

The Centenary Project SDF End of Project Evaluation and Ten Year Review

Church Army's Research Unit, April 2025



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Foreword

It is a pleasure to read this evaluation report and commend the work of the Centenary Project, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary since the inception of the project.

It was an exceptionally bold decision by the Bishop's Council back in 2014 to invest £1million of our limited historic reserves to see a step-change in mission and ministry with children and young people. This report indicates that that was a wise investment which has enabled children and youth ministry to be increasingly embedded across the Diocese and parishes to appoint a worker, particularly those who wouldn't have been able to do so under their own steam.

The Centenary Project continues to enrich the life of the Diocese and I am struck by the comments of those who have participated in this evaluation and the evident impact the project has not only on the churches where we have placed Centenary Project Workers, but on the whole culture of children and youth ministry in the Diocese. There is much to be thankful for.

Until recently, the innovative approach of the Centenary Project was a blessing only to us here in Sheffield Diocese, but I am encouraged too that others across the Church of England are now beginning to learn from the Centenary Project and implement its best practice.

The publication of this report also coincides with a successful outcome of our application to the national church, which included a significant allocation of funding for the next phase of the Centenary Project. I pray that this work will continue to be fruitful with many more children and young people being discipled across the Diocese: may the next ten years be even more fruitful, by God's grace, than the first ten.

I am grateful to Church Army's Research Unit for the report, and the research behind it, for providing a rigorous assessment of the Centenary Project and for the helpful suggestions that it makes for the project's continued growth, success and impact.

As you read the report, please do pray for the workers across the Centenary Project, the parishes they serve and for the people with whom they are connecting.

The Rt Revd Dr Pete Wilcox

Bishop of Sheffield

Executive Summary

The Diocese of Sheffield's Centenary Project (CP) was set up to support a 'step-change' in the diocese's work with children, young people and families. This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Centenary Project, which has been timed to coincide with the project's ten-year anniversary and the end of Strategic Development Funding (SDF) from the national Church. The evaluation included a desk-based review of statistical data and documentation, 14 interviews with relevant stakeholders and focus groups with Centenary Project Workers (CPWs) and members of the central team.

Impact, Achievements and Outcomes

From our review of existing data and documentation about the Centenary Project and our interviews / focus groups with relevant stakeholders, there emerges a picture of the Centenary Project's achievements that is overwhelmingly positive.

1. Nearly all the original targets set have been met or exceeded.
2. There remains a statistically significant difference between churches with a Centenary Project Worker (CPW) and other churches. Churches with a CPW have a higher proportion of under 18s in their worshipping community than churches without one.
3. CPWs enrich their parishes and mission areas in numerous ways, providing
 - Greater capacity and missional energy
 - Greater consistency and reach
 - Greater volunteer engagement, focus and profile of children, families and young people's ministry within parishes
4. Experiences of what happens when a CPW moves on continue to vary from parish to parish. But there is often an enduring impact as the value and importance of CYF ministry remains embedded within the parish.
5. Assessing whether the CP has achieved its stated ambition of enabling 'a step-change' in mission and ministry with children, young people and families in the Diocese of Sheffield is difficult without a precise definition. But during the CP's lifetime, there has been considerable changes in things like:
 - The scale and reach of CYF provision
 - The prominence and embeddedness of CYF ministries within diocesan structures
 - Support structures and leadership pipelines for CYF ministries
6. Though the CP's impact is overwhelmingly positive, this does not always translate into traditional Sunday attendance. And commenting on the challenges of engaging with teenagers as well as children, some diocesan stakeholders reflect that the experience of the CP has reminded us "how hard it is to form teenage disciples".

Learning from the Centenary Project

1. Over the past ten years, the Centenary Project has developed and grown in a way that is consistent with the delivery model outlined in the original proposal and subsequent SDF bid. The ‘centrally employed, locally deployed’ principle has been in evidence throughout and it provides the necessary ‘scaffolding’ for ensuring that CP parishes and workers are adequately supported. Though the central support model does not need significant alterations, interviewees suggested various potential improvements and factors that are key to ensuring CPW placements go well.
2. One aspect of the SDF project that did not go as well as initially hoped was the proposed three-year partnership with SHINE. This involved bringing Christian bands, artists and evangelists into secondary schools, but the partnership ended earlier than planned. With the benefit of hindsight, diocesan stakeholders reflect that the inclusion of this project within the SDF was a bit of an ‘add-on’ and that the two projects (CP and SHINE) were not sufficiently aligned in terms of vision and culture.
3. Within the Diocese of Sheffield, learning from the Centenary Project’s experience has already begun to inform other areas of diocesan life and there is potential to develop this further. For example, aspects of the CP’s central support model might be used to help inform the development of more effective support structures for clergy and lay ministers in the diocese.
4. One national Church representative described the Centenary Project as “a beacon of hope” that shows other dioceses wanting to engage with children, young people and families what can be done. At a time when the Church of England has some very ambitious national targets and initiatives for engaging with children and young people and raising up new children and youth leaders, there is much that the wider Church can learn from the Centenary Project’s experience around:
 - The benefits of CYF workers being locally deployed but centrally employed
 - The importance of investing in central support services to ensure parishes and workers are adequately supported
 - The need for creative and courageous use of internal and external funding
 - Having skilled CYF practitioners involved in project inception and design alongside project management professionals

Looking to the future

As part of this evaluation, interviewees told us about their hopes and ideas for the further development of the Centenary Project over the next five years. Many of the ideas generated have already been included within the diocese’s recently approved Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) funding bid. The release of this funding is a clear affirmation of the Centenary Project’s achievements over the last ten years. As the project continues to grow and diversify, maintaining the project’s distinctive culture and values will be particularly important.

