illustrate a story. Autistic children have problems empathising and have difficulty comprehending abstract ideas and concept formation (eg tell an autistic child to "sit in a circle" and they will literally sit in the middle). Neuro-typical people link ideas naturally but autistic children learn each fact separately and need to have the links explained to them. Social stories are effectively used to explain abstract concepts, ie, for Key Stage 1, friendship; Key Stage 2, forgiveness. She found children could express their opinions and even change them during these discussions as they went through the school. Children with autism develop skills of learning and communication at a slower rate so this school's way of teaching is helping them overcome some of their difficulties.



<< *It's been helpful to refresh our minds and our approach in our sessions and to be mindful of these special children in our preparations.* >>



As we look to the start of Christmas sessions, two of these prayer stations concentrated our thoughts on light.

1. Visualise a golden light with you; imagine this is the Holy Spirit – who would you like to pass it onto? Think about your friends and put a thumb print on the string lying on the paper for each of them.

2. God of Light – In the beginning let there be light, God said, and he was pleased with what He saw. It's that same light shining today. What do you love about light? What are the most awesome lights you have ever seen? Write or draw what you love then attach to the back of the dark box. Use the magic pen/light to see what others have written and thank God for his gift of light.



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3. A prayerful focus on our local primary and secondary schools; our volunteers were encouraged to write prayers on 'red bricks' for the schools, pupils, students and teachers. Special moments; special prayers.

After prayer stations volunteers were invited to go to their workshops. Our team leaders were amazed at how the talk had affected the volunteers as they worked through the different activities: creative story-telling, guided drama and role on the wall. This time we had a fourth workshop dedicated to our secondary schools team; their time to learn together and hone their skills for the sessions that are coming up.

Creative story telling

Volunteers were taught the story, shown how to use the figures, and practiced how to ask wondering and open questions. Feedback – volunteers felt that using Godly Play and story bags are a good way to build bridges in helping children with autism.



Role on the wall

This technique helps children to draw out the character of a person from a story or piece of text; a body shape is drawn on a huge piece of paper or card; they fill in with thoughts and comments inside and outside of the body shape. Yr4 pupils will use this technique in their Christmas session to delve deeper into the people in the nativity story, e.g. shepherds, wise man and Mary.

Feedback - Volunteers suggested that using different coloured pens might help children with autism differentiate between what are the facts we know about the character (perhaps written in pencil outside the body shape), and what that character might be feeling or thinking, (perhaps written in different colours inside the body shape).

Guided Drama



The team leader led the volunteers through the Good Samaritan story; they'll be sharing this with Yr4 pupils in the Christmas session this term. Volunteers were encouraged to explain the role to each pupil; if a pupil didn't want to join in the drama there could hold up the 'boo' and hooray' cards at the appropriate time. Practicing the drama in this way is really

effective in helping volunteers be more comfortable and confident. The stage, the mat, is where the action is going to take place. Using freeze-frame questions helps to unpack what was going on, so, volunteers, let's have a go! ... Use questions like: to the robbers, Priest and Levite ... why are you doing that? Do you always treat others like this? To the Jewish man lying on the road, hurting ... how are you feeling? what do you think of those robbers? – some insightful questions.

Secondary



85% of volunteers in this group were new to REinspired. The workshop covered REinspired's ethos and how we work with teachers and students. The group discussed how open questions help to bring out the student's thoughts and then how to respond to the student's questions.

Volunteers practiced the 'Diamond 9' technique which is a ranking and sorting exercise for an individual or for small groups. Statements are ranked in order of importance as to whether you agree with the statement. Volunteers will be using this exercise with students in the up and coming GCSE session, [The Role of the local church in Britain](#).

Feedback from volunteers was wonderful ::

"Thank you – always encouraging and challenging. Very special to be able to meet with others who 'get' what we do and are passionate about this work."