

What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

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Statement of originality

Except for those parts in which it is explicitly stated to the contrary, this dissertation is my own work. It has not been submitted for any degree at this or any other academic institution.

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Abstract

In recent years, short-term missions have received heavy criticism. But to what extent is this criticism justified? Is there a biblical grounding for short-term missions and what can we learn from those who have participated in them?

In this dissertation, the literature review explores the biblical grounding to short-term missions and the benefits and drawbacks to such trips. It draws on Paul's missionary journeys to identify principles for contemporary overseas missions.

Through a mixed methods single case study involving questionnaires, interviews and a focus group, the research explores benefits to teenagers and church youth groups engaging in short-term missions with *The Smiles Foundation* in Romania. Data is presented following sequential explanatory design and themes identified through deductive thematic analysis.

The research reveals numerous benefits to teenagers engaging in short-term overseas missions, including growth in faith, impact on vocation and personal development. It also identifies deeper relationships with one another as the main benefit to youth groups undertaking such trips. Discussion around individual and collective experiences concludes that short-term missions are most beneficial when undertaken as a group.

The research findings challenge the commonly-held framing narrative for short-term missions which view participant as giver and beneficiary as receiver, opening up the possibility for trips to be seen as partnership opportunities that result in mutual blessing.

As a result of the research, recommendations are made for church and youth leaders, areas for further research are identified, and subsequent steps are suggested.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“A thoughtful evaluation of short-term mission trips will reveal that many are ineffective, distracting, wasteful, and in some cases flat-out counterproductive to the cause of Christ among the nation” (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 6¹). Short-term missions (STMs) have been heavily criticised, but to what extent is this criticism justified? Is there a *biblical* grounding for STMs and what can we learn from those who have participated in such trips?

As an individual whose life has been shaped by several overseas mission experiences, I am keen to explore how cross-cultural trips have impacted others. For more details on my story, see Appendix A.

1.2 Background

In his book, *Missions*, Johnson introduces two missionaries. The first travelled to India in 1812 and spent 37 years there until he died. The second travelled to India in 2012 for two weeks. Johnson (2017) does not berate either approach but highlights how both men were typical missionaries of their generations. This demonstrates how approaches to overseas mission have changed over time. Whilst long-term missionaries do still exist, short-term mission participation is becoming increasingly more common, with reports of an increase of 630% over a five-year period (Kelly 2018: 3).

Whilst we could accept this statistic and talk of a “short-term mission explosion” (Howell and Dorr 2007: 238) or declare that “short-term mission has become a global phenomenon” (Linhart in Nash and Whitehead, 2014, Chapter 12), it is pertinent to consider the context of statistics. Kelly, Linhart, Howell and Dorr all write from an American perspective. From a UK perspective, Skirton² reports: “Long before Covid-19, I was noticing a decline in the number of British Christians engaging in cross-cultural, overseas mission” (2021). Similarly, Arthur describes the UK church as “less interested in overseas mission work than in previous

¹ E-books without page numbers will be referenced in this way and marked as e-books in the bibliography.

² Skirton works for *Operation Mobilisation* – an organisation specialising in mission opportunities.

generations” (2017: 7), observing that “in 2011, a major survey of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK made no reference to overseas mission” (2017: 7). From this perspective, it seems more accurate to conclude that STM engagement is declining in the UK. It is set amidst this backdrop of decline that this research is carried out. Whilst reinvigorating enthusiasm for global mission in the UK is not the primary aim of this research, it would certainly be a welcome consequence.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of this research is to explore how teenagers and youth groups from the UK benefit from engaging in STMs. The impact of STMs on participants remains an under-researched area and “no scholarly work has systemically examined the influence mission trips have on the individuals participating in them” (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009: 122). Robert explains that “we don’t really know yet whether it’s simply do-good tourism or a profound, life changing experience for people who do these trips” (in MacDonald 2006). US writers Ver Beck (2006), Trinitapoli and Vaisey (2009) and Beyerlein *et al.* (2011) have begun to contribute to this discussion, but this dissertation contributes to a gap in research from a UK perspective.

The objectives of this research are to:

- **Outline and critically evaluate existing literature on this topic.**

A literature review will explore what the Bible communicates about STMs, including identifying valuable principles for effective STM engagement. It will also examine what wider literature contributes to the debate concerning the benefits and drawbacks of such trips.

- **Collect data from a UK perspective to explore benefits to teenagers as individuals and youth groups as a whole engaging in STMs with *The Smiles Foundation*.**

This will be fulfilled through conducting empirical research. Considering STMs from both an individual and a group perspective will allow me to bring my research into conversation with key writers on this topic such as Durkheim (1912), James (1902) and Joas (2000) as well as with biblical examples of individuals and groups commissioned

by God. This will enable me to determine whether STMs are most beneficial when undertaken individually or as a group.

- **Challenge the framing narrative for STMs, encouraging them to be seen as opportunities for partnership and mutual blessing.**

Discussion stemming from the research results will challenge the prevailing view of STM participants as “giver” and beneficiary as “receiver”. Instead, I will advocate for STMs to be seen as partnership opportunities that result in mutual blessing.

- **Encourage church and youth leaders to consider engagement in STMs in their discipleship strategies for young people in their church.**

As a result of the research, I will make recommendations and encourage church and youth leaders to consider the role STMs could play in the formation of the teens in their midst.

1.4 Scope of the research

Johnson raises the concern that “if we promote short-term missions based on thinking about our benefits, we run the risk of making short-term missions a selfish enterprise” (2017, Chapter 6). The length of this dissertation has limited the extent to which this can be discussed. Nevertheless, reflecting on this concern has been an important part of the research process, therefore I have shared my reflections in Appendix A.

1.5 Definition of terms

In this dissertation, all references to “short-term missions” or “cross-cultural experiences” refer explicitly to *overseas* mission trips. References to “participants” refer to those *going* on a mission trip, whilst references to “beneficiaries” refer to the people overseas.

In wider literature, there is variation in what constitutes *short-term* mission with suggestions ranging from “less than ten days” (Linhart in Nash and Whitehead, 2014, Chapter 12) to trips lasting “from one week to two years” (Fanning 2009: 1). In *this* research, short-term refers to trips lasting a maximum of two weeks.

Finally, it is important to recognise the distinction between *mission* and *missions*. Bosch helpfully describes how “‘Mission’, singular, remains primary; ‘missions’, in the plural, constitutes a derivative” (1991: 391). *Missions*, therefore is never synonymous with *missio Dei* and STMs only comprise part of our work in representing God in the world.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Up until the turn of the millennium in the year 2000, research into STMs remained a neglected area (Priest and Howell 2013: 125). However, significant uptake of such trips over a short period of time led to greater interest. As a result, the early 2000s saw academic writers from missiological (Brown 2008; Priest and Priest 2008; Wang 2008), anthropological (Birth 2006; Zehner 2006; Howell 2009) and sociological backgrounds (Ver Beck 2006; Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009; Beyerlein *et al.* 2011) beginning to delve into this area, exploring STMs from cultural, economic, political and historic perspectives. Despite this, research into STMs remained limited and “a relatively new field of investigation” (Fanning 2009: 9).

In what follows, I will explore the biblical grounding for STMs before considering arguments raised in wider literature both in favour of and against STMs.

2.2 Biblical grounding for short-term missions

2.2.1 The Great Commission

The logical starting place is Matthew 28: 19-20 – what is commonly known as the Great Commission. This constitutes the primary missional mandate to “*go* and make disciples of all nations” [own emphasis]. It is Jesus’ command to *all* people for *all* time. Similarly, before Jesus ascends to heaven, He says: “...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8b). Steinberg (2023) comments that people often save their most important message until last, and therefore suggests that reaching the world with the gospel was Jesus’ most important instruction to His followers. This highlights the continued importance of overseas mission today.

Although globalisation means we can potentially reach “all nations” without the need for *overseas* mission, Acts 1: 8 calls followers to engage in mission both at home *and* further afield. As Beaver highlights, “the commission appears to list the simultaneous fronts of mission rather than successive geographical or chronological phases of it” (1971: 346). From what we know

of Jesus' missionally inclusive attitude, I would argue this is a fair interpretation of Jesus' words, thus reinforcing the importance of overseas mission engagement for Christians today.

2.2.2 God is a missionary God

In addition, God's desire to call worshippers "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Revelation 7: 9) is portrayed clearly throughout Scripture (Genesis 12: 3; Isaiah 19: 19-25; Jeremiah 3: 17). The Bible leaves no doubt that "God is a missionary God" (Johnson 2010), exemplified in his sending of Jesus into the world. As Mack and Stiles highlight, "long before Jesus uttered the Great Commission to his disciples, God displayed his missionary heart" (2000: 28). As Christians, we are called to reflect God in the world and so our heart's desire should similarly be to "declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples" (Psalm 96: 3) and to ultimately "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28: 19).

2.2.3 The early Christian church

Furthermore, the early church at Antioch demonstrated a precedent for sending out missionaries. For example, Saul and Barnabas were set apart by the Holy Spirit for this role (Acts 13: 1-3). New Testament letters also encouraged Christians to support missionaries (3 John 1: 8; Philemon 4: 15-16; Titus 3: 13). From this perspective, supporting the spread of the gospel through missionary work "is a normal part of basic Christian health" (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 3) and "not an optional add-on" or "for certain people who are interested in that sort of thing" (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 5).

2.2.4 Paul's missionary journeys

Finally, it would be remiss to study overseas missions without considering "the pioneer missionary par excellence" – the Apostle Paul (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 3). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine all of Paul's missionary journeys in detail, however there are elements true to each of his journeys that arguably constitute valuable principles that remain relevant for contemporary overseas missions.

- **Teach the gospel message.**

In all his teaching, Paul never compromises on the fundamental message about the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, summarising this succinctly in his letter to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-4.

- **Demonstrate cultural sensitivity.**

Paul adapted to different cultural contexts, presenting the gospel in ways that resonated with the cultural and religious backgrounds of his audience. For example, he uses the Athenians' altar "to an unknown God" as a starting point when teaching in Athens (Acts 17: 23) and finishes by quoting a Greek poem which they would have known (Acts 17: 28).