The Centenary Project has achieved a huge amount over the last ten years, enriching the lives of thousands of children and young people. It has also been a “a beacon of hope” to others in the Church of England and, as such, many people in the wider Church are looking forward to hearing how it continues to develop over the years to come.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Diocese of Sheffield's Centenary Project, which has been timed to coincide with the project's ten-year anniversary and the end of Strategic Development Funding (SDF) from the national Church. Building on a previous mid-term review of the project published by Church Army's Research Unit in January 2022, this evaluation took place between October 2024 and April 2025. The overall aims of the evaluation, agreed at the start of the project, were:

- To evidence the impact of the Centenary Project on children's, youth and families ministry in the Diocese of Sheffield
- To capture learning from the project with a view to informing the future development of the Centenary Project and identifying relevant learning for the wider Church

To achieve these aims, we conducted:

- A review of selected statistical data and documentation about the Centenary Project supplied by the diocese
- 14 research interviews with a selection of stakeholders agreed with the client. These included Centenary Project workers past and present, parish representatives, diocesan stakeholders, and wider Church representatives.
- Two focus groups - one with Centenary Project workers and one with members of the central project team

In preparing this report, we have been mindful of both the national Church's guidelines for SDF end-of-project evaluation reports and the specific evaluation questions identified by the Diocese of Sheffield in the project brief. In endeavouring to do justice to both, the rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 (Setting the Scene) briefly introduces the Centenary Project and its original aims and objectives
- Section 3 reviews the Centenary Project's impact, outcomes and achievements
- Section 4 draws out key learning for both the Diocese of Sheffield and wider Church arising from the Centenary Project's experience
- The report then concludes by summarising the evaluation findings and looking to the future

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in and assisted us with this research. We hope and pray that the insights in this report will be of use and service to both the Diocese of Sheffield and the wider Church.

Andy Wier, Elspeth McGann, and Dan Ortiz
Church Army's Research Unit, April 2025

2 Setting the Scene

In 2014, Sheffield diocese set aside £1million of its own investment from historical reserves to initiate a ground-breaking ten-year plan to employ children, youth and family workers, targeted in its most economically disadvantaged areas. It was named the Centenary Project as it marked the diocese's 100th birthday. This model was intended to equip local churches to effectively engage, nurture and disciple a new generation of young people, children and families. The Project employed Centenary Project Workers (CPWs, mixture of part-time and full-time), and a Centenary Project Manager to oversee every appointment, work with local churches on setting objectives and with support workers through a relational network and regular mentoring sessions. CPWs build teams of local volunteers to support the ministry, and work in local schools and across parish boundaries as they develop new missional activities for young people and children.

From 2018 onwards, additional Strategic Development Funding (SDF) from the national Church enabled the expansion of the project. In total, the Diocese of Sheffield received £1,842,259 SDF between 2018 and 2023 towards the total £2,417,516 cost of a Transforming Children, Youth and Families' Work project. This additional funding enabled:

- The expansion of the Centenary Project to include more parishes
- Growing the central team to provide more support for workers and parishes
- The introduction of youth hubs to facilitate the gathering of youth groups
- An internship programme which ran from 2018 to 2023
- A partnership with SHINE which involved bringing Christian bands, artists and evangelists into secondary schools

The key inputs and outcomes envisaged by the 2017 SDF Bid (Second Stage Application) are summarised below.

Inputs	Desired Outcomes (by 2023)
<p>Employment of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 FTE additional CPWs • 3 part-time Area Co-ordinators • 2 additional part-time Hub Co-ordinators for Doncaster • Part-time Fundraiser <p>18 intern posts</p> <p>Partnership with large churches on areas of intern recruitment, training and deployment</p> <p>SHINE to start a new Sheffield hub and deliver 9 Hub events each year</p>	<p>Regular active engagement with at least another 2,000 children and young people</p> <p>15% to have moved to discipleship groups (300 proactive young disciples)</p> <p>30 new expressions of ministry with children, young people and families (engaging with 750-1,050 people, predominantly un-churched)</p> <p>A replicable diocesan-led CPW recruitment model, employed centrally, deployed locally</p> <p>2 new hubs formed in Doncaster</p> <p>Career opportunities for young people in areas of high unemployment and deprivation</p> <p>A growing talent pool of interns</p> <p>Funding advice for all projects, plus targeted sustainability work with 4 parishes per year (securing up to £10,000 per parish per year)</p> <p>SHINE engaging with 8-15 schools per year (1,000 gospel responses over 3 years, with 650 sustained mature disciples)</p>

3 Impact, Outcomes and Achievements

3.1 Overall Impact

The table below provides a ‘traffic light’ summary assessment with relation to the outcomes identified at the start of the SDF project. It draws on data reported by the Centenary Project in the most recently available update to the project’s Benefits Realisation Plan.

Output Measure	Status	Progress Update 2023
Active engagement with at least 2,000 children and young people on a regular basis by 2023		Original target exceeded (End of Q2 2023: 6,070 children and young people regularly engaged over the lifetime of the project)
15% (300) of the 2,000 to have moved to discipleship by 2023		Original target exceeded (End of Q2 2023: 1,330 regulars are in Discipleship Groups, which is 22% of the total)
30 new missional activities with children, young people and families (25 to 35 per group) leading to engagement with an additional 750 to 1050 people (included in the 2,000)		Original target exceeded (End of Q2 2023: 171 new missional activities over lifetime of the project, with 84 currently active)
2 new hubs formed in Doncaster by the end of 2018		Dec 2018: Achieved
Work with 24 target parishes on financial sustainability		Original target exceeded (Jan 2023: 26 parishes worked with on financial sustainability in addition to supporting new parishes interested in securing a CPW)
10 FTE CPWs by 2023		Original target exceeded (Jan 2023: 14.0 FTE CPWs appointed with commitment to 15.1 FTE CPWs)
18 intern posts to create job opportunities for young people and develop a pool of quality CPWs		Jan 2023: 16 intern posts funded; 3 led to CPW jobs and several led to other CYP missional or voluntary work
Employment of 3 Area Co-ordinators		April 2019: Achieved
Employment of 2 additional part-time Hub Co-ordinators for Doncaster		Dec 2018: Achieved
Employment of part-time fundraiser		Sept 2019: Achieved
Partnership with large churches on intern recruitment, training and deployment		There has been no formal partnership, but the internship programme of a large church has helped inform the diocese’s Ministry Experience Scheme

The Centenary Project's achievements

When respondents were asked to identify the Centenary Project's greatest achievement, we received a wide range of responses. These ranged from the reach and scale of the project, the culture that has established, its longevity, the model it employs, and also its innovation and risk-taking.

