




# *Annual Report 2023*

Charity Number: 1091290



*Step's vision is for a lively, relevant and consistent witness to Christian truth and standards to be established and maintained in all the secondary schools in St Albans and Harpenden.*

## *Bigger But Smaller*

If you attended either of our last two End of Year Celebrations you would have heard Chris talk about our vision of 'bigger but smaller'. As we grow as a charity in terms of our staff capacity, volunteer team and activities we deliver, we want to become 'bigger but smaller'. We hope to be bigger in terms of organising an increased number of large gathering events, whether inside or outside of school (sowing more seeds, even wider), but we also want to be smaller by investing more time in those individuals and small groups - cultivating the seeds by journeying with individuals as they develop as people and grow in their faith.

This year we have welcomed new staff members and said goodbye to long-serving members of the team. We've moved our office space to our 'bigger', permanent location at Vineyard Church (from the temporary place we were in while Vineyard's incredible building project to grow their youth provision was being finished). We've been blessed with an unexpected grant of £200,000 for us to significantly grow over the next three years, which, although is an amazing gift from God, it gives us a significant challenge to gradually increase our regular income each year to enable us to maintain this capacity once the funding has been spent (more on this is on page 11). It's also been another record-breaking year in terms of the number of activities we have delivered, as you can see on the next page.

As you read this year's annual report, we hope you get a flavour (and it's just a tiny flavour) of what being 'bigger but smaller' looked like in 2022/23 and a bit of a taste of what 2023/24 may look like.



# Another Record Breaking Year

Below is a summary of our record-breaking year in terms of activities delivered in schools. The figures from last year are in brackets.

**1,129**  
(1,132)

## Lessons, Workshops or Assemblies in School or part of a Step Day (top 5 lessons taught shown below)

Who is Jesus (55 times with 1,650\* young people)

Ultimate Questions (49 times with 1,470\* young people)

Prejudice (48 times with 1,440\* young people)

Walk Through the Bible (46 times with 1,380\* young people)

Parables (43 times with 1,290\* young people) (\*based on 30 young people per lesson)

**452**  
(387)

## Lunchtime Activities

These include Explore Groups, Clubs, Themed Cafes and regular spaces like The Snug (Loreto), The Burrow (Townsend) and The Emmaus Centre (Nicholas Breakspear)

**520**  
(351)

## Courses, Mentoring and other Informal Initiatives

Including Haven, Tough Stuff, Leadership Foundations, Youth Alpha, NUA Origins and work with our iMatter Journal

**103**  
(91)

## Sessions on Year 6 Step Up Days at Primary Schools

Including Friendship, Identity, Journeys and Footprints

**2,204**  
(1,961)

*In total we delivered a record 2,204 activities in schools*

*That is an average of 56.5 activities and over 1,100 students seen every single week in term time*



## *Bigger- Step Days...*

This year, we delivered 48 Step Days including the 13 Step Up Days we delivered for Year 6 children in local primary schools and a Leadership Conference with 70 sixth formers. A Step Day is a term we use to describe a themed day with a group of students - often an entire year group or half a year group split over two days. Step Days can be in school but our preference is when we can take the young people out of school and host the day in a church to give it a retreat feel. Wherever we host it, we provide them with a mixture of calm, reflective spaces, creative spaces such as pottery and crazy, energising activities such as team building games - all things which young people desperately need when they come out of their normal routine.

## *...Leading to the Smaller*

One of the successes of Step Days is when we include a taster session of one of the various courses we offer. This might be an Alpha course (see Page 5), a Haven course to help those with anxiety or Leadership Foundations, which has grown significantly this year.

Our Leadership Foundations course is a wonderful opportunity for local Christians who have leadership experience to invest in the lives of young people and bring Christian values into the leadership arena. In one of the schools that we delivered the course for the very first time, one student commented that the course “has greatly developed my confidence in who I am as a person and has allowed me to be bolder in other group opportunities outside of the programme. Overall, I deeply appreciate the work of those at Step who have poured into us to help us grow into leaders who can make a difference in the world and in the lives of others.”





## *Bigger to Smaller- Townsend's Explore Day*

On the back of our 'bigger' activities, 'smaller' initiatives often develop. One example of this was at Townsend in November, where we delivered an Alpha taster session as part of a Year 7 Spiritual Reflections Day with a theme of Christianity and Me. Ten young people joined the subsequent Youth Alpha course in the spring term, where a local church youth minister joined Helena and another Step volunteer.

The course was a huge success, with all the young people developing in their faith. Some, who already defined themselves as Christians with varying commitment, felt they had a stronger and more relevant faith as a result. There was also one girl who at the beginning of the course said she didn't think God existed, she wasn't a Christian but she felt like she wanted to dip her toes into the water to see what it was about. By the end of it, she said she was ready to dive in and has since been attending the church that the youth minister works at and is connected with their youth groups.