- **Build deep and meaningful relationships.**

Paul built deep relationships with those he worked alongside such as Silas, Barnabas, Philemon and Timothy, the latter of which he refers to as his "true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1: 2), revealing the depth of their relationship. A similar depth of relationship is revealed in the emotional farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus where "they all wept as they embraced him [Paul] and kissed him" (Acts 20: 36). As Mack and Stiles summarise, "he [Paul] fills his letters with his love and affection for people he had spent time with on his missions trip" (2000: 131).

- **Empower local people.**

Paul demonstrated a model for sustainable locally-led Christian communities through empowering local people to continue the work of the church after his departure. For instance, he appointed elders in new churches (Acts 14: 23) and encouraged local believers to use their gifts for the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12).

- **Have a servant-hearted attitude and openness to God's will.**

In Philippians 2: 5-7, Paul reminds us to have the same servant-hearted mindset of Jesus. Paul clearly "understands himself as a servant" (Schnabel 2008: 131) – despite his plans often being altered due to unforeseen circumstances, including shipwrecks (Acts 27: 39-44; 2 Corinthians 11: 25) and imprisonments (Acts 16: 22-24; Acts 24: 27; Acts 28: 30-31), he remained open to God's plans and "went where God's Spirit led him" (Schnabel 2008: 12).

2.2.5 Summary

In summary, the imperative of the Great Commission, God’s desire to reach all nations, and the acts of the early Christian church provide a strong grounding for the continuation of overseas missions today. In addition, Paul’s trips reveal a potential model for effective cross-cultural engagement. What perhaps remains unclear is whether overseas missions can be effective when they are *short-term*.

Although it has been argued that “Paul’s first journey was really just a series of consecutive short-term mission trips” (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 6), his stays were often cut short due to rejection or persecution, rather than an active decision to stay for a limited period. This is not to suggest STMs are *unbiblical*, but simply to highlight that there are limited biblical examples of short-term trips. In light of this, we must always seek God’s wisdom when discerning whether STMs are appropriate for us in our contemporary context.

2.3 Benefits of short-term overseas missions

Whilst some writers depict STMs as doing “more harm than good” (Kelly 2018: 1), proponents of STMs emphasise numerous benefits to such trips. This section draws on wider literature to identify five benefits to STM participants.

2.3.1 Engagement in STMs deepens religious beliefs and practices.

“When I am serving, I am in need of the Lord’s help. I am more prone to pray, I have more opportunities to speak with others, and I am better able to grow in obedience to the Word”.

(Mission trip applicant in Howell and Dorr 2007: 252)

Several writers describe STMs as transformational, particularly regarding faith development (Keener 2019; Ver Beck 2006: 478; Emery-Wright and Mackenzie

2017: 100). Trinitapoli and Vaisey provide evidence for these anecdotal claims by using “measures of religious belief” (2009: 129) and “measures of religious practice” (2009: 130) to explore how STMs impact the religiosity of participants.

Their research revealed that STM participants were “more likely to believe in God and less likely to express uncertainty about God’s existence” (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009: 134). STM participants were also more likely to view God “as a personal being, involved in the world” (2009: 134-135) in comparison to non-mission trip takers who frequently described God as “an impersonal or uninvolved force” (2009: 135).

In terms of religious practices, their research revealed that STM participants reported increased engagement in attendance at religious services, Bible reading, prayer, and efforts to proselytise (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009: 138).

These findings illustrate why STMs have been described as spiritually transformative experiences. However, what Trinitapoli and Vaisey’s research knowingly fails to address, is whether these changes in belief and practice are sustained over time. Ver Beck’s research touches on this with one STM participant commenting: “When you go on these trips you never come back the same and you think you’ll never complain again, but unfortunately after a couple of years you do complain” (2006: 492). A longitudinal study would be needed to thoroughly investigate the longevity of changes reported by STM participants.

2.3.2 Engagement in STMs impacts the participant’s worldview.

“I expect to gain a fresh and new perspective, to be stretched out of my comfort zone, to expand my worldview”.

(Mission trip applicant in Howell and Dorr 2007: 245)

STMs hold the potential to change an individual’s worldview (Borthwick in Fanning 2009: 3; Usner in Borland and Adams 2013: 97). Research by Beyerlein, Adler and Trinitapoli revealed that STM participants “had slightly lower levels of ethnocentrism compared to people who stayed home” (2011: 783), indicating that STMs help participants develop an openness to other cultures. Additionally, “mission trip-takers scored higher than nonmission [sic] trip-takers on the Global Social Responsibility Inventory” (Hopkins in Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 783), demonstrating a heightened awareness of personal responsibility in global social justice issues. Furthermore, they found STM participants were twice as likely to engage in voluntary work at home compared to non-mission trip-takers (Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 789), revealing a tendency for STM participants to respond practically to their heightened awareness of personal responsibility regarding world issues.

Such findings have led some to conclude that a STM might be better termed “a transnational consciousness raising activity for social justice” (Detemple in Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 784). From my perspective, this description is flawed for two reasons. Firstly, it focuses the purpose of STMs on the participant (see Appendix A for further discussion). Secondly, it focuses on one single area of impact, thus ignoring the other ways that STMs benefit participants.

2.3.3 Engagement in STMs impacts vocational pathways.

“After Kim saw the malnourishment clinic we worked at in Guatemala, she returned home and changed her major to dietetics, planning on returning as a full-time missionary”.

(Mack and Stiles 2000: 114)

Proponents of STMs argue that such trips serve as opportunities to explore overseas mission work as a vocation (Ver Beck 2006: 478) – a stance often supported by long-term missionaries who credit STMs as the reason behind their commitment as career missionaries (Fanning 2009: 2). In Friesen’s study, 50% of his participants reported

increased interest in future full-time mission work in the year following a STM (in Fanning 2009: 19), indicating a potential link between STM engagement and the uptake of long-term missionary work. However, Friesen did not follow up to see whether this increased interest *did* result in longer-term commitments, thus casting doubt over the reliability of his findings.

On that note, the link between STMs and the recruitment of long-term career missionaries has often been questioned (Lupton, 2011, Chapter 2) – and perhaps rightly so. Holzmann claims “25 out of every 100 involved in short-term service become life-long missionaries” (in Fanning 2009: 9). However, if millions of people engage in STMs annually (MacDonald 2006; Ver Beck 2006: 478; Howell and Dorr 2007: 236; Priest and Priest 2008: 54; Howell 2009: 206), and the number of long-term missionaries worldwide is in decline (Johnson, 2017, Chapter 6; Allen in Fanning 2009: 1), then it is impossible for Holzmann’s statistic to be universally true. In other words, “the explosive growth in the number of short-term mission trips [...] has not translated into similarly explosive growth in the number of career missionaries” (Powell *et al.*, 2011, Chapter 5).

That said, others insist that “if we want long-term missionaries, we have to be totally committed to a short-term program” (Olson in Fanning 2009: 22) and there is evidence of concerted efforts to tap into the potential that STMs hold for encouraging engagement in long-term missionary work. For instance, Brewer has a ten-step program aimed at helping STM participants transition from short-term participants to long-term missionaries (in Fanning 2009: 27).

2.3.4 Engagement in STMs increases long-term support for mission work.

“One girl who came with the group has come back as a volunteer doctor and another group of five to six young people are coming every year with her. Now she is raising money for the clinic”.

Some writers claim a link between STM participation and increased charitable giving (Mack and Stiles 2000: 38; Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 789). However, there is also evidence to suggest that this is not always the case. In Ver Beck's study, 59% of participants reported an increase in their financial giving following their STM (2006: 485). However, Ver Beck followed up these claims by examining the charity's donation details. This revealed that "75% of the 165 participants in the short-term teams [...] did not send in any direct donation [...] in the two years after their trip" (2006: 485). It is possible that participants chose to support the charity financially through other means, however the discrepancy does call into question whether STMs *do* increase long-term financial support for overseas mission work.

That said, *financial* support represents just one form of longer-term support. Mack and Stiles³ describe how STM engagement has had an "impact in galvanizing missions awareness in the church" (2000: 38). This is certainly true in my own experience as after my first STM, I encouraged others to get involved and organised three subsequent STMs for groups in my church.

Prayer also constitutes another form of long-term support. STMs can encourage people to "pray more specifically for those they visited" (Mack and Stiles 2000: 38) and "can convert a person into a lifelong intercessor" (Taylor in Fanning 2009: 4). Again, this is something I resonate with, as during the Covid-19 pandemic I felt moved to establish an online prayer meeting for supporters of the charity – a group that still meets today with new supporters often joining after their own STM.

2.3.5 Engagement in STMs transforms participants.

"I have no doubt that my life will be dramatically altered by this trip".

³ At the time of writing, Mack and Stiles had directed STMs for over fourteen years.

In a special issue of *Missiology* (Volume 41, Issue 2) that focused on STMs, Priest and Howell state that “people claim, and experience, changed lives as a result of their involvement in, and even exposure to, short-term mission” (2013: 127). In addition to the aspects already mentioned, STM participants also report change in the following areas:

- increased humility (Van Engen 2000: 1; Keener 2019);
- the development of empathy and compassion (Emery-Wright and Mackenzie 2017: 100, Fanning 2009: 3, Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 792; Mack and Stiles 2000: 162);
- increased gratitude (Howell and Dorr 2007: 261; Ver Beck 2006: 486);
- a sense of empowerment to make a difference (Guthrie 2001: 87; Taylor in Fanning 2009: 4).

Ironically, the vast number of benefits to STM participants has become one of the primary arguments *against* STMs with critics contending that trips benefit the participants more than the intended beneficiaries. It is for this reason that Keener (2019) and Howell and Dorr (2007) propose the use of the word “pilgrimage” in lieu of STMs since “it better describes the process of participants going away to be changed, rather than changing those to whom they go” (Keener 2019). From my perspective, whilst I agree that the term “pilgrimage” does illustrate the transformational nature of STMs, the word shifts the primary purpose of the trip to being about the participant. As Fanning points out (and as detailed in Appendix A), “while it’s true that one of the fruits of a short-term trip is a life change for the missionaries, this should be viewed as a result and not the motivation for the enterprise” (2009: 14). For this reason, I do not feel the term “pilgrimage” encapsulates the essence of STMs.