Many respondents spoke of the **reach and scale** of the project - the impact that has been gained from employing more CPWs, and reaching and interacting with many more children than originally envisioned at the start of the project. As one person said, "it has consistently smashed its targets."

"It has lasted longer and impacted more parishes than many previous grant-funded projects in the diocese and elsewhere." - Diocesan stakeholder

"I am amazed by the numbers... I hate the language of value for money, but it's done a lot with a relatively modest budget" - Diocesan stakeholder

Others commented on the **profile** of the project, that it is well known throughout the diocese, and regularly features on the diocese's website and in publications. They identified that the profile of the Centenary Project has also led to a much greater visibility of CYF ministry in general across the diocese [see also section 3.3 which asks whether there has been a 'step change' in children's and young people's ministry within the diocese].

Another achievement identified by respondents, was the **culture** that has been established within the CP team of providing nurturing, relational, and bespoke roles tailored to individual contexts, rather than a one-size-fits-all or template approach.

"We haven't created a cookie cutter approach. Each post is a journey with a parish - beginning with wondering / dreaming with parish and building a post around what we think God is doing and what the needs / possibilities are... I'm very proud that we have something which isn't easily described because each post is different." - Diocesan stakeholder

What is felt to be one of the unique elements of the Centenary Project is the approach of the CPW being '**centrally employed, locally deployed**'. This was praised as an effective structure and model for supporting both the CPWs and the parishes they are placed in. Several respondents stated that they felt this model could be applied to other roles within the diocese of Sheffield, and also in other dioceses.

"CPW are experienced locally as deeply embedded and each CPW's work is utterly contextual. But there's a degree of consistency as well. [The] diocese has a handle on employment and recruitment - [they are] gatekeepers of calibre and guarantors of peer support; there's a sense of workers being part of a diocesan-wide team. That balance (centrally employed, locally deployed) has been critical to the CP's fruitfulness and consistency" - Diocesan stakeholder

An achievement identified by figures from the national Church was around the **longevity** of the Centenary Project and how it has continued to have sustained impact over the course of ten years. They particularly noted that the project had navigated two potentially challenging periods; the transition of the founding leader and also of course the Covid pandemic. It was highlighted that not only did the project navigate and survive the pandemic, it actually "thrived" within it.

"The structure and support of the project are "exemplary" ... Many other structures and projects collapsed during this period [Covid], but this project withstood that storm." - National Church representative

“So many other projects pressed pause for two years and had to effectively start from scratch, but they kept going. They had to modify as it went, but it maintained that momentum”. - National Church representative

Finally, some senior figures commended the Centenary Project for its approach to **innovation and risk-taking**. The diocese’s initial earmarking of around £1 million towards this project shows its belief and trust in the project. At a time where financial pressures could easily have led to an exclusive focus on funding for clergy roles, this was a risk-taking investment that respondents felt should be commended.

“The genius of it was earmarking money for youth and children’s work at a time when there was huge pressure to just keep funding clergy posts” - National Church representative

“The Vice-chair of DBF urged us to be radical and dream dreams - challenging the meeting to do so something for young people with a sizeable chunk of diocesan reserves. That was very moving and exciting. A big act of faith for a diocese with relatively small reserves.” - Diocesan stakeholder

3.2 Impact on Parishes

What's changed since the mid-term Review?

With relation to impact on parishes, the main conclusions of our 2022 mid-term evaluation report all still stand.

- **The Centenary Project's impact on parishes has been overwhelmingly positive.**
- **The project is still reaching parishes who could not otherwise appoint a worker.** 65 churches have been enabled to share or appoint a worker. Many of these projects would not otherwise have been able to appoint a worker.
- **The project has impacted disadvantaged communities,** though the focus has broadened since the mid-term Review.
- **There remains a statistically significant difference between parishes with a CPW and those without one.** Our mid-term evaluation found that churches with a CP worker had a higher proportion of under 18s in their worshipping community than a control group of churches without a CP worker. There had been a statistically significant difference between them for every year from 2017 to 2020. This trend has continued in subsequent years, and while the size of the proportion difference between the two groups has decreased, there remains a statistically significant difference between them for the years 2021 and 2023 (in 2022 the difference was not significant).
- **Parishes with CP workers were better equipped to navigate the pandemic.** As the mid-term evaluation noted, the vast majority of CPWs worked throughout the lockdown, finding creative ways to continue relationships in an incredibly challenging time. Though regular attendance figures have undoubtedly been impacted by the pandemic, with every diocese seeing a decline in regular attendance, on average the decline among CP churches is much less marked than in the control group of non-CP churches. Within CP churches, All-Age Average Weekly Attendance declined on average by 12.2% between 2019 and 2023, whereas a control group of churches declined by 26.5% on average. There is a statistically significant difference between these two groups.

The difference to parishes

When asked about the difference that having a CPW makes to the parish they are placed in, one of the incumbents we interviewed described the experience as both “good and bad” because of a particularly difficult experience with their CPW. However, they indicated they felt well-supported by the CP central team in managing a difficult situation. Otherwise, responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive, with interviewees describing the difference that having a CPW makes in several ways.

Some described the impact of having a CPW in terms of having greater **capacity**. This meant that more activities and groups were taking place with children and young people than before the CPW arrived, and that the parish was felt to have greater capacity for other areas of parish life since they were released from the responsibility of HR tasks. Respondents also spoke of how this in turn led to the broadening of horizons within the parish as perhaps new areas of focus or ministry were able to be explored.