The group on the Alpha course didn't want it to end so Helena has since set up a new Explore Group for them and others who have wanted to come along, where they looked at a new resource we've discovered called 'NUA Origins'.

Not only have the school encouraged this group, they even gave permission for them to go off timetable for a day to delve deeper in an Explore Day. Helena used our Space Mat, a couple of episodes from NUA Origins and some reflective craft activities to provide them with a day that has grown their faith further and strengthened the relationships within the group. Helena is incredibly excited to continue to work with this group this year and see the fruit of the seeds that have been sown.



# Bigger- Illuminate Gatherings

There are many young people we know in schools who, although haven't been brought up in a church community, are fascinated by the Christian faith. They have questions, love the relationships that they have with their Christian friends and appreciate the connections that the small groups and clubs they attend in schools bring. Some will have a fledgling faith but attending church events can be daunting for them.

Step is part of a collaborative group called 'The Collective' - a network of church youth leaders and youth charities such as Step, 267 and Young Life, who want to expand youth ministry beyond their own setting and offer multiple pathways for young people to be discipled. This includes planning events that are purposefully accessible to all young people and tailored for those who already attend church to feel comfortable inviting their friends along. The hope is that after having lots of fun in a church or with a group of Christians while hearing about God, they would connect with other youth groups or worship events such as Fuel.

This year two hundred young people attended a Friday night event at Vineyard with giant inflatable games, glow in the dark crazy golf, crafts and much more, with an amazing testimony from a sixth former. Over a hundred attended a trip to Ninja Warrior and nearly a hundred attended an end of year prom at St Paul's Church, designed especially for those who missed events like this during Covid. Our Schools Coordinators, Jez and Helena, definitely enjoyed dressing up for the occasion.

Step were able to accompany several students we work with, which grew those relationships and for some provided avenues into new spaces such as Fuel and some of our 'Third Spaces' described on the following page. During the 2023/24 academic year, we are really excited to be hiring the cathedral for a monumental event in January and hosting the Riding Lights on October 3rd, among others.





## Smaller- Third Spaces

You may be asking yourself what are ‘Third Spaces’. Success at Step is seeing young people connected with local churches but as we saw on the previous page, this journey is not always easy. Third Spaces are designed to fill the gap between school and church - a place where it isn’t just an extension of schools work and it isn’t just a church youth group. Instead, it is a strategic place for those at Step to grow relationships with the young people outside of school while introducing them to a Christian community.

Illuminate Cafe is one of these spaces that launched this year, inspired by the success we have had with other groups such as Donut Drop-In at St Helen’s Church in Wheathampstead. Illuminate Cafe is a time for young people to be themselves and have fun whether that is playing table football, basketball or table tennis, playing music, doing crafts or just chatting with friends. There is no formal Bible teaching but conversations about faith happens in the midst of spending time with one another. The last session of the term included a spontaneous ‘prayer huddle’ with the group praying for the summer ahead.

One young person refers to it as a family and when someone new joined stated “I guess it’s like having a new member of the family”. Others have arrived through our lunchtime groups at Verulam and Nicholas Breakspear and they have since attended Fuel and the Prom, mentioned previously. We’ve also seen people our team are mentoring attend and many young people who have been invited by the friends. Following the success of this group, we are actively pursuing further opportunities to create similar environments in other churches.

A hand is holding a box of Kix cereal. The box is blue and white with a large red 'K' logo. Text on the box includes 'NEW IMPROVED RECIPE', 'SPECIAL', 'The Original', and 'Kix'. The background shows a multi-story residential building with a light-colored facade and a window. The image is partially obscured by a purple banner at the top and a purple banner at the bottom.

## *Bigger- Social Justice Education*

Young people in today's world are passionate about social justice and part of our work is to communicate that God shares this desire because of his love for His creation. This year, we have organised assemblies and subsequent whole-school food collections for the Care Centre, delivered our Refugee Experience workshop 34 times, our Fair-trade workshop 41 times and hundreds of young people have experienced our Justice Mat.

We also had the absolute privilege of inviting asylum seekers, who are connected to Markyate Baptist Church, to a Step Day with Nicholas Breakspear and more recently to Sir John Lawes for a talk and Q&A session with sixth formers. The latter was set up for students studying Sociology and Politics but it ended up attracting about 50 sixth formers and the head teacher was in attendance. The asylum seekers were honest about their experience and the school posted on social media their gratitude, stating 'the challenges they faced and their appreciation for being in the UK was truly overwhelming. We cannot thank them enough for their bravery in sharing'.

