



Gungahlin Uniting Church

Building a vibrant family and young people's ministry



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Introduction

This plan has been developed by the Church Council of Gungahlin Uniting Church (GUC). It provides a way forward to growing a sustainable, vibrant family and young people's¹ ministry which gives young people and their families meaningful opportunities to grow in faith and to develop positive connections and relationships. It builds on existing programs which reach out to those at GUC and in the community.

The plan is consistent with child safe policies which emphasise the importance of protecting and nurturing children within our church community, and which calls us to create an environment where every child feels valued, safe, and empowered to flourish spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Focusing on young people and their families will also help GUC grow. We have enormous potential in Gungahlin, where the median age is only 32, where there are almost 24,000 families and where 23% of the population is under the age of 15².

GUC is a multi-generational and multi-cultural church. This plan will be underpinned by a intergenerational approach to ministry. The plan does not seek to prioritise young people and families at the expense of other members of the congregation. It does, however, recognize that we need to do more to support young people to develop and mature in their relationship with God, to provide them and families with greater opportunities for connection, and for GUC to grow as a multi-generational congregation.

Links to GUC, Presbytery and Synod's Mission plans

This plan gives life to GUC's mission plan in relation to children's ministry: *"GUC hopes to expand our children's programs, both within the church and as an outreach. This will mean we will need to grow the number of young families attending worship and to develop worship and study that meaningfully connects with them and their children and helps them explore their faith as individuals and as families"*³.

As we seek to be more accommodating with families and young people through this plan, we will also be living out commitments from our Presbytery's Mission Plan⁴:

- *Helping each other grow connections with our local communities – Expressing what we do in different ways to cross into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context.*
- *Being church together – Building deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church. Becoming more cohesive, while valuing our diversity, and growing from each other's experiences.*
- *Engaging in social justice, equality, and local issues – Speaking and acting out as a safe church.*

¹ References in this plan to young people includes children, youth and young adults

² 2021 ABS Census- Gungahlin <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/80104>

³ Growth Opportunity Plan for Gungahlin Uniting Church December 2022

⁴ Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-2026 <https://canberra.uca.org.au/media/16277/final-crp-mission-plan.pdf>

This plan also strongly aligns with Synod's *Future Directions* vision⁵ for growth, in particular *Reaching and empowering people in the first third of their lives; Living cross-culturally as a multicultural and intercultural church; and Working with presbytery to stimulate growth in and through congregations.*

How we will do it

We have identified six core commitments important to building a vital family and young people's ministry, some of which we are already doing well, and some where we could do better.

1. *Prioritise young people and families*

We will build a culture of investing in young people and families through intergenerational support, resourcing, and intentional inclusion of young people.

We will encourage the participation of young people in all aspects of worship and church life. We will provide opportunities for them to contribute their ideas, talents, and perspectives, and ensure they feel valued and respected as integral members of the congregation.

When churches prioritise young people – and their families – everywhere, they take a step beyond both empathy and warmth. They allocate resources, energy, and attention to teenagers and young adults both inside and outside their walls.

....you will not be able to make your church more effective on your own. You need everyone in your church to prioritise young people if you hope to make worthwhile and lasting progress. Simply put, priority is the game changer for churches that want to grow young.

(Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin, Growing Young, Baker Books 2016 p200)

2. *Engage, develop and support leaders*

We will ensure volunteers are adequately supported and resourced and are trained/mentored. Leadership will be shared.

We will encourage greater engagement through flexible, bite-size volunteering opportunities, building confidence to take on greater roles over time.

We will provide our young people with leadership opportunities, entrusting them with opportunities to lead and contribute, growing our next generation of leaders.

3. *Offer engaging activities and programs which build faith and connection*

We will offer a range of Jesus-centred programs and activities for young people of different ages and interests which are engaging and help them grow in faith and discipleship.

Young people and families will be provided with opportunities to connect with one another and build strong relationships and support networks within the church community. We will extend opportunities to the wider Gungahlin community.

⁵ Future Directions <https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/about-us/future-directions/>

4. Foster a warm environment

We will foster a warm, welcoming community, fueled through peer and intergenerational relationships, which is inclusive and creates a sense of belonging and of being valued.

For teenagers and emerging adults, depth of relationship opens the door to deeper exploration of belief. First relationship, then formation. First belonging, then belief.

....a warm, family-like community embraces young people as fully participating and fully needed members of the body. The good news is that when we bridge the generation gaps, everyone grows young. Cross generational discipleship is beneficial not only for young people but also for older generations who need the vitality of the young to inspire their faith just as much as the young need wise elder to ground theirs. Faith, after all, is not just passed down. It's passed around.