“Without me initiating [the groups] and leading them, I don't know that they would have started or still be running.” - CPW

Others talked about their parishes now having greater **missional energy**. The planning and preparation that is done between the CP team and the parish in defining the CPW's task and role before they are appointed was described as injecting missional energy into wider parish life, as others (such as the PCC, volunteers, and the congregation) are able to see their part within this

new role and ministry. Respondents also spoke of how having a CPW simply opens doors to new opportunities for mission and engagement.

“[Having a CPW] brings so much hope and joy and encouragement.” - CP parish

A key point made by some of the CPW's themselves was that having a CPW within the parish provides greater **consistency** within the Children's and Young People's ministry. They spoke of how common it is within CYF ministry for employed workers to stay for relatively short periods of time, and so having the Centenary Project model encourages workers to be in post for longer which allows trust and relationships to be built between the CPW and the children and young people they are engaging with. This consistency is also applied within church structures and leadership (e.g. PCC), as the CPW is able to be an advocate and represent at this level for children and youth ministry, and it becomes more embedded within the church's culture.

“[The CPW is] a voice in the PCC for the young people.” - CP parish

Many respondents spoke about the greater **reach** that has been seen in their parishes. There is the growth in numbers of children and young people attending groups and activities, and also the growth and connections that are created between the parish and others (for example schools, uniformed organisations, and other children's agencies and services). These particular connections were described as being able to be formed and maintained because of the dedicated person who is able to facilitate this.

“Having someone with that specialism and that focus was absolutely transformational.” - Incumbent of a CP parish

Many respondents identified that there was a greater level of **volunteer engagement** within the children's and young people's ministry within the parish. By having the CPW co-ordinating teams of volunteers and providing training and support opportunities for them, parishes were seeing growth in this area.

“I think also volunteers have blossomed...they do things that are perhaps taking them out of their comfort zone.” - CPW

All of the identified themes often led to what respondents identified as a greater **profile** of children's and young people's ministry within those parishes. They described that previously the CYP ministry may have been somewhat tokenistic, but with the CPW within the parish, the profile of this ministry is much more strategic and intentional.

“It also has focused the congregation on the importance of young people, children and families. It focused the older congregation especially [on] how important it is to work with children.” - Incumbent of a CP parish

“[Having a CPW] changes the way that churches perceive youth and children - helps them to realise how important it is to be nurturing children and young people and more welcoming to families (especially for small churches who may not have much experience).” - CP team

It was also identified that having a CPW within the parish had led to better **perceptions** of the church in general within the wider community.

“[Having a CPW has] helped the status of our church. We are seen to deliver really good children's and young people's work. We are trusted in that. Schools also refer people to us when they ask about children's or youth activities.” - Incumbent of a CP parish

What happens when a worker moves on?

Though we heard varying perceptions about the degree of impact that the Centenary Project has on a parish once a CPW moves on, there is at least some enduring impact in all cases because the **value and importance** of CYF ministry remains embedded within the parish.

*“No church has stopped the ministry completely - it’s still on their agendas.” -
CP team*

For the Centenary Project, the ideal scenario is that the activities and groups that have been established by the CPW continue and that **volunteers** have been empowered by the CPW to carry on with the work. This has happened in some parishes, though in others there is a sense of vulnerability, with some interviewees expressing concern about the longevity of groups without the CPW.

“No one feels confident enough to take charge. They say, ‘We’re here to support you [CPW]; we’re doing it because you’re doing it.’” - Current CPW

“Our first CPW left and we had about a five-month gap before a new one was appointed. It was hard work during the time in between; some groups had to stop. Messy Church started but couldn’t carry on without a CPW. The toddler group, I tried to get volunteers but had to cancel. It made us appreciate having a worker.” - CP Parish

Respondents identified that there was a potentially unmeasurable lasting impact on families as a result of a CPW. Through their engagement with groups and activities at the church, **seeds of faith** may have been sown with children and families, that will grow and develop throughout the rest of their lives.

It should also be noted that a parish coming to the end of their CPW funding isn’t necessarily the end of their journey with the Centenary Project. There are many cases of parishes that have continued to employ the CPW using their own funds or other external grants. Other parishes, after seeing their CPW move on, have chosen to appoint a new member of staff into a CYF role who is employed locally rather than as a part of the Centenary Project.

3.3 Impact on the wider Diocese of Sheffield

As with the previous section, the main findings of our 2022 mid-term evaluation report concerning impact on the diocese still stand:

- **The project aligns well with the diocesan strategy** and there is a **strong sense that the CP is ‘a success story for the diocese to be proud of’**
- **CP workers have brought greater diversity to a diocese historically perceived (by some at least) as white, grey, and male-dominated.** As one interviewee at the time put it, [the diocese] is ‘still predominantly white but [the CP] challenges the grey and male’

The mid-term review evaluation report also noted some concerns that ‘CPWs may be overlooked in wider diocesan conversations and not valued as much as clergy’. Though we did not explicitly ask questions about these dynamics within this more recent evaluation, our sense from the material that follows is that the position and profile of CPWs in the diocese has improved.

As part of our research, we asked interviewees to reflect on the extent to which the Centenary Project had achieved its stated ambition of enabling ‘**a step-change**’ in mission and ministry with children, young people and families in the Diocese of Sheffield. Though it was acknowledged that the nature of the ‘step-change’ envisaged was not defined precisely at the Centenary Project’s inception, interviewees identified various areas in which they had seen considerable change during the CP’s lifetime.

For example, **the scale of CYF provision** (both in terms of the numbers of workers and then numbers of activities and groups taking place) across the diocese has increased considerably. There has undoubtedly been an increase in the workforce in CYF ministry within the diocese through the Centenary Project. And the Centenary Project has enabled CYF provision to take place in parishes and areas that otherwise wouldn’t have been able to employ a worker (a leading focus of the original bid).