## *Smaller- Social Justice Engagement*

These bigger gatherings and initiatives spark opportunities for the smaller. We have welcomed a small group of Verulam students to the Care Centre for a tour before they kindly volunteered their time (albeit while missing a lesson) to help in the warehouse and see what happens to the items once they've been collected. We are excited to be growing these visits this coming year with different schools.

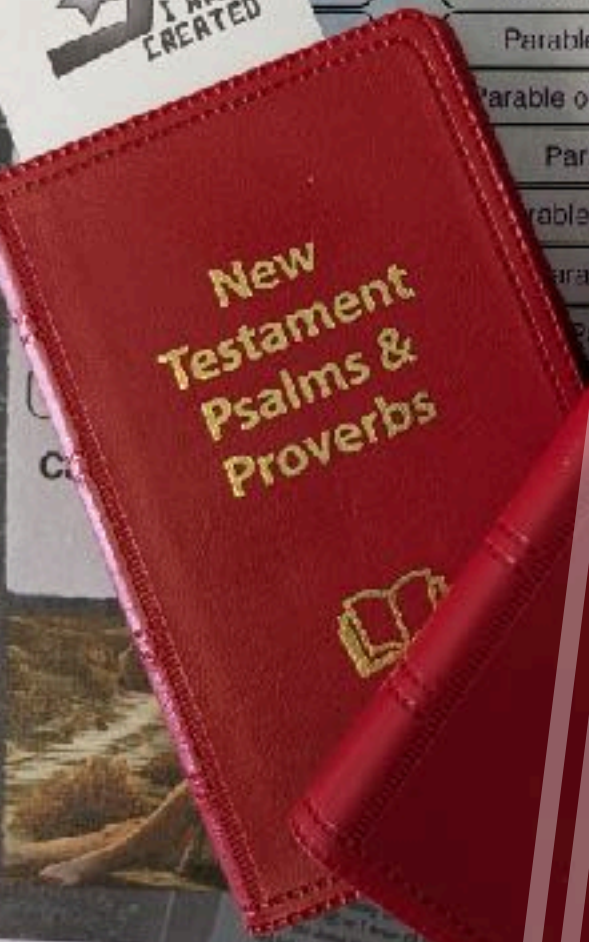
And, with our connections with the Refugee Cafe at Markyate Baptist Church, a couple of schools are now interested in offering it as an opportunity for students to volunteer with.



A parable is a story with a meaning. Jesus wasn't the only person to tell parables but he told many that are recorded in the Bible.

Parable  
Teach information  
Hide or reveal the truth  
Stir emotions  
Cause a reaction

Put the Bible passages below, match them to the parables and fill in any missing words.



## Bigger- Bibles Given Out

You may be familiar with The Gideons and you may even remember receiving a little red Bible as a gift at school or seeing one in a hotel room. The Gideons UK are now called Good News for Everyone and we have been working with them for many years to put Bibles into the hands of young people, normally when they are in Year 7.

This year we have given away over 1,000 Bibles and the advantage of us working together has been the context in which they are given. It might be as part of a Step Day or a lesson series on Who is Jesus or Parables of Jesus, but whenever a Bible is given out, there is an opportunity for them to use it straight away, learn how to find passages within it (often in a fun quiz-style manner) and then read the stories that have brought joy and hope to billions of people in the world. The added advantage is that it's in the context of an existing relationship with Step.

## Smaller- Bible Study Guides Developing

We sometimes get to hear about young people reading their new Bible outside of the context it was given (and on one occasion this year, hearing about a parent who has started reading their son's Bible he received at a Step Day). One of our new resources that will be developed this year is an accompanying booklet with a guide to reading the Bible, a few examples of Bible studies and links to our app and website, where we shall be adding additional reflections and studies. Our aim is that this will help the young people access the Bible on their own but also in the context of small groups in school or our 'third spaces'.



A photograph of two women standing side-by-side in front of a dense green leafy background. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a red and white patterned dress. The woman on the right has long blonde hair and is wearing a dark blue dress with a floral pattern. Both are smiling at the camera.

## Bigger- Growing Our Staff Team...

This year we have seen changes to our staff team. We said goodbye to Sara Martin in February and at the same time recruited Charlotte Carthy (4-days a week) and Mary Purkiss (full time) as Schools Coordinators, giving us an extra 6 days a week for the last term of the school year. Both Charlotte and Mary, pictured here, have settled in really well and brought enthusiasm and new skills to the team.

Sadly, Charlotte Barton also left her part time role at the end of the school year to set up a schools work charity called the Trinity Project. We're very excited about this new venture and would love you to pray for it, so please visit [www.trinityproject.uk](http://www.trinityproject.uk) for more information.