(Kara Powell, Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin, Growing Young, Baker Books 2016 p171, 175)

5. Listen to young people

We must be prepared to listen and learn from young people and to encourage cross-generational discussion and understanding. We will give young people a voice and welcome their contribution in all aspects of church life. We will build a culture of intergenerational listening and learning.

6. Be a relevant and outward looking church

We will encourage young people to explore identity, purpose and belonging as part of their faith journey. We will connect faith to the everyday realities of young people's lives and to broader social issues – inviting our young people to serve, advocate and lead.

We will create opportunities to connect with families and young people across the wider Gungahlin community, finding new ways of expressing and sharing our faith, raising our profile within Gungahlin as a regional church.

What we will do

These six core commitments will be implemented over three stages. Each stage, and the success factors, builds on previous stages. We can bring forward parts of each stage or otherwise change direction if an opportunity is presented and there is sufficient support.

God's invitation to GUC is not into busyness, but into courage, depth, and connection. Through this Growing Young journey, the Spirit seems to be calling the congregation to grow in courage, compassion, and collaboration — not just for the sake of church growth, but for the sake of community transformation and deeper intergenerational faith. God's invitation is both inward — to form a more Christ-centred, listening church — and outward — to serve creatively, share generously, and welcome boldly.

God is not only inviting GUC to grow young, but to grow deep, wide, and whole – a church of courage, connection and Christ shaped community.

We are called:

- *To be courageous – to listen and change*
- *To collaborate and share*
- *To serve the wider community with creativity*
- *To grow through relationship*

Stage 1: The young people....

This stage focuses on building on our current programs – Playgroup, Oasis, Billabong and Girls and Boys Brigade – and seeks to generate greater congregational engagement and support for young people’s ministry. During this stage the Pulse team (the Synod children and youth ministry team) will be invited to discuss the “Growing Young” program to engage interest and support more detailed planning. This will involve the Pulse team meeting with interested GUC members monthly over a six month period.

This stage:

- ensures current programs have age-appropriate and engaging material which support young people’s faith development
- extends programs to include social and other activities which build connection, faith and positive relationships:
 - Encourage each young people’s group to go on a Synod/Brigade-sponsored camp each year.
 - Offer social activities, including joint activities between GUC groups (eg joint Brigade and Oasis/Billabong activities) and/or across Presbytery to build connections.
- increases visibility of programs within GUC and build a sense of energy and vitality:
 - we will create energy by ensuring young people’s programs have high visibility within the congregation, creating a buzz around what is being done.
 - Actively promote programs in bulletin/announcements, provide feedback on what young people are doing, celebrate special events (eg camp), accomplishments and milestones..
- encourages greater participation of the congregation in leadership and at group activities
 - Provide flexible, “bite-size” opportunities to volunteer which recognises availability and other commitments.
 - Recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers.
- promotes inclusiveness:
 - Look for opportunities to include young people in all aspects of church life – extend to Brigades and Oasis and to a wider range of areas.
 - Regular young people’s services (which could include the Brigades) to promote programs and build inclusiveness: tell the story of what has been done over the term, display work and talents, encourage leadership and involvement.
 - New people are welcomed by other young people.

This stage envisages a small team interested/involved in young people’s ministry to support planning and coordination and to obtain feedback. Our Minister would work particularly with Oasis and Billabong to support leaders and to ensure they have appropriate resources, including programs. A broader, more strategic group would work with the Pulse team in considering “Growing Young”.

We will know we are successful if:

- parents and young people report that:
 - programs are engaging and provide opportunities to grow in faith
 - young people feel valued and have a sense of connection with GUC
- relationships are forming within and between groups at GUC and across Presbytery
- more people are actively engaged in supporting/leading young people’s ministry, with the number of volunteers involved increasing by 20%. Young people’s programs are well supported with adult leadership.

Stage 2: Young people and families....

This stage builds on the momentum created during stage one and is dependent on increased engagement of the congregation during stage one. During stage 2 there is a greater focus on connection, intergenerational support and collaboration. The whole of the congregation is engaged and supportive of the ministry. New families are attracted to and integrated into the life of GUC by offering a diverse range of family-friendly activities and services.

Drawing on the outcomes of GUC's Growing Young Report, this next stage seeks to deepen what has already begun: shifting from inclusion to integration, from program to relationship, and from short-term momentum to sustainable ministry. It calls for a wider table where every age, experience, and voice is honoured:

- young people — not just involved, but co-leading
- elders — not just remembered, but listened to
- the whole congregation — not just informed, but invited⁶

At the same time, young people's programs will be extended to cover current gaps, we will place greater focus on family friendly events and introduce innovative forms of family friendly Sunday worship.