The Centenary Project has **surpassed all its targets** for the number of children, young people and families engaged with. And while these interactions and attendees aren’t necessarily fully translating to traditional Sunday church attendance, they are and should be included within the wider worshipping communities of these parishes. It should also be noted, however, that some interviewees reported a perception that the project had had more success in engaging with children than with teenagers.

Respondents also highlighted that CYF ministry has become much **more prominent and embedded** within diocesan structures. The Centenary Project team are based at Church House, and the team and CPWs are regularly involved in planning diocesan events. It was felt that CYF ministry is now much more ‘on the agenda’ for the diocese. It is also felt that the Centenary Project team and their CPW’s have now achieved a level of recognition within the diocese as a source of expertise for others to draw upon.

“It might have been tempting for senior staff to rest on their laurels and think CYF ministry has now been taken of care of. But having the Director of the Parish Support Team (who had oversight of the CP) part of the Bishops’ Staff Team helped prevent that - [there is] continued advocacy for CYF ministry and a seat at the table” - Diocesan stakeholder

As a result of this prominence of the ministry within the diocese, is now felt that there is a much **wider recognition of CYF ministry within the diocese**. There is a greater understanding of its value, importance, and its contribution to ‘what it means to be church’.

“The spotlight on children and young people - the importance of them in the kingdom of God... there’s places where there’s been step-change in thinking about what it means to be church.” - CP team

Another change that was identified was the **support structures** for CYF workers that are now in place within the diocese. Structures such as area-based youth hubs and a regular pattern of away days are able to provide a resource to both workers and the groups they facilitate. In more recent years some of these resources have been opened up to non-CPW groups and leaders as well, and there has been much uptake of this offer.

“At the recent Youth Leader Breakfast, the majority of those who came were not CP.” - CP team

“When talking about the Youth Hubs, some churches have commented, ‘We could run this ourselves, but we want to be under the umbrella of CP, we want to be part of something bigger.’” - CP team

Some respondents commented that the Centenary Project has made initial gains in beginning to develop a **‘leadership pipeline’** for CYF ministry within the diocese. Examples of this include the introduction of the internship programme, the role of a CPW becoming known and recognised within the diocese, and (though not originally planned for) several CPWs training for ordination.

“Before the project, there was [a] dwindling workforce... It’s more about [a] swing [in] vocations - taking CYF vocations more seriously.” - CP team

Also, it should also be acknowledged that **the diocese’s continued commitment** to the Centenary Project beyond its initial funding is an indicator of a wider ‘step-change’ - a move away from what some perceive as “a focus on solely sustaining clergy posts”, with greater recognition of a whole range of vocations.

“It has signalled the intentional priority of the diocese to invest in the missing generation”. - Diocesan stakeholder

3.4 Reflecting on Impact

Alongside the overwhelmingly positive descriptions of the Centenary Project’s impact presented above, some of our interviewees also added important qualifications and caveats as follows:

- The CP’s impact does not always translate into traditional Sunday attendance. One national Church figure, for example, indicated that they would have expected to see a better ‘return on investment’ reflected in average weekly attendance. But during this evaluation, we also heard concerns that standard Statistics for Mission returns submitted by churches do not accurately capture the impact and reach of the Centenary Project.
- The CP’s impact may not be evenly distributed across the diocese. One interviewee questioned whether the impact of the Centenary Project is ‘pocketed’ in a way that may mean the diocese as a whole is not transformed.

“Are CP churches doing well and the others are being left to struggle?”

- Feedback from some stakeholders suggests that the CP may have been more effective at engaging with children than with teenagers. As one diocesan stakeholder put it, the experience of the CP has reminded us “how hard it is to form teenage disciples”. This is something the diocese is keen to refocus its attention on moving forward.
- Lasting impact? Another interviewee wondered whether efforts are being made to keep in touch with the project’s ‘alumni’ once they are no longer teenagers?

“Leaving home or starting work or uni is such a disruptive time of life; is it potentially that all of the effort and input that has been given through CP is then lost?” - National Church representative

4 Learning from the Centenary Project

4.1 Project Design and Implementation

Initial design

The way the Centenary Project was initially designed was informed by the following factors that were outlined in the original proposal from 2015:

- In response to a perceived crisis point with relation to young people in the diocese, the Centenary Project was conceived as a way of *Equipping the local church to effectively engage, grow and disciple a new generation of young people, children and families*.
- CPWs would be rooted in the local parish church and accountable to the CP Project Leader. Line management would ordinarily be through the local incumbent/leader, but most CPWs would be legally employed by the diocese (to reduce the burden on parishes for HR and PAYE).
- The majority of CPWs would be part-time posts, with the possibility of full-time posts if parish or mission partnerships would benefit from a trained and more experienced CPW.
- The norm would be for the CPWs to be placed initially for a three-year period, with the possibility of continued funding.
- Funding would be aimed primarily at the most deprived parishes within the diocese.

The 2017 SDF bid then proposed refining and further developing the Centenary Project's delivery model to include:

- Expanding the Centenary Project to include more parishes
- Increasing the size of the central team to provide more support for workers and parishes
- Introducing youth hubs to facilitate gathering of youth groups and an internship programme

Subsequent changes

Over the past ten years, the Centenary Project has developed and grown in a way that is consistent with the delivery model outlined in the original proposal and subsequent SDF Bid. The 'centrally employed, locally deployed' principle has been in evidence throughout, but the project also adapted and evolved in response to experiences of ministry and new opportunities. Key changes of note include:

- There have been more full-time (and fewer part-time) CPW posts than initially imagined - although the majority of the posts are still part time.
- The Centenary Project no longer focuses only on the most economically disadvantaged parts of the diocese (but there are still different levels of funding for churches with different financial means)
- Churches that employ their own children's / young people's worker can now 'buy in' to the Centenary Project's central support services
- The central team is now larger than initially imagined, with various new roles created to meet increased demand and provide additional support
- New CPW posts have been built into other projects funded by the national Church (e.g. Resourcing Churches SDF)