We aim to recruit a new full-timer later in the year, but in the meantime we are thankful for Jez Bottrill, who has agreed to increase his hours up until Christmas to shoulder some of the ongoing responsibilities needing cover following Charlotte leaving. You can see all our current staff team at [www.stepschoolswork.org.uk/about-step](http://www.stepschoolswork.org.uk/about-step), which we'll update if we appoint.

## ...And Our Wonderful Volunteers

As well as our staff team growing, in 2022/23 twelve new volunteers joined the team., with a few more starting the process over the summer. To help our volunteers develop in their skills, to be given further opportunities in other areas of Step's work and potentially take on leadership roles, we launched our 'Step Ladder' volunteer development program. Our aim is to refine this over the next year so that we provide the best environment for volunteers to flourish at Step. If you'd like to join the team as a volunteer, please get in touch.



# Finances

2022/23 Income £374.6k (£199.6k allocated to 22/23 budget)

## A Gift in the midst of a challenge

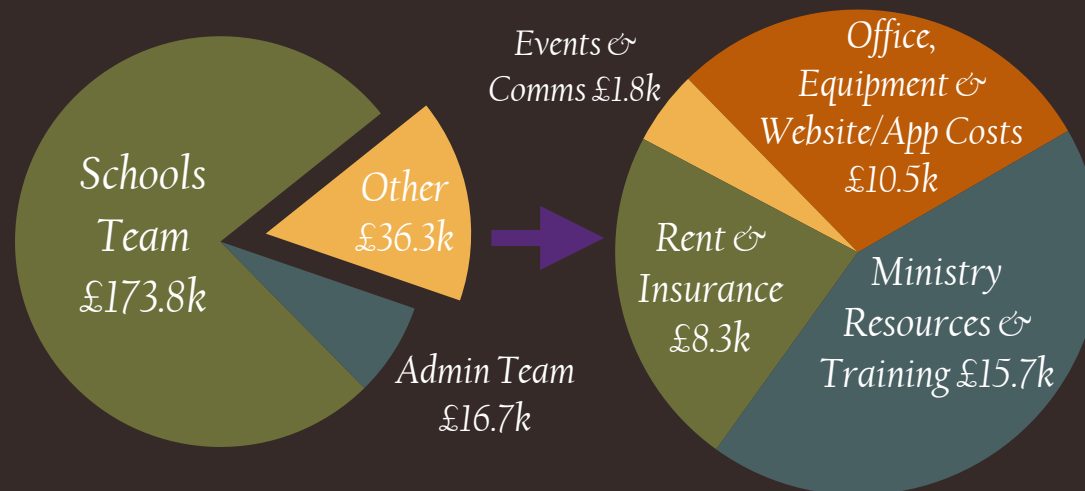
Income Stream	Total Income in 2022/23	Income allocated for 2022/23 budget
Individuals & Gift Aid	£96.1k	£96.1k
Churches	£37.8k	£37.8k
Grants	£228.1k	£53.1k
Other	£12.6k	£12.6k
TOTAL	£374.6k	£199.6k

In November 2022, we were invited to apply for one-off funding from The Weald Trust, who had decided to wind up the trust and distribute its assets. Their trustees shared in our vision and awarded Step an extraordinary grant of £200,000, enabling us to accelerate the implementation of our 3-5 year plan. This is reflected in our increase in staff team and our anticipated further increase this year. Because of this exceptional grant we had a surplus for the year of £147.8k. However in practice we allocated only £25k of the grant last year, which in effect meant we had a deficit of £27.2k. The remaining £175k of the grant will be allocated to the next three years.

Individual giving (including gift aid) was 17% down from last year with church giving down 16%. Expenditure was £36.9k higher this year due to the impact of inflation on general costs, the need to buy new equipment including a printer & laptops and increased staff costs due to a growing team and inflation-based pay rises.

2022/23 Expenditure: £226.8k

## Future Growth and Sustainability



Our budget for 2023/24 is £288.6k (with £55k of Weald Trust grant allocated) and we anticipate this level will only gradually rise over the next few years while our core financial income catches up with the expenditure this grant has allowed.

It does mean that we have a challenge. In order for us to maintain this level, and possibly grow again, we need a major increase in our giving through individuals, churches and other grants. Please pray that God provides, as He's always done, and consider if you can support us financially. More information about our financial projections can be found at [www.stepschoolswork.org.uk/growth](http://www.stepschoolswork.org.uk/growth)





*There are many ways to support Step so if you'd like to volunteer, sign up to updates or financially support us, please get in touch or visit our website for more information.*

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