



Christians at work in Luton With Youthscape



Rob McNerney

Senior Youth Worker and Luton Unite Coordinator

I would sum up my work at Youthscape and what it means to me as purposeful, challenging, and rewarding.

“What am I doing with my life!?! All my brothers and sisters look up to me and I’m setting a horrible example!” Tristan roared out through a clenched jaw accompanied by tears. Tristan had found belonging in a local gang. The moment I left our first mentoring session I couldn’t stop sobbing in my car. I listened to the Lord and prayed out for this talented, yet so vulnerable and mixed up teenager.

Week after week in mentoring sessions, he shared about how impossible it felt to turn his life around. We spoke about little strategies, taking back momentum from what felt like a downward spiral. How to become quieter. How to stay silent and use non-verbal looks to slowly, incrementally, retreat from this group of people that reward “the loud, bold, and daring”. Years later I bumped into Tristans mum at Weatherspoon’s and she shouted over to me, “Rob, Rob, how are you, it’s so great to see you, thank you so much.” She showed me photos and videos of her son a young man, flourishing.

I’ve worked for Youthscape for nearly 10 years now. I arrived in Luton in 2015 from America. Immediately, I felt captured by the Monday morning team chapel and breakfast start to the week. I couldn’t believe that a company would start there week with such devotion to God, prayerful attitude right into the heart of their mission to serve young people, and then... I got a bunch of delicious food. I knew God brought me somewhere special straightaway.

I have many specific moments and people I could share as being highlights in my time here, but one more than stands out happened just after launching a basketball drop in project as part of my partnership work with St. John’s Church to start up and build youth ministry there.



A young boy named Darrell rocked up FULLY KITTED OUT, I'm talking Nike trainers, athletic shorts, headphones on, and a pristine Golden State Warriors Steph Curry jersey. He was ready to ball. I found out quickly he was only in year 5 and this programme was for year 7+. Being a newbie to ministry, naturally I caved straightaway and lowered the entire age limit to accommodate this specific boy.

Every week he came to drop in and we chatted over many hours of playing basketball. Suddenly, he was in year 7. He decided he wanted to come to Spree Summer Camp even though it was a Christian thing. Matt Summerfield was the speaker that year and asked the audience "who wants to follow Jesus" and WITHOUT ANY HESITATION Darrell leaped to his feet and exclaimed "I want to follow Jesus" in front of several hundred other young people he didn't know. My heart was absolutely overjoyed as I watched this unfold. Darrell received his first Bible on the spot and in the years to follow him and I had amazing conversations about the Lord at drop in and youth group.

As Luton Unite Coordinator now, I feel so blessed to see young people encounter the Lord and grow in their faith. I came into Luton in 2015 with a personal mission to bring hope, healing and excitement about Jesus to the young people of this town. To see the next generation raised up to know the Lord and to be courageous about their faith. Sometimes it's hard yards, unseen efforts, and totally heart-wrenching stories. But this mission I entered in with still fires up my Spirit and my heart to move forward. I know Luton is a very special place to God. I love this town. I feel purpose, challenge, and reward in working with the incredible young people of Luton and thank Youthscape for giving me the job!

**Young people's names have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality*



Would the community perceive the absence of your church or organisation? Chances are they would, considering the valuable ministries and services it offers. Stay tuned for further updates on the thriving church in Luton as it remains actively engaged with the community