2.4 Drawbacks of overseas short-term missions

In recent years, STMs have received heavy criticism. However, most of the criticism levelled at STMs stems from a desire to see engagement in overseas missions done *effectively*. This following section draws on literature to identify five arguments *against* STMs, whilst also considering how these pitfalls might be navigated for a successful STM.

2.4.1 Engagement in STMs is expensive.

“We could have done so much with that money”.

(Orphanage staff member in Van Engen 2000: 1)

Every year, STMs cost an enormous amount of money. Estimates for the annual cost of trips in the US range from 2.5-5 billion dollars (Lupton, 2011, Chapter One). Consequently, the question concerning whether the benefit to overseas charities outweighs the large financial input is often raised (Beyerlein *et al.* 2011: 783; Van Engen 2000: 2; Johnson, 2017, Chapter 6; Ver Beck 2006: 478; Lupton, 2011, Chapter 1).

Unarguably, the vast amount of money raised for STMs *could* be immensely beneficial in third-world countries. As an illustration, Van Engen highlights that the \$25,000 raised by students for their STM could have covered half the annual running costs for the orphanage they went to serve (2000: 1). This might lead us to conclude that donating the money is better than going, however Ver Beck’s research suggests the solution is not so straightforward.

In his study, Ver Beck reported that when given the choice between receiving the money or receiving the people, “many community members [beneficiaries] were reluctant to recommend that groups just send money because they clearly valued the personal connection” (2006: 482). One beneficiary even stated: “it’s better if the groups come, because of their love for others” (2006: 482). That’s not to say that the contrary argument was not expressed from beneficiaries, however it does highlight that no financial donation can replace the impact of personal engagement.

One solution here could be to encourage STM participants to invest financially *after* their trip. As expressed by Van Engen, “short-term missions can be worth every penny if they mark the beginning of a long-term relationship” (2000: 4).

2.4.2 Engagement in STMs only serves to assuage guilt.

“Are we going through the motions of helping the poor so we can congratulate ourselves afterwards?”

(Van Engen 2000: 3)

Critics of STMs question the motives of participants describing engagement as “little more than a well-intentioned, feel-good activity” (Lupton, 2011, Chapter 8), and stemming “out of a selfish desire to feel good about helping others” (Fanning 2009: 4). In essence, they become “expensive efforts that assuage [...] guilt” (Ver Beck 2006: 478). To address this, pre-trip preparation (a foundational principle for effective STMs engagement, as identified by Ver Beck 2006; Fanning 2009; Mack and Stiles 2000; Powell *et al.* 2011) is essential to remind STM participants of the biblical mandate to go.

2.4.3 Engagement in STMs reinforces power dynamics.

“Can we continue to redress the imbalances of financial power, whilst sending affluent teams to work with partners on a short-term basis?”

(BMS World Mission 2021)

Usually, STM participants travel from wealthy to third-world countries (Priest and Priest 2008: 66), meaning STM participants are considered by beneficiaries “to have a lot of wealth” (Mack and Stiles 2000: 182). This inevitably brings a power dynamic into play which has not gone unnoticed in the debate around STMs. For example, Fanning expresses “concern about the cultural imperialist assumptions underlying many short-term projects” (2009: 6), Beyerlein *et al.* mention “the practice of paternalistic aid” (2011: 783), whilst Usner grapples with how to engage with STMs without “being complicit in a form of soft neocolonialism” (in Borland and Adams 2013: 96). *BMS World Mission* even offer this

imbalance of power as one of the reasons for withdrawing their short-term mission programmes (2021).

STM participants often see money as the solution to the issues they encounter during STMs (Mack and Stiles 2000: 86; 175). In the Bible, the disciples also displayed this tendency. For example, when Jesus instructed them to feed a crowd, their response was: “That would take more than half a year’s wages!” (Mark 6: 37). Interestingly, Jesus encouraged them to see what the people already had and He used this as the starting point. So, whilst generosity and giving are biblical principles (Deuteronomy 16: 17; Proverbs 3: 9; 2 Corinthians 9: 7; Luke 6: 38), Jesus’ actions suggest there is something important too about working in *partnership* with the people we are seeking to serve and using the resources they have available.

To avoid perpetuating a colonial mindset where Westerners assume they have the answers to local problems and impose solutions without sufficient understanding of local communities, STM engagement should involve demonstrating cultural sensitivity and empowering local people – two of the five principles identified in Paul’s model for mission (see section 2.2.4).

2.4.4 Engagement in STMs disempowers locals.

“They gather money to come here to do work, work that we are capable of doing”.

(Ver Beck 2006: 483)

STM participants sometimes take work from locals who would benefit much more both from the pay and the dignity gained from earning money themselves. In his book, *Toxic Charity*, Lupton describes how “when we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them” (2011, Chapter 1). This disempowerment can lead to dependency and destroy self-initiative as “people become conditioned to wait for

the next mission group to arrive instead of building their businesses through their own efforts” (Lupton, 2011, Chapter 2). Moyo testifies to this impact, describing how “aid has helped make the poor poorer and growth slower” (in Lupton, 2011, Chapter 3). We must, as Fanning rightly urges “find a way to help that does not leave others feeling that they are too weak, helpless and uninformed to help themselves” (2009: 5).

As highlighted previously and in Paul’s principles for mission (see section 2.2.4), empowering locals is essential for effective STMs. Greenfield describes how power, money or resources brought by STM participants should be used to “raise up insiders” so that projects can be owned by local people (in Fowle 2023). He highlights how this not only empowers local people but also ensures longevity. Reflecting on the Covid-19 pandemic, Greenfield reports that “around 80% of missionaries went home and most of their ministries collapsed” due to insufficient investment in local people (in Fowle 2023). From this perspective, STMs have to involve partnership and doing *with* rather than *for* (Newton and Early 2015: 56).

2.4.5 Engagement in STMs does not benefit the people intended.

“The food we ship to Haiti, the well we dig in Sudan, the clothes we distribute in inner-city Detroit – all seem like such worthy efforts. Yet those closest to the ground [...] quietly admit that it may be hurting more than helping”.

(Lupton, 2011, Chapter 1)

We have already noted how STMs can create a cycle of dependency and disempowerment that is destructive to beneficiaries. In addition, STM participants can “be a burden to local missionaries, organizations, and church workers” (Fanning 2009: 6) and can distract them from their work (Ver Beck 2006; Van Engen 2000; Jeffrey 2001; Becchetti 2001; Johnson 2017).

Such a problem can only be overcome by STM participants addressing the attitude with which they come to serve. As identified in Paul's model for mission in section 2.2.4, STM participants must adopt a servant-minded attitude, described by Johnson as being "characterized by a desire to do 'the ministry of whatever'" (2017, Chapter 5).

2.5 Summary

In light of the biblical imperative for overseas mission work and consideration of the benefits and drawbacks raised in literature, I believe it *is* possible to engage in STMs in a manner which embraces their transformative potential whilst also navigating some of the pitfalls.

Numerous texts on STMs identify drawbacks of such trips but also explore effective ways of engaging with STMs. These include Priest's *Effective engagement in short-term missions: doing it right!* (2008) and Becchetti's *Why most mission trips are a waste of time and how to make sure yours isn't* (2001). Their titles alone imply there is a "right" and "good" way to do overseas mission. I believe it is therefore not a question of *whether* we should engage in STMs but of *how*.

From this literature review, we have established that it is important to approach STMs with sensitivity, cultural awareness, and a commitment to sustainable and responsible engagement that partners with local people. There is also a need for pre-trip preparation and consideration of how a STM might be embedded in a longer-term plan of support.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The objectives of this dissertation are to:

- Outline and critically evaluate existing literature regarding STMs;
- Collect data from a UK perspective to explore benefits to teenagers as individuals and youth groups as a whole engaging in STMs with *The Smiles Foundation*;
- Challenge the framing narrative for STMs and encourage them to be seen as opportunities for partnership and mutual blessing;
- Advocate for church and youth leaders to consider engagement in STMs in their discipleship strategies for the young people in their church.

This chapter outlines the details of my research strategy, including my selection of research methods, analysis tools and the rationale behind these choices. I will also consider limitations of this research and consider ways these can be mitigated.

3.2 Mixed methods

To complete this empirical study I used a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods research “combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 17). In this way, it recognises the value of both quantitative *and* qualitative methods, aiming “to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies” (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 14-15). As a result, this combined approach results in “a fuller and more complete picture of the thing that is being studied” (Denscombe 2010: 141).

Furthermore, a mixed methods approach allows for triangulation of results, whereby findings can be tested and validated “through the convergence of information from different sources” (Carter *et al.* 2014: 545). In other words, it provides “the opportunity to check the findings from one method against the findings from a different method” (Denscombe 2010: 139), thus increasing the reliability of the data. It is these strengths of mixed methods research that led me to take this approach.

My mixed methods approach involved questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a focus group. I will now consider my chosen methodology (case study) and these research methods in turn, reflecting on their suitability for this research.

3.2.1 Case study

I chose to conduct a case study since this methodology “is best suited to theory building” (Gagnon, 2010, Introduction) and “is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries” (Creswell 2013: 100). Other methodologies were discounted as less suitable or unsuitable. For instance, a phenomenological approach would have been unsuitable for exploring the impact of STMs on an *individual* level since the purpose of such an approach is “to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell 2013: 58)”. A mixed methods case study seemed the best methodology to meet the specified research aims.

Due to time constraints, I chose to conduct a *single* case study focused on STMs with *The Smiles Foundation*⁴. My reasons behind choosing this charity were three-fold. Firstly, the charity offers regular STMs⁵, making it ideal for researching specifically *short-term* experiences. Secondly, the charity has a large support base in the UK, allowing me to conduct research specifically from a UK perspective. Thirdly, *The Smiles Foundation* is a charity with which I have a personal connection (see Appendix A). Whilst researching a known organisation can bring risks (see section 3.5), it also has advantages. These include ease of access to gatekeepers due to pre-existing relationships, and the potential for more insightful analysis due to good contextual understanding – referred to by Wallace and Wray as possessing “practice knowledge” (2011: 94). In this instance, my own understanding of how STMs run with *The Smiles Foundation* aided the research process.