The 2017 SDF bid also included funding for work with SHINE (in partnership with St Thomas Crookes), which involved bringing Christian bands, artists and evangelists into secondary schools. Though initially conceived as a three-year partnership from January 2018 to December 2020, the work came to an end sooner than originally planned (with staff put on furlough in March 2020 and then made redundant in summer 2020). Interviews with diocesan stakeholders suggest that this

part of the project was a bit of “an add-on”, having not been a part of the original Centenary Project vision. Interviewees also reflected that the partnership with SHINE was already “a difficult relationship” which “didn’t work quite as well as we’d hoped.” On reflection, while SHINE demonstrated the diocese’s willingness to experiment and try new things (as encouraged by SDF), it seems that the decision to include it and the Centenary Project in a single SDF bid may have been taken without sufficient consideration of whether the two projects were sufficiently aligned in terms of values and culture.

Central support model

Our previous mid-term evaluation found that “the project’s success is supported by its values”¹, which had been carefully nurtured by its leaders. It noted that there had been a relatively low turnover of workers and suggested that most CPWs seemed to appreciate the project culture and values (though there was still further to go with some of these). As part of this evaluation, the Diocese of Sheffield were keen to explore what difference the CP’s central support model makes to ministry effectiveness and worker wellbeing, so our interview schedule included a question specifically about this. Responses to this question suggest that the provision of central support for both workers and parishes generates considerable added value in:

- Supporting parishes and providing ‘scaffolding’ for effective ministry - including input around objective setting and assistance with things that parishes would have struggled to do

“We don’t need to worry about that [e.g. finding appropriate training for CPW] because it is done by [the] CP central team.” - Incumbent of a CP parish

“They are someone we can call upon when we have issues.” - CP Parish

- Resolving difficulties between CPWs and parishes when they occur
- Prioritising worker wellbeing

“There’s a very intentional focus on worker wellbeing. They make sure you take care of yourself and your walk with God... No one was doing that at my previous church” - CPW

- Enabling peer support among CPWs

“That’s one of the things I used to love, that when somebody was putting on an event, they could call... they could put a message out, and there’d be several people to come and help them to run an event if you’ve not got a lot of volunteers.” - CP team

- Providing training and mentoring

“I would have quit without them - they [mentor] are my ‘safety net’.” - CPW

¹ Mentoring, networking, training, setting objectives, measuring outcomes, good line management, and working fair hours for a fair salary.

When asked how the central support model could be strengthened and improved, many interviewees stressed that the existing model is working well and does not need major alterations. Nevertheless, various potential further improvements were suggested around:

- Training for line managers and incumbents - how to enable them to affirm the CPW's distinctive gifts and temperament and not micromanage (whilst ensuring appropriate accountability)?
- Equipping CPWs to navigate sometimes tricky relationships with incumbents and parishes. Common difficulties included mismatched expectations, micromanagement, and clergy sometimes taking credit for things CPWs have done or not placing sufficient value on CYF ministries. Comments from CPWs also suggest there is sometimes a gendered dimension to these difficulties, with unequal power relations.
- Developing support for teams of volunteers as well as CPWs.
- Ensuring that members of the central team maintain connections with CYF ministry 'on the ground' - for example, by occasionally visiting activities run by CPWs as volunteers (a practice that has already been established within the team).
- Some CPWs were also keen for the annual retreat to be made longer.

Reflecting on / learning from parish experiences

As noted already in Section 3.2, some parishes have had more positive experiences with CPWs than others. As part of this evaluation, we invited our interviewees to reflect on the question: 'What do you think are the key factors that affect whether a CP worker parish placement works out well?' Responses to this question uncovered a range of key factors in this regard. These included:

- Good preparation and expectation management with parishes
 - Making sure they don't see employing a worker as a way of abdicating / outsourcing responsibility for CYF ministry
 - Clear understandings / expectations about roles and responsibilities (of parish, CPW and CP central team) and lines of communication and accountability
- Careful discernment about the timing and focus of CPW appointments - e.g.
 - Not appointing a CPW if incumbent is planning on leaving soon
 - Being cautious about appointing youth workers if there is no existing children's ministry to feed into it
- Flexibility, adaptability and sensitivity
 - Tailoring each new CPW role to the needs of each parish
 - Willingness of all parties (parish, CPW and central team) to be flexible and adjust roles / arrangements when necessary
 - Sensitivity to and respect for theological differences between CPWs and parish
- Making good use of support networks
 - Finding each CPW a mentor they work well with
 - Willingness / capacity of CPW to engage with the wider CP network and access support

4.2 What the Church Can Learn

Learning for the Diocese of Sheffield

Our interviews with diocesan stakeholders suggest that the Diocese of Sheffield has already learned a considerable amount from the experience of the Centenary Project over the past ten years.

- The CP principle of having workers who are ‘centrally employed and locally deployed’ has informed other areas of diocesan life, for example the deployment of buildings advisors in the Mission Area Support Team. It has also been suggested that aspects of the CP’s central support model (which emphasises care for CPWs and reducing isolation) could be used to help inform the development of more effective support structures for clergy and lay ministers in the diocese. We note that this is already happening, to some degree, through Associate Archdeacons’ use of coaching models when meeting with clergy.
- Several interviewees pointed out that, amidst various pressures on diocesan funds, it was very brave of the Diocese of Sheffield to earmark such a large amount of funding to establish the Centenary Project. This initial investment from the diocese also helped pave the way for subsequent funding from the national Church through SDF. But some interviewees also pointed out that it was advantageous to the project’s development that the CP culture and values had already been established before SDF funding was sought.
- Diocesan stakeholders also reflected on the challenges of engaging with teenagers as well as children, and the importance of helping young people engaged through the Centenary Project to continue a discipleship journey as they transition into secondary school. The diocese is keen to address this moving forward.
- As noted already, the partnership with SHINE did not go as well as hoped. There are important lessons to be learned here about the need for careful discernment when preparing major funding bids and ensuring that potential partners are sufficiently aligned in terms of values, culture and expectations.