During stage 2 we will:

- build cross-generational relationships
- co-design ministry with young people — not just for them
- resource ministry with staff and volunteers
- clarify the message of Jesus in relevant ways amongst our young people
- develop programs to cover current gaps such as college, young adults, preschoolers; consider alternative young people's programs.
- hold regular family friendly events
- hold alternative forms of family friendly Sunday worship (eg messy church, café church)

We will establish a congregational prayer group for youth and family ministry, grounding prayer in real stories and outcomes, and building a spiritual culture where young people feel supported, uplifted, and spiritually included as core members of the Body of Christ.⁷

During stage 2 we envisage employing an experienced family and young person ministry facilitator to help grow this critical stage of ministry. GUC would initially seek to fund the position through a grant from Synod (Synod Growth Investment Fund), but eventually through growth in GUC membership. If successful, the person will work alongside the Minister and volunteers to build support, develop programs, coordinate events, encourage involvement and mentor volunteers. They will not replace volunteers – they will only be successful if there is strong ongoing congregational support. Indeed, as the ministry grows, so will the need for additional volunteers.

⁶ Gungahlin Uniting Church: Growing Young Report 2025

⁷ *ibid*

We will know we have been successful if, in addition to earlier success factors:

- GUC is successful in obtaining funding for a Family and Young People's Ministry Facilitator
- we have programs covering all age groups, with preschool programs averaging 10+, and 75% of young people attending an age-appropriate group.
- 75% young people/adult group can identify next steps in faith journey and actively transition between age-appropriate groups
- there is intergenerational support for alternative services and engagement in social justice issues
- community outreach programs are successful in engaging youth from both GUC and the community
- young adults have taken on leadership roles in services or life of church. Youth are growing in confidence and are contributing to life of GUC
- new families are joining GUC and remain engaged for at least 18 months
- the number of volunteers supporting family and young people's ministry has increased by 20%.

Stage 3: Young people, families and the Gungahlin community....

This builds on earlier stages and consolidates leadership while taking our mission to the wider community. We will continue to employ a person to facilitate and coordinate these mission activities.

During this stage we will consolidate and build our leadership programs – for example, work with Presbytery/Synod to support an annual volunteer leadership retreat and ongoing skills development; develop succession planning for key volunteer roles within ministry teams.

We will encourage young people to engage with the wider community, bearing witness to Christ through service to the community or through advocacy and action in relation to social justice issues.

GUC already ministers to young people and families in the community ministry through Playgroup, Girls and Boys Brigade, as well as the food pantry, café and food garden. In this third stage we look for other opportunities to connect with families within Gungahlin. This could include working alongside community partners rather than replicating existing programs. For example:

- Partner with community organisations or Canberra-based Uniting Care agencies to offer family focussed programs (eg family support programs or parenting workshops)
- Develop relationships with the local high school and college
- Raise profile by participating and hosting local community and cultural events for eg during Celebrate Gungahlin Festival
- Develop relationships with local partners such as Communities at Work and neighbouring churches such as Salvation Army and Gungahlin Mosque.

We will know we have been successful if, in addition to earlier success factors:

- GUC is recognised as a go-to family resource, with at least one formal partnership and regular referrals from community organisations
- average of 25+ community families participating monthly in GUC programs, with 20% expressing interest in exploring faith
- GUC's family and young people's ministry is fully funded by GUC, from growth in numbers and annual giving, fund raising, savings and community program fees/grants, enabling the Young People's Ministry Facilitator position to continue

- the number of volunteers engaged in family and young people's ministry has increased by a further 20%, with at least 12 volunteers in structured leadership roles with clear development pathways and succession plans.

Review

This plan will be reviewed regularly, and will include the outcomes of the Growing Young report. the views of a family and young person ministry facilitator, should GUC be successful in obtaining a grant from the Synod Growth Investment fund, and in response to changing congregational, presbytery or synod mission plans.

Conclusion

The Church Council of Gungahlin Uniting Church propose this plan after prayerful reflection and with consultation with others in the Synod and Presbytery. It is flexible, and so able to respond to changing need within GUC and Gungahlin more widely, while also providing a path for GUC as a congregation and community to walk together as we seek to uplift and grow our families and young people.⁸

Gungahlin Uniting Church Council

11 June 2024

⁸ This plan was reviewed in August 2025 to include outcomes of GUC's Growing Young Report 2025.