⁴ <https://www.thesmilesfoundation.org/>

⁵ <https://www.thesmilesfoundation.org/hands-on-mission-trip-experience-dates/>

Although a single case study contributes to “an in-depth understanding” (Gagnon, 2010, Introduction), it does also have limitations, including being “even more subject to the problem of generalization that affects the case method as a whole” (Gagnon, 2010, Chapter 3.2). For this reason, the research results are not generalisable but could be described as “assertions” (Stake in Creswell 2013: 99) or “patterns” (Yin in Creswell 2013: 99), which may serve as a springboard for church or youth leaders to consider the potential for STM engagement in their own context.

3.2.2 Questionnaires

Case study research involves “multiple sources of information” (Creswell 2013: 97). Data from online questionnaires constituted one of my sources. Questionnaires are cheap and time-effective ways of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data with wide coverage (Creswell 2013: 48-49), making it a good choice as one of my research methods.

With consent from gatekeeper Kevin Hoy, Founder and CEO of the *The Smiles Foundation* (Appendix B), a link to the questionnaire was circulated in the charity’s November 2023 newsletter. A link was also shared on social media to maximise potential reach. Questionnaire data was collected from November 2023-January 2024.

The questionnaire was aimed at two groups of people. The first was individuals from the UK who had participated in a STM with *The Smiles Foundation* in their teenage years. I specified an age range (18-23) and time frame for trip dates (2013-2018) to ensure participants were over 18 at the time of research (and therefore able to give their own informed consent) but without their trip being too far in the distant past to recall.

In total, I received fifteen responses from individuals. Data from four participants was excluded as they didn’t meet one of the aforementioned criteria. A further two respondents were slightly older than I initially specified (age 24 and 27 respectively), however both had participated in four STMs with *The Smiles Foundation* during their teenage years. As they had multiple

experiences of STMs as teenagers I decided to include their data. This meant my research included relevant questionnaire data from eleven participants in total.

The second group the questionnaire was aimed at was UK-based church or youth leaders who had led a STM with teenagers to *The Smiles Foundation* in the past ten years. This criteria identified people who could contribute to the research concerning the impact of STMs on *youth groups*. The time period of ten years allowed for post-trip reflection without the trip being too far in the past. In total, five leaders completed the questionnaire, and their data was included in the study.

3.2.3 Focus group

Focus groups involve a small number of people. Denscombe suggests they typically include “six to nine people” and “last for 1½ to 2 hours”; however “in small-scale research projects the numbers are often smaller” (Denscombe 2010: 177). This was true for my focus group which took place in January 2024, running for 60 minutes with three leaders. To eliminate selection bias, I had planned to randomly select three leaders from the questionnaire respondents who had expressed willingness to participate further in the research, however, as only three respondents indicated this, these were the three invited to form the focus group. The focus group was conducted online via *Microsoft Teams* for ease of access for participants spread across the UK.

A focus group suited this study as it provided a means of gauging the extent to which there were shared views in the group (Denscombe 2010: 177). In this case, whether there were similarities in the experiences of different youth groups on STM with *The Smiles Foundation*. For this reason, it was important that both audio and video were recorded (with consent) as this enabled me to monitor non-verbal cues such as nodding, which was key in ascertaining the degree of consensus within the group.

3.2.4 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews took place in January 2024 via *Zoom* with a random selection of three individuals who expressed willingness to participate further in the research. I conducted the interviews individually as unlike with the focus group, I was looking here to explore reflections of *individual* young people, therefore limiting the possibility of participants being influenced by others was important. The semi-structured nature of the interviews with “a few questions to guide discussion” (Garland 2012: 507) lent itself well to fulfilling my exploratory research aim. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for later analysis. Transcriptions were available to participants on request to ensure validity.

3.2.5 Additional data

Following the focus group, one participant contacted the young people she had taken on a STM to *The Smiles Foundation*. Three young people shared their reflections with her via email and consented to their data being included anonymously in this research.

3.3 Data presentation and analysis

To present and analyse the data, I followed a sequential explanatory design, which typically involves “collecting and analysing first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study” (Ivankova *et al.* 2006: 4). I presented the quantitative results from the Likert scale questions in diverging stacked bar charts (see Figure 1 in section 4.2.1 and Figure 5 in section 4.3.1) and extrapolated initial themes from these. By means of a deductive thematic analysis⁶ I then analysed the qualitative data to corroborate (or dispel) the initial findings from the quantitative data. Additional themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. Quotes illustrating each theme were collated and presented in tables (see Appendix K and Appendix L).

Ivankova *et al.* describe how with sequential explanatory design “the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem [whilst] the qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring

⁶ Described by Brown and Clarke as involving “searching across a data set [...] to find repeated patterns of meaning” (2006: 15).

participants' views in more depth" (2006: 5). This was the case in my research as the more in-depth qualitative data provided better understanding of the initial quantitative findings. Thematic analysis also proved a good choice of analytical tool as it was "a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants" (Nowell *et al.* 2017: 2), ultimately enabling me to address my research question.

3.4 Ethical approval

Before conducting research, ethical approval was sought from St Padarn's Institute's Ethics Committee. This was granted on 13th October 2023 (Appendix J). The Research Ethics Policy from St Padarn's Institute⁷ was followed throughout and the research was carried out with consent from Kevin Hoy, Founder and CEO of *The Smiles Foundation* (Appendix B).

3.5 Limitations

As with any research, it is important to identify limitations and potential risks and consider how these can be mitigated.

Firstly, the time available impacted my methodological choices. For example, an ethnographic study observing teenagers on a STM could have yielded insightful results but would have been too time-consuming for this dissertation.

Similarly, the length of this dissertation affected the extent to which some areas could be explored (as mentioned in section 1.4). It also impacted the number of quotes I could include in the presentation and analysis of my findings. So as not to lose the voice of participants I included the most relevant quotes in-text but also compiled a full thematic list of quotes as found in Appendix K and L.

My research is also susceptible to the possibility of non-response bias. This is the bias that occurs when the data collected reveals themes that do not reflect the views of those not included

⁷ https://stpadarns.contentfiles.net/media/documents/SPI_Research_Ethics_Policy.pdf

in the research (Denscombe, 2014, Chapter 1). As I was exploring the *benefits* of STM engagement it is possible that those with *positive* experiences of STMs were more likely to engage with the study. With more time available, it would have been beneficial to increase my sample size to allow me to more reliably corroborate the data collected and thus offset this potential bias.

Thematic analysis also presents challenges in research. One drawback to this analytical tool is that the nuanced details of individuals can be lost when collating themes. This is a challenge posed by qualitative research as presenting it inevitably involves “imposing some sort of order” and “deleting some voices, some perspectives in favour of others” (Ward 2004: 134). My role as the researcher is therefore significant in thematic analysis since no-one can search for themes without pre-conceptions (Braun and Clarke 2006: 7) and there therefore exists “the unpalatable prospect that, rather than being objective, researchers may be swayed by vested interests in the outcome of their investigation” (Denscombe 2010: 83).

This has been particularly important for me to consider since my vocational pathway has been shaped by STM engagement (see Appendix A). Whilst a truly objective stance can never be achieved (Denscombe 2010: 91), there are ways of minimising the impact of researcher bias.

One way I have endeavoured to do this is through the reflexive practice of journalling. Journalling “aids awareness of oneself as a researcher and helps identify the precommitments that are brought to the research” (Cameron *et al.* 2005: 32). For me, incorporating personal reflexivity into the research process has enabled me to acknowledge the presence of my own assumptions and consider their impact throughout the research.

3.6 Summary

In summary, this research can be described as a mixed methods single case study that draws on questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a focus group to produce both quantitative and qualitative data. It uses a sequential explanatory design and deductive thematic analysis to

identify the benefits of young people and youth groups engaging in STMs, thus fulfilling the primary aim of this research.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings and analysis of the research are presented in two main sections to reflect the dual nature of my research question, which seeks to explore the benefits of STMs to both teenagers as individuals and youth groups collectively. As is customary with sequential explanatory design, I will first present the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data, before proceeding with analysis.

4.2 Data from individuals

This section concerns the first half of my research question concerning the benefits for teenagers as *individuals* engaging with STMs.

4.2.1 Results of quantitative data from individuals

The diverging stacked bar chart in Figure 1 is a product of the quantitative data from the eleven individuals who completed the questionnaire. Within the four sub-headings, the data is organised in descending order according to majority agreement.

Responses from individuals who participated in a short-term overseas mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation*