Many of the learning points for the wider Church that follow also potentially relate to the Diocese of Sheffield.

Learning for the wider Church

At a time when the Church of England has some very ambitious national targets and initiatives for engaging with children and young people and raising up new children’s and young people’s leaders,² there are various things the wider Church can learn from the Centenary Project’s experience. As part of the 2022 mid-term evaluation, we prepared a briefing note that outlined key lessons for other dioceses arising from the Centenary Project’s experience. The key learning points from that document are all still relevant and are summarised in Appendix 2. Alongside these, other areas of learning for the national Church are summarised below.

- The Centenary Project provides an accessible ready-made model that can be reproduced (with appropriate contextualisation) in other dioceses and beyond. Indeed, the CP has already informed the development of children’s and young people’s ministry in various

² See <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/children-and-young-people/doubling-number-children-and-young-people>

other dioceses and as part of this evaluation, we interviewed a representative of one such diocese. That diocese had developed a SMMI proposal for a new project “very heavily influenced by” but “not identical” to the Centenary Project and had greatly appreciated learning from the CP’s experience. They told us *“I want to say thank you to the Centenary Project for saying ‘this is possible’”*. A national Church representative we interviewed also told us the Centenary Project had been *“a beacon of hope”* that gave other dioceses a sense of “If they can do it, why can’t we?”

- Interestingly, the one feature of the Centenary Project that no other diocese seems to have copied is the practice of employing workers at a diocesan level and not a parish level. At least one national church representative expressed surprise and disappointment about this because they thought the CP’s aim of **‘centrally employed, locally deployed’** was very beneficial. Some dioceses seem concerned that employing workers centrally reduces parishes’ sense of ownership and involvement. This, however, does not appear to be the case within most CP parishes, so further work may be needed in sharing the benefits of the ‘centrally employed, locally deployed’ model with other dioceses.
- Some interviewees also reflected on the Diocese of Sheffield’s experience of investing in central support services for the Centenary Project (providing services for things that many parishes struggle to do) at a time when many other dioceses are removing or cutting back on central services. Though we have been unable to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis, various people we interviewed suggested that providing quality support services for workers is a necessary and worthwhile investment and that skimping on these is a false economy.
- Further features of the Centenary Project that may have particular relevance to the wider Church in the current climate include:
 - Courageous and creative use of internal (diocesan) and external (SDF / SMMI) funding
 - Having skilled CYF practitioners involved in project inception and design alongside project management professionals
 - Investing in mentoring and appropriate support networks for children’s and young people’s leaders

Alongside all the positive learning points outlined above, this evaluation has also uncovered more challenging areas of learning from the wider Church around:

- Acknowledgement that CYF ministry is often ‘slow work’ that requires faithful relationship-building over many years - in this context, expectations and target setting need to be negotiated carefully
- The challenge of measurement - some stakeholders interviewed expressed concerns that national Church measures such as those linked to ‘Statistics for Mission’ do not adequately reflect the scope and breath of CYF ministry
- The challenge of sustainability as not all CYF ministries are able to become self-funding

5 Conclusion

5.1 Looking Back

This evaluation of the Diocese of Sheffield's Centenary Project has been timed to coincide with the project's ten-year anniversary and the end of Strategic Development Funding (SDF) from the national Church. Looking back at the project's achievements over the past ten years, there is a huge amount to celebrate. As Section 3 of this report (Impacts, Achievements and Outcomes) noted:

- Nearly all the original targets set have been met or exceeded.
- The wider achievements of the Centenary Project include:
 - Its reach, scale, profile, culture, and longevity
 - Its innovative and effective model of appointing children's, young people's and families' workers who are 'centrally employed but locally deployed'
 - The Diocese of Sheffield's commendable innovation and willingness to take risks in initiating the Centenary Project
- There remains a statistically significant difference between churches with a Centenary Project Worker (CPW) and other churches. Churches with a CPW have a higher proportion of under 18s in their worshipping community than churches without one.
- CPWs enrich their parishes and mission areas in numerous ways, providing greater capacity and missional energy, greater consistency and reach, and greater volunteer engagement and focus on children's young people's and families' ministry within parishes.
- Assessing whether the CP has achieved its stated ambition of enabling "a step-change" in mission and ministry with children, young people and families in the Diocese of Sheffield is difficult without a precise definition. But during the CP's lifetime, there has been considerable changes in things like:
 - The extent of CYF provision and the numbers of children, young people and families engaged
 - The prominence and embeddedness of CYF ministries within diocesan structures
 - Support structures and leadership pipelines for CYF ministries

5.2 Looking to the Future

In Section 4 of this report, we reflected on key learning arising from the Centenary Project's experience that is relevant to both the future development of the project and the wider Church. As part of this evaluation, interviewees also told us about their hopes and ideas for the further development of the Centenary Project over the next five years. Many of the ideas generated have already been included within the Diocese of Sheffield's future plans and the recently approved bid for over £4 million Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) funding from the national Church for the Centenary Project between 2025 and 2031. This includes provision for:

1. Deployment of 24 new Centenary Project Workers in strategically significant parishes and mission areas parishes, with a particular focus on resourcing youth ministry in 10 locations and developing relationships with Church of England primary schools.
2. Further support for established Centenary Project posts to create additional capacity or to help make a post sustainable for the longer term.
3. Supporting parishes with lay-led CYF ministry to develop their work with children and young people or to start 'something new'.