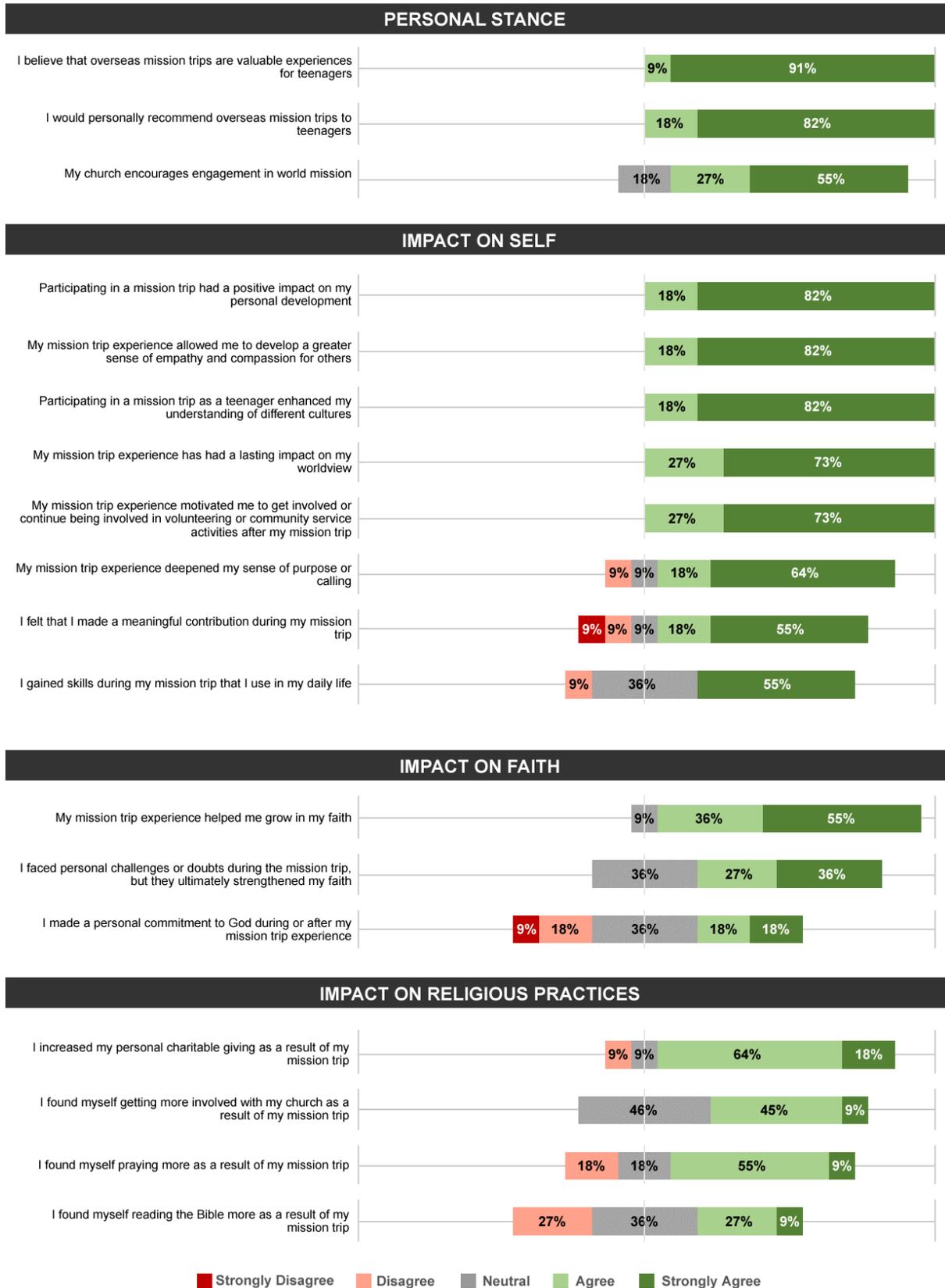


Figure 1. Results of quantitative data from individuals

4.2.2 Results of qualitative data from individuals

Using the headings from the quantitative data as the starting point for analysing the qualitative data, I extracted quotes from the interview transcripts relevant to each theme. Figure 2 summarises these findings with reference to transcript line numbers. Full quotes relevant to each theme are detailed in Appendix K.

PERSONAL STANCE	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	E1	E2	E3
Valuable experience for teenagers		127-135	79-80; 162-163; 264-265		30-31												
Personally recommend	308-311	126-127	263-265; 269; 287														32-33*
Church engagement in world mission	13; 34-37; 47; 48*; 49; 269-272*	10; 16-17; 29	14; 16-18; 30-36; 45-49; 288-289														
IMPACT ON SELF																	
Positive impact on personal development		78; 129	113; 120; 217; 239-242; 286		30-31												34
Developed empathy / compassion			169-175; 249; 258														
Enhanced understanding of different cultures	74-76; 191; 196-204	41-43; 46; 48; 51	240-241			38-40	50					87				10-11	
Lasting impact on worldview	190-191	78-81	58-68; 184-185; 247-248														
Motivated continued volunteering			142-147; 175-185; 205-206; 222-225; 230						60								
Deepened sense of purpose / calling	192-195		69-71; 147; 182-184; 219-221; 224-225; 282											102-108			
Made a meaningful contribution	90-91; 232; 235	45; 68-74; 110-112	76; 101-105	11-12		39		56		71			94				27-30*
Gained skills used in daily life	146-154; 170		235-236; 242														
IMPACT ON FAITH																	
Helped me grow in my faith	246-249	93-94; 104; 128; 133-135	197-198; 201-202; 219-221; 224-225	17-18	30-31; 34	39-40											
Challenges / doubts strengthened faith			111-112; 113	18-20													
Personal commitment to God	246-249	103-104; 128	200-201														
IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICES																	
Personal charitable giving		121															35-38
Church involvement	264-265																
Prayer																	
Bible reading																	

Figure 2. Thematic analysis of themes within qualitative data from individuals

As seen in Figure 2, most themes from the quantitative data were also present in the qualitative data with the exception of areas concerning religious practices. Deductive thematic analysis of the qualitative data also revealed a further five themes:

- Friends
- Revelation
- Gratitude
- Life-changing experience
- Guilt

I followed the same process as above with these five themes, gathering relevant quotes as detailed in Appendix K and listing line numbers as seen in Figure 3.

ADDITIONAL THEMES	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	E1	E2	E3
Friends	15; 22-23; 284-288; 299-301	128-129; 134-135; 143-145; 150-156	129-130; 140-143; 151-152; 161-163; 303-307; 332		31-33	39-40											
Revelation	92-97; 108-115		184-185; 247-248														27-30
Gratitude	159; 163-178; 185-189	79-80; 81-82													9-10		42-44
Life-changing experience	55; 176-178; 187-191; 216; 228; 234		72; 147; 212-215; 265; 269											102	8		
Guilt			171-175														31-32 40-42

Figure 3. Additional themes within qualitative data from individuals

To examine the prevalence of *all* themes, I created a chart that visually depicts the extent to which each theme was discussed within the qualitative data (see Figure 4). To do this, I allocated one block of colour for every line in the transcribed data that contained content on that theme. An “X” in a block signifies that the content of the data was on theme but offered an opposing viewpoint.

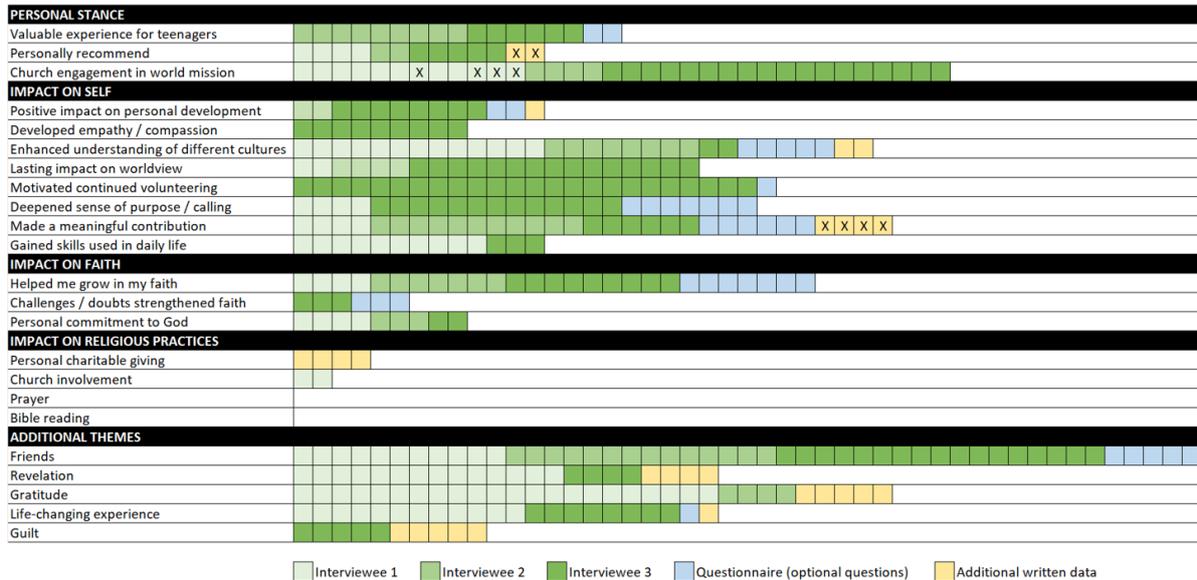


Figure 4. Prevalence of themes within qualitative data from individuals

4.2.3 Analysis of all data from individuals

Figure 1 shows that all individuals who responded to the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that STMs were valuable experiences for teenagers and that they would recommend such trips to other teenagers. The interview data supported these findings, evident through comments such as “absolutely do it and do it now... you won’t regret it” and “if the opportunity arises, 100% do it because it may just change your life”.

Whilst such comments represented the majority voice, Xs under “personally recommend” in Figure 4 indicate that it wasn’t a unanimous viewpoint. One participant cautioned: “I would encourage anyone considering a mission to strongly think about going for an extended period of time, or donate the money instead”. For this person, there was some hesitancy around the impact of *short-term* trips and their associated costs. Discussion in section 2.4.1 illustrated that concern over the cost of STMs is not new and it has often been questioned whether donating the money is more beneficial to those in need (Lupton 2011; Beyerlein *et al.* 2011; Van Engen

2000; Ver Beck 2006). However, as was highlighted in section 2.4.1, Ver Beck's research with beneficiaries revealed there was a human element to trips that no money could replace. This perspective was also expressed in my research with multiple participants commenting on the heartfelt connection to beneficiaries that was only possible through going. For example, one participant described how a beneficiary kept a photo of her, stating: "they're in our hearts but we're in theirs [...] There are no words and that's the truth. It's so profound". Similarly, another participant remarked: "you can build relationships with these people [beneficiaries]. [...] You actually speak to them and find out about their lives. And you connect with them on a deeper level".

Participant one's reflection here: "there are no words", also resonates with Mack and Stiles' experience of STMs. They state: "it's impossible to tell anyone who hasn't been [...] about what it is like [...] More difficult still is finding the right adjectives to communicate how our hearts were touched and our attitudes transformed" (2000: 160). From this perspective, the assertion that it is better to send money is not so straightforward, since it ignores this possibility for transformation through human relationship and connection that was identified in Ver Beck's research, experienced by Mack and Stiles, and reinforced through my findings.

Moving on to the data concerning church engagement in world mission, 82% of individuals reported that their church encouraged engagement in world mission (55% strongly agree; 27% agree). It was also a topic discussed significantly in all three interviews (see figure 4). One participant stated: "there is a massive Smiles⁸ profile in our church", whilst another observantly highlighted a link between her initial STM and the subsequent increased level of overseas mission engagement in her church – noting perceptively that engagement didn't exclusively mean *going* but could include a range of things, as highlighted in section 2.3.4.

The Xs in the Figure 4 on this topic stem from one interviewee who expressed frustration at her own church's *lack* of enthusiasm for world mission which resulted in her engaging with a STM organised by a neighbouring church.

⁸ Short for *The Smiles Foundation*.

The picture built up from the quantitative and qualitative data concerning church engagement in world mission reveals a potential causality between the priority of world mission within a church and the likelihood of individuals engaging in overseas mission. We can conclude from this that churches play an influential role in shaping both attitudes towards and engagement in world mission. If we believe we are called to obey the words of The Great Commission and to reflect God’s missionary heart in the world (as established in section 2.2), then it is therefore important that church leaders hold a positive attitude towards and encourage engagement in overseas missions.

With regards to the impact of STMs on individuals themselves, the qualitative data also supports the findings of the quantitative data, providing more detail as to how an individual’s mission trip reportedly positively impacts their personal development, allows them to develop a greater sense of empathy and compassion for others, enhances their understanding of different cultures, has a lasting impact on their worldview and motivates them to get involved (or continue being involved) in volunteering or community service activities. See Appendix K for supporting quotes from individuals.

Likewise, excerpts from the qualitative data support the quantitative findings from the majority of survey participants who stated that their trip also deepened their sense of purpose or calling, enabled them to make a meaningful contribution and enabled them to gain skills that they use in their daily life.

However, as seen in Figure 1, the response to the latter three areas in the quantitative data was *less* affirmative overall than that of the five prior areas. Despite this, the chart that visually depicts the prevalence of themes (Figure 4) reveals *no* significant difference with multiple participants making contributions in all three of these latter areas. In fact, Figure 4 reveals that “making a meaningful contribution” was one of the *most* discussed themes with participants frequently referring to “impacting other lives” and “helping others”.

That being said, “making a meaningful contribution” was also the only theme under “impact on self” that generated Xs. These stemmed from a single participant who stated: “it was a massive wake up call to see how massive a charitable organisation is required for systemic and financial support for struggling people and one tiny troop of teenagers isn’t going to make much difference over such a short period of time”. This viewpoint speaks into the debate concerning the extent to which STM participants can actually make a difference (see later discussion in section 4.3.3).

As discussed in section 2.4.1 and concluded in section 2.5, a good approach to STMs involves ensuring trips are embedded within a longer-term plan for support. Johnson articulates this stance too, insisting that “from the very beginning we should decide that every short-term trip will aim to benefit the work of long-term missionaries and local believers” (2017, Chapter 6). The mixed responses concerning whether an individual felt like they made a meaningful difference could therefore be a result of their sending church’s approach to overseas mission, with those going as part of a longer-term plan of support understanding their role within the bigger picture and thus feeling more confident in their ability to make a meaningful contribution. More in-depth research would be needed to ascertain whether this is the case.

Looking at the impact of STM engagement on an individual’s faith, 91% of the questionnaire participants agreed that their experience helped their faith development. Growth in faith was a prominent theme amongst all interviewees (see Figure 4), evidenced through quotes such as “it was very much a reawakening of faith and belief in God” and “my faith in God grew exponentially”. Mack and Stiles describe how in recent years, there has been a shift from wanting to *know* God to wanting to *experience* God (2000: 22). Engagement in STMs arguably enables participants to *experience* God for themselves as they witness Him at work in the world, which could explain why growth in faith was such a prominent theme. These findings also demonstrate why church or youth leaders may want to consider engagement in STMs as part of their strategic discipleship of young people.

The quantitative data revealed lesser agreement around whether challenges/doubts during the trip strengthened an individual’s faith and even lesser agreement as to whether the trip resulted

in individuals making a personal commitment to God of some kind – only 36% of respondents agreed to some extent (18% strongly agree; 18% agree) with the latter statement. A potential reason for this is revealed in the interview data from individuals as two out of the three interviewees stated explicitly that they had already been baptised, whilst the third alluded to having already made a relational commitment to God.

This interpretation of a “personal commitment” referring specifically to *baptism* may have led some individuals (who were already baptised) to consequently disagree or answer neutrally to this question. This illustrates why the combination of quantitative and qualitative data that a mixed methods study provides is useful as the interviews allowed participants to expand, thus enabling me as the researcher to better understand the findings of the quantitative data. With the additional insight gleaned from the interviews, it would seem reasonable to conclude that engagement in STMs *does* potentially contribute to individuals making a personal commitment to God, albeit perhaps in a relational/attitudinal sense, as described by all three interviewees (see Appendix K), rather than through an act such as baptism.

Turning now to the impact on religious practices, Figure 1 revealed that questions about charitable giving, church involvement, Bible reading and prayer were answered more negatively than any other questions (though agreement still outweighed disagreement overall). Likewise, we see in Figures 2 and 4 that the areas relating to religious practices were rarely discussed in interview, if at all. These findings stand in contrast to the results of Trinitapoli and Vaisey’s research presented in section 2.3.1 which reported that teenagers claimed *increased* Bible reading and prayer as a result of their mission experience (2009: 135).

Just as some individuals had already taken the commitment of baptism, it may have been that the participants in my research were already engaged significantly in these named religious practices, thus causing them to answer ‘neutral’ or ‘disagree’ to questions concerning *increased* engagement in these areas. There are indications that this may be the case within the interviews with comments such as: “I already was like doing it [referring to reading the Bible and praying]” and “I’m still involved in churchy charities, still involved in church organisation and church groups”.

Notably, amongst the religious practices named, charitable giving was the area where *most* impact was reported with 82% of respondents agreeing that their trip resulted in an increase in their charitable giving. One individual provided some insight as to why giving may be more significantly impacted, explaining: “of all the charities I come into contact with, it’s the ones that I have a personal connection to that I actually come through and support financially. It certainly makes a difference having seen where the money goes”. Guthrie describes this as a generational shift with younger generations being “less likely to support an enterprise [...] without firsthand knowledge of it” (in Fanning 2009: 1). With this understanding, engaging *young people* in STMs is vitally important as it is more likely to lead to them financially supporting the work overseas.

That being said, we must not forget that “whenever we ask people for information, they answer through a filter of what will make them look good” (Babbie in Ver Beck 2006: 489). As mentioned in section 2.3.4, participants in Ver Beck’s research significantly overreported their giving (2006: 485). As the 82% figure in my research is also the product of a self-completion questionnaire, it may similarly be that participants have overreported this impact. As my sample size is particularly small (11 respondents), it is not possible to conclude a definitive relationship between STM engagement and charitable giving from my findings.

Finally, five additional themes were identified from the qualitative data, all of which were discussed to varying extents by multiple participants (see Figure 4). The first of these themes was friends, identifiable through comments such as “there’s fellowship in the evening and [...] everyone’s there together” and “it [STM] created a lot of sort of shared experience with a lot of our friends”. The theme of friendship will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter when I consider group and individual engagement; however, it is worth highlighting here the prevalence of that theme amongst the responses from *individuals* – relatively in-depth conversation with all three interview participants as well as in two questionnaire responses (see Figure 4). Clearly the respondents had also been involved in *group* mission trips and the importance of participating alongside friends stood out markedly for them. These findings resonate with Mack’s report that “there is a bonding ability on short terms that I find in few other places in ministry” (Mack and Stiles 2000: 50).

The second additional theme identified from the qualitative data was that of revelation, identified frequently by references to something “opening their eyes”. This included:

- revelation as to the needs of the world: “it was an eye-opener as to why we need that sort of understanding and shared aim towards peace”;
- revelation of God at work: “seeing further than this town and seeing God’s work in practice [...] you go out there and see what He’s doing for us”;
- revelation of poverty locally: “when I came back, I was like ‘oh, actually, there’s so much more poverty in the world’ and it maybe opened my eyes to a bit more of what’s going on in our country”.

These reflections aligns with both Mack and Stiles’ claim that “short-term missions often serve as a wakeup call to the injustices in the world around us: the hazy awareness from the evening news transformed into grizzly reality” (2000: 108), as well as findings from Trinitapoli and Vaisey’s research (discussed in section 2.3.1) that revealed STM participants as more likely to see God as active and involved in the world (2009: 135).

The third additional theme was that the STM increased feelings of gratitude. This theme was identifiable through comments such as: “it made me appreciate and made me more grateful for everything” and “it helped me realise how privileged we are with what and who we have around us at home”. This also aligns with findings from my literature review which revealed “increased gratitude” as one of the ways in which STM participants are transformed (see section 2.3.5).

In addition, there was significant discussion around the all-embracing, life-changing nature of STMs (see Figure 4), illustrated by frequent repetition of the word “life-changing” as well as remarks such as: “I do feel like from the first trip, everything changes”.

Finally, the fifth additional theme I identified was that of *guilt*. This was a less prevalent theme overall (raised by only three participants – see Figure 4), but the negative sentiment was contrary to every other theme, therefore I felt it contributed a unique insight into some people’s experiences of STMs. Interestingly, Mack and Stiles also identify guilt as a “common theme of

tension” for Western participants returning home with the realisation of materialism in one’s own culture (2000: 159). In my research, guilt was expressed over three different areas: a realisation of privilege, the expense of the trip, and the luxury afforded to STM participants whilst serving overseas. For supporting quotes, see Appendix K.

4.3 Data from group leaders

This section speaks into the second half of my research question, focusing on the benefits for *youth groups* engaging with STMs.

4.3.1 Results of quantitative data from group leaders

The diverging stacked bar chart in Figure 5 is a product of the quantitative data from the five group leaders who completed the questionnaire. The same organising principles and colours are used as in Figure 1, but the sections differ to reflect the questions asked of the leaders.