The release of this funding is a clear affirmation of the Centenary Project's achievements over the last ten years and opens up a new chapter in the life of the project. The proposed further

expansion of the Centenary Project is a very exciting prospect, but it is also important to acknowledge that this will come with challenges as well as opportunities. As the project continues to grow and diversify, one particularly noteworthy challenge concerns the importance of maintaining the project's distinctive culture and values, and maintaining the same "exemplary" quality, at the same time as embracing new opportunities. As one interviewee put it, quality leadership (at every level) and quality appointments have been key to the project's success to date, so it is imperative to ensure that, amidst further growth and expansion, this continues.

The Centenary Project has achieved a huge amount over the last ten years, enriching the lives of thousands of children and young people. It has also been a "a beacon of hope" to others in the Church of England and, as such, many people in the wider Church are looking forward to hearing how it continues to develop over the years to come.

With our grateful thanks to everyone who assisted us with this evaluation.

Andy Wier, Elspeth McGann, and Dan Ortiz
Church Army's Research Unit, April 2025

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview Questions

As detailed in the Introduction, our methodology for this project included:

- A review of selected statistical data and documentation about the Centenary Project supplied by the diocese
- Two focus groups - one with Centenary Project workers and one with members of the central project team
- 14 research interviews with a selection of stakeholders agreed with the client.³ These included Centenary Project workers past and present, parish incumbents, diocesan stakeholders, and wider Church representatives.

Different stakeholders were asked different interview questions, but all questions were taken from the following core list:

Topic	Interview Question
Warm up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What has been your involvement in or relationship to the Centenary Project?
Overall Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would you say has been the Centenary Project's greatest achievement? Do you have a story or example that illustrates this?
Parish Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How would you summarise the difference that having a CP worker makes to the life of a parish?• To what extent, does this impact continue when a CP worker moves on?• What do you think are the key factors that affect whether a CP worker parish placement works out well?
Diocesan impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Centenary Project sought to bring about a 'step change' in ministry and mission with children, young people and families across the Diocese of Sheffield. To what extent, has that 'step change' been achieved?
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did the project significantly change or depart from what was initially imagined at the very start of the project? If so, what were the reasons for this?
Central support model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What difference does support from the CP central team make to ministry effectiveness and worker wellbeing? Are there ways this could be strengthened and improved?
Internal learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What's the most important thing that the Diocese of Sheffield has learned, or needs to learn, from the Centenary Project's experience?
Learning for the wider Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think other dioceses and the national Church can learn from the Centenary Project?
Looking to the future (sustainability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How would you like to see the work of the Centenary Project develop over the next five years? What would a sustainable future look like?
Wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there anything else you'd like to tell us that would be relevant to this evaluation?

³ 16 potential interviewees were contacted and invited to participate in the research. Of these, 14 were willing and able to be interviewed.

Appendix 2 - Key Learning Points for other Dioceses

Extracts from mid-term evaluation (2022): Briefing note for other dioceses

Why learn from this project?

- This project is not trying to deliver anything novel or alternative. **It is core ministry.** Where parishes, deaneries and dioceses find themselves with ageing attendance and more thinly-stretched resources, this project ensures quality children, youth and families ministry.
- The careful process by the wider team to decide whether a parish is suitable for a worker means a parish receives help with **strategic mission discernment at no extra cost.**
- This project has tracked its progress from the start. The **statistics** prove it has made a difference.
- The project has developed considerable **expertise in developing systems to measure impact.** Similar projects can learn from this expertise.
- This project is about serving every parish in a diocese, but especially those in **economically disadvantaged** communities. It's about growing potential from small and ordinary beginnings.
- This project ensures long-term investment is made in children, youth and families. Where **diocesan strategies will adapt** and the wider landscape of resourcing will change, this project has proved it can adjust to such developments.
- Don't be tempted to think '*we're not in a place to start*' and dismiss an opportunity. There are priorities to line up in a diocese, but if the diocesan bishop is convinced, things fall into place.
- This project respects local context, considering the history of a parish and existing resources in the area. The bespoke discernment process allows for exploration to determine what existing ministry is taking place - either Anglican or by other denominations - and so complement.

What do you need to know before starting?

- Key to this project is the balance of local workers and central team. Workers are supported by the central infrastructure. **One cannot exist without the other.**
- This central infrastructure is especially vital for those parishes without stipendiary clergy - whether in vacancy or with no dedicated clergy person long-term.
- Longevity is aided by developing the right culture built around key values. Love your workers. Support them. Invest in what they do as a vocational ministry. **Take seriously their calling.**
- **Mentoring** is key to this project's effectiveness. It is essential.
- While this is not an overly expensive project - central costs are kept as low as possible - **neither is it a project to be delivered 'on the cheap'**. Take seriously 'fair hours for fair salary' to respect your workers and their ministry from the start.
- This project cannot perform miracles. It will not instantly transform numbers of children, youth and families attending churches overnight. However, **do not underestimate** the significant impact that paid workers can have directly and indirectly to the life and health of parishes they are working with.
- Recognise the importance of **networking** to help workers feel supported and part of something bigger of which they are proud to be a part.
- Due to the balance of central versus local elements of the project, most workers will be best known for their work locally. Communication and **celebration of the network** of lay workers across the project will be vital to make transparent the core ministry it delivers for the diocese as a whole.
- Prepare churches well. It's all in the **preparation.** Work on finance from the start.

- Expect to **recruit locally**. In the Sheffield experience, it is unlikely people would move house for smaller contracts, so advertise in local networks and through social media.
- **Set clear objectives** with the right blend of realism and aspiration but knowing that 'life happens'. Regular meetings drawing together worker, mentor and local line manager help ensure objectives are set and tracked as much as possible.
- Make **training for line management** - even for clergy - compulsory.
- The project can never be impervious to the unknown. There will always be seasons of things working well and other seasons when things feel like a struggle. **Be open to change**. Always ask 'How can we do this better?'
- It can be **hard for workers to tell good news stories** about their own work. It won't happen without intentionality. Ensure there is energy and capacity on the central team for communications.