Responses from leaders who have taken young people aged 13-18 on a short-term overseas mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation*

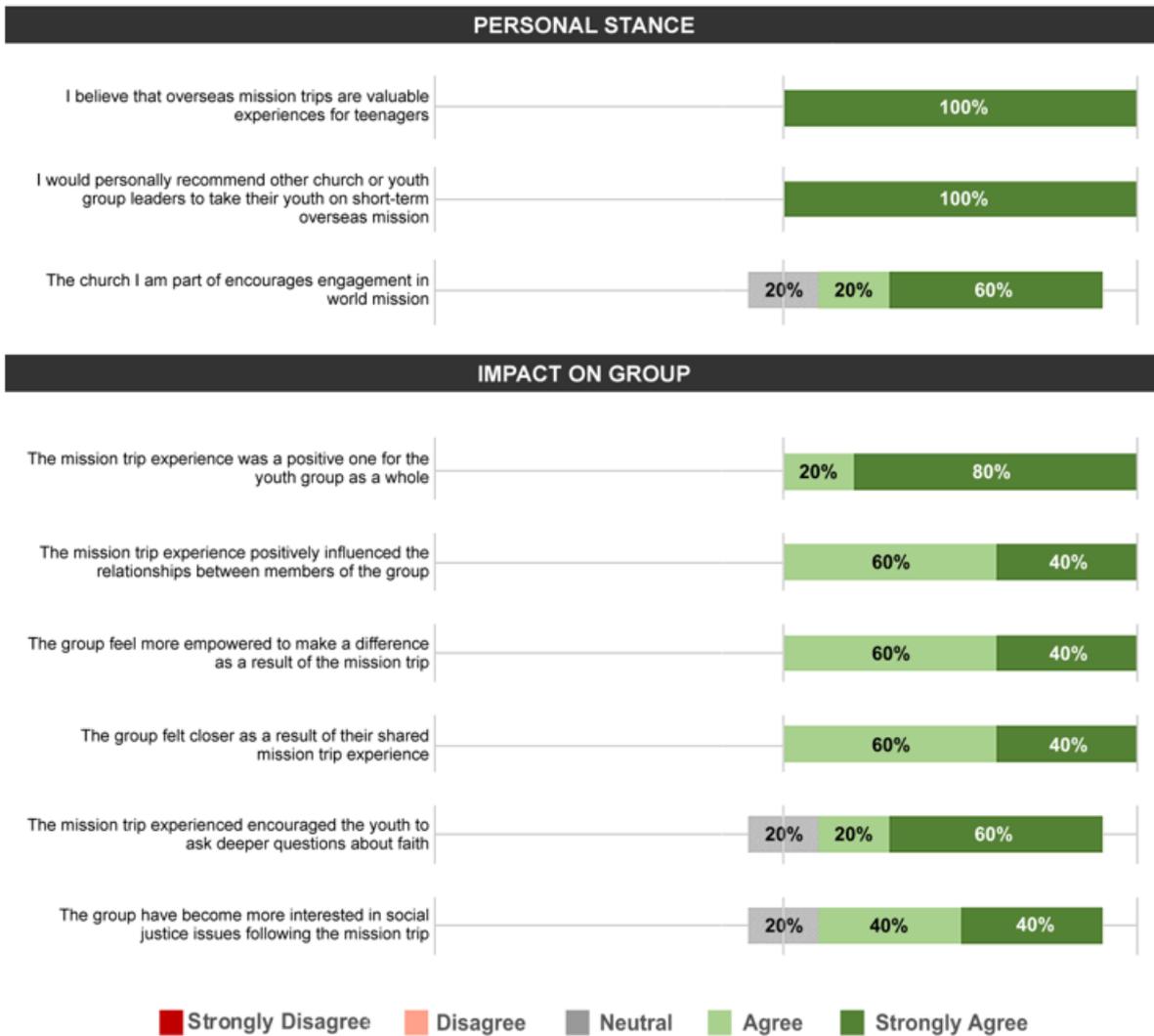


Figure 5. Results of quantitative data from group leaders

4.3.2 Results of qualitative data from group leaders

As with the data from individuals, I used the themes from the quantitative data as the starting point for analysing the qualitative data. Due to the similarity in the second and fourth headings under “impact on group” (see Figure 5), these were combined to form one theme: “positively influenced group relationships”. As before, I identified quotes relevant to each theme (see Appendix L) and produced a summary of quotes with reference to line numbers as seen in Figure 6.

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	QA	QB	QC	QD	QE
PERSONAL STANCE								
Valuable experiences for teenagers	32-33; 35-37; 83-84; 207-208; 297	26; 164; 375-376	263; 334; 346-349		24			
Personally recommend	364	362	360					
Church engagement in world mission	79-80; 88-89; 91-93	7-9; 13-14; 97-99*	107; 110; 122; 125; 126*					
IMPACT ON GROUP								
Positive experience for whole group	207-208; 297	136-138	366		24-25			52
Positively influenced group relationships	329-331	21-22; 370-375*	237-238; 245; 247-249; 282	6		29		
Empowered group to make a difference	201-202; 306-308		210-211; 336-337; 339-342					45-46
Encouraged deeper questions about faith			282; 333; 351-352					
Stimulated interest in social justice issues			167					

Figure 6. Thematic analysis of themes within qualitative data from group leaders

Six additional themes emerged from the process of thematic analysis. These were:

- Impact on vocation
- Deepening of faith
- Exposure to difference
- Revelation
- Life-changing experience
- Gratitude

The same process was applied to these new themes, with relevant quotes collated in Appendix L and the line numbers recorded in Figure 7.

ADDITIONAL THEMES	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	QA	QB	QC	QD	QE
Impact on vocation	33-35; 293-295; 306-308		210-211					
Deepening of faith	36-37; 145; 296	104; 139	239-240; 262-263; 339-340; 343; 375-376	13				
Exposure to difference	45-46; 141-145	14; 49-50; 102-104; 136; 320-321	171-174		13-14; 16-17	29		
Revelation	157; 195-197	26	167-168	20				
Life-changing experience	44; 82; 198-203*; 297-299; 302; 311-313; 364	362; 183-184*	360; 366					
Gratitude	44-45; 150-156		261					

Figure 7. Additional themes within qualitative data from group leaders

Following the same process described previously, a chart was created to visually depict the relative prevalence of each theme (see Figure 8). As in Figure 4, an “X” in a block signifies that the content of the data was on theme but offered an opposing viewpoint. Unlike with the individual interviews, it was important to observe non-verbal communication between participants in the focus group to ascertain the degree of consensus. Therefore in Figure 8, a “Y” (for “yes”) indicates a verbal comment that triggered body language indicating agreement (such as nodding) from at least one other participant.

Moving on to consider the areas in which STMs impacted the leaders' groups, the qualitative data provides detail as to why group leaders affirmed that the STM was positive for the youth group as a whole (80% strongly agree; 20% agree), positively influenced group relationships (40% strongly agree; 60% agree) and empowered the group to make a difference (40% strongly agree; 60% agree). For supporting quotes, see Appendix L.

The two questions that received some “neutral” responses (in comparison to the responses of complete agreement to the above questions) were unsurprisingly the two areas that were talked about the *least* in the focus group – discussed by only one participant (see Figure 8). Nevertheless, the qualitative data revealed the ways in which, for this leader, the trip resulted in:

- the young people asking deeper questions about faith: “the group became quite reflective and learnt to ask questions”;
- the group becoming more interested in social justice issues: “ours [the young people] were opened to a lot of socio-economic issues”.

On reflection, given the relatively high percentage of leaders who agreed to some extent with these two statements (see Figure 5), the fact that only one leader discussed these two themes as areas of impact is more likely the result of the small sample size rather than it being evidence of the statements being untrue. A bigger sample size would enable triangulation to confirm or contradict this.

In addition to the themes identified initially in the quantitative data and supported through evidence from the focus group, six additional themes emerged from analysis of the qualitative data from leaders. Interestingly, these extra themes all overlapped with additional themes identified in the data from individuals, suggesting they are likely reliable findings. Three of these themes were revelation (specifically around the extremity of poverty), gratitude and the trip being a life-changing experience. For supporting quotes, see Appendix L.

Whereas Figure 4 revealed that individuals only made affirmative comments in relation to the trip being a life-changing experience, the Xs in Figure 8 shows that group leaders also expressed some contrary thoughts. These mostly concerned hesitancy as to the longevity of the trip's impact on their groups. For instance, one leader stated: "the impact on their lives, it was while we were there, most definitely affected them, but [...] I think once we came home some of them have drifted", whilst another similarly commented: "I think with our teams it changed the way they thought for the moment, but I'm not sure how long it lasted unfortunately".

Such comments speak into the debate around the potentially *short-term* impact of STMs. For instance, Lupton reports that "service projects and mission trips do *not* [own emphasis] effect lasting change" (2011, Chapter 2), arguing that "within six to eight weeks after a mission trip, most short-term mission-trippers return to the same assumptions and behaviors they had prior to the trip" (2011, Chapter 2). Powell *et al.* present an even bleaker view, suggesting that "the impact fades within days" (2011, Chapter 5), whilst Ver Beck describes STM participants as "saplings, which can be bent and held in one place for a week or more, but once released quickly return to their previous state" (2006: 477). These remarks in wider literature align with the concerns expressed here by the group leaders.

Nonetheless, Usner presents a more optimistic viewpoint, arguing that "it does not end after the experience; rather, this lived understanding seeds a commitment to join in the work for justice wherever and whenever one can" (in Borland and Adams 2013: 104). This viewpoint more accurately reflects the views *individuals* in my research who talk of "permanence" and/or "life change". For instance, one individual described how the STM experience "leaves a permanent little mark". She claims: "it totally permeates you and leaves a permanent little mark in your heart". Similarly, another individual mentioned explicitly "the lasting impact it has had over my life".

Whilst it appears that contradicting viewpoints seem to be presenting themselves here, it is of course possible that *both* perspectives are true – *some* people are impacted longer term whilst for others the impact is short-lived. This may be the result of the effectiveness of post-trip debriefing and reflection, but may also be down to other factors, such as how often individuals

engage with STMs. For example, Friesen claims that “repeat STM participants were better able to retain their positive changes” (in Fanning 2009: 10), concluding that “multiple short-term experiences are moving young adults deeper into missional life” (in Fanning 2009: 10). This argument further supports the need for local churches to be committed long-term to world mission so that STMs do not become one-off experiences.

Finally, the remaining three additional themes that emerged from the qualitative data from leaders also overlapped with themes from individuals. There were: the trip impacting the vocation of some of the young people, the deepening of faith of those on the trip and the exposure to difference, including being out of one’s comfort zone as well as the experience of another country and culture. For supporting quotes, see Appendix L. As these areas were revealed in the data from both individuals *and* group leaders, it seems fair to conclude that they all constitute areas of significant impact for STM participants.

4.4 Summary

In summary, this mixed methods case study has revealed that STMs with *The Smiles Foundation* were considered valuable experiences for both young people individually and youth groups as a whole. Both young people themselves and group leaders would recommend such trips to their counterparts.

The main benefit of taking a church youth group on a STM appears to be that the shared experience will likely lead to deeper relationships within the group. The group itself will also likely be impacted by the ways in which individuals within the group change as a result of their trip.

For young people as individuals, STMs can be described as beneficial and transformative experiences as they:

- Push them out of their comfort zone and expose them to difference, thus enhancing their understanding of different cultures and opening their eyes to poverty, the needs of the world, and how God is at work in the world;

- Deepen their sense of purpose or calling, potentially motivating them to get involved in volunteering or community engagement or impacting their vocational pathway;
- Positively impact their personal development by helping them develop skills for their daily life including increasing their confidence and developing a greater sense of empathy and compassion for others;
- Help them grow in their faith and deepen their relationship with God;
- Impact their worldview, thus creating shifts in attitude (increased gratitude) and behaviour (personal charitable giving).

Finally, analysis of the research findings highlighted that there is a clear need for church leaders to exhibit a missions mindset, whereby engagement in world mission is both modelled and encouraged.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss two different areas. Firstly, I will discuss the interplay between individual and group experiences to ascertain whether STMs are more beneficial undertaken as an individual or within a group setting. To do this, I will draw on the perspectives of three writers – James (1902), Durkheim (1912) and Joas (2000), who all speak into the overarching sociological debate concerning individual and group experiences. James and Durkheim offer conflicting theories – the former highlighting the importance of the *individual* and the latter emphasising the importance of *group* experiences. Writing much later, Joas offers a more integrative approach bringing together aspects of both James’ and Durkheim’s theories. I will bring their theories into conversation with my own research as well as looking to biblical example.

Secondly, I will discuss how my research opens up the possibility for STMs to be seen as partnership opportunities that result in *mutual* blessing. In doing so, I will challenge the commonly-held perspective of STM participants as “givers”.

5.2 Individual versus group experiences

Firstly, American psychologist James was known for his emphasis on *individual* religious experiences and the personal, subjective nature of spirituality (1902). In my research, data collected from individual STM participants demonstrates (in line with James’ theory) that STMs can be personally transformative experiences for individuals. In fact, even the data from group leaders revealed unique individual responses, particularly when it concerned the STM shaping vocational pathways. This was evidenced through comments such as: “one has become a missionary”, “one of mine went on to do two years mission work”, and “one has become a pastor” – the repetition of “one” emphasising the individual responses.

Similarly, another theme from my research was that STMs expose individuals to difference (see section 4.3.3). Exposure to difference arguably leads to a process of self-examination as individuals navigate and respond to the differences they encounter. In my research, this is

evidenced by the additional themes of guilt and gratitude (see section 4.2.3) that stem from introspection and a re-evaluation of personal values. From a Jamesian perspective, STMs can be highly *personal* experiences and therefore more likely to result in deep, authentic, personal transformation when undertaken *individually*.

On the other hand, French sociologist Durkheim argues that *collective* experiences create a sense of community and reinforce social bonds (1912). As concluded in the previous chapter, this was the main benefit identified for youth groups engaging in STMs (see section 4.4). The importance of friends was also identified as an additional and prominent theme within the data from *individuals* (see section 4.2.3), therefore reinforcing the significance of the *group* experience. It is perhaps the reason why STMs have been described as “largely a group phenomenon” (Priest and Priest 2008: 59) with “only four percent of those who participate in STM going alone” (Priest and Priest 2008: 58). Interestingly, even Howell and Dorr, who present the case for STMs to be viewed as pilgrimages (see section 2.3.5), recognise the importance of the *group*, stating that “although the pilgrim quest is the choice of an individual and a deeply personal experience, it must be conducted in the community” (2007: 248).

From a Durkheimian perspective, it could be argued that STM participation fosters a sense of “collective effervescence” (1912) – a sociological concept coined by Durkheim to describe the resulting excitement and unity that comes about when a group of people come together to participate in the same action. In this instance, the *group* experience of STMs is significant since it is what drives participants to unite in fulfilling their common mission and encourages participants to “see missions as the work of the church together [rather] than the personal, private activity of the individual” (Johnson, 2017, Introduction)⁹.

Durkheim’s and James’ theories stand in opposition to one another. This is where the work of German sociologist, Joas, offers an interesting perspective. Joas advocates for an integrative

⁹ Although admittedly, “collective effervescence” could arguably be generated through involvement in other group activities and is not unique to groups engaging in STMs.

approach that recognises the mutual interdependence of individual *and* collective dimensions in shaping religious experiences (in Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009: 121).

In Chapter 4 we have identified benefits to both youth groups and individuals who engage in STMs, thus aligning with Joas' stance that recognises something important in both individual and group experiences. The individual and collective elements of STMs offer participants the chance to grow both individually and deepen one's own personal faith, whilst also contributing to a shared mission with one's peers, allowing participants to appreciate the interconnectedness of their faith within a larger community. It is this perspective that I also see as aligning most closely with biblical example.

In the Bible, we see God commissions people individually. We see this in the examples of Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-3), Moses (Exodus 3: 10-12), Samuel (1 Samuel 3: 10-14) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6: 6-8). In the New Testament, there is also recognition that every individual has unique gifts and talents to offer (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7). This reveals that people as *individuals* are called to partake in God's mission. At the same time, we see Jesus commissioning the disciples *collectively* (Matthew 28: 18-20) and opting to send the seventy-two out in pairs (Luke 10: 1), thus indicating there is also something important about engaging with mission as a *group*, or at least *alongside* others.

Paul's analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 summarises this interplay between individuals and groups well as he highlights the simultaneous importance of individual contributions and the collective effort in fulfilling God's mission. This analogy is arguably brought to life in STMs as participants bring themselves as individuals with their individual gifts to contribute to the group's shared mission. It is perhaps this aspect of STMs that makes them such fulfilling and transformative experiences.

In summary, James' and Durkheim's theories offer interesting perspectives concerning individual and group engagement, but it is Joas' combined approach that resonates with biblical example, the findings of this research, and my own lived experience of STMs. In my opinion,

it is important to recognise and embrace both the individual and collective dimensions of God's call as this encourages a balanced understanding of God's purpose for individuals and the community of believers as a whole.

To conclude, it could be argued that STMs are *most* beneficial when undertaken within a group since this allows participants to navigate their personal calling within the context of a shared mission, thus ultimately contributing to the flourishing of both individuals and the collective body of Christ.

5.3 Participants versus beneficiaries (mutual blessing)

The findings of this research challenge some of the prevailing views of STMs. STM participants often do not see their cross-cultural experience “as a source for their *own* conversion” or believe “they can learn anything from the poverty or marginalization they find themselves in” (Kelly 2018: 10). Instead, STM participants “see themselves as ‘givers’ or ‘savers’ but not as recipients of anything positive” (Kelly 2018: 10). Similarly, Howell notices how the “use of sacrificial mission language discourages trip participants and STM leaders from placing emphasis on or expressing enthusiasm about the educational or cultural benefits to be gained from the trip” (2009: 206). By revealing benefits of STM engagement to participants, this research challenges this stance that STM participants do not benefit from the experience themselves and opens up the possibility for STMs to be seen as opportunities for partnership that result in *mutual* blessing.

As established in sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4, STMs are most effective when *partnership* is prioritised. However, successful partnership does not occur naturally. Emery Wright and MacKenzie report that “young people can often treat such experiences [STMs] as tourists rather than pilgrims, and leave the experience without the sense of partnership that the best mission trips encourage” (2017: 103). It is for this reason that pre-trip preparation is essential for those participating in STMs – as concluded in section 2.5.

When STMs are approached with the servant-hearted attitude described in section 2.2.4, then the potential for mutual blessing is more likely. Mack and Stiles describe how they “have seen people transformed for the kingdom with fresh force and power – both those short termers we have taken and those nationals who have hosted us” (2000: 11). Similarly, Kelly states that “it *is* possible for short-term trips to be constructive cross-cultural experiences for *both* hosts and guests” [own emphasis] (2018: 11). Perhaps one reason that the possibility of mutual blessing is often overlooked is a result of our language use around the people involved in STMs. By referring to “participant” and “beneficiary”, are we reinforcing the commonly-held view of participant as “giver” and beneficiary as “receiver”, and in doing so, missing the beautiful reality of STMs as opportunities for mutual blessing?

Of course, no-one wants to think of STMs primarily in terms of personal gain (and I am not suggesting we should (see Appendix A)), but what if engaging in STMs with the principles established from Paul’s missionary journeys in section 2.2.4 results in the deepening of faith and the emergence of life-long disciples of *both* the participating individual and the beneficiary overseas? Would that not be something worth celebrating? Would such a result not give us a glimpse of John’s heavenly vision of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne” and praising God (Revelation 7: 9a)?

Nonetheless, STMs can only be described as *mutually* beneficial if they do benefit *both* participant *and* beneficiary. There is currently little research into the effect of STMs on beneficiaries themselves. However, I believe there are indications that STMs can benefit those overseas. Firstly, Ver Beck’s interviews with both participants and beneficiaries revealed that both groups felt they learned from one another (2006: 481). Secondly, the fact that charities such as *The Smiles Foundation* encourage STM engagement and promote the value of such trips to beneficiaries and mission workers in the field also supports this stance. For example, in a recent newsletter to STM participants Hoy writes: “the effect of the work that was achieved through your joining with us is hard to put into words. This, alongside the encouragement of staff and beneficiaries that your presence in country provides, ensures the opportunity to share

the love of Jesus in so many different ways¹⁰” (16 February 2024). These indications lead me to believe that when engaged with thoughtfully, STMs *can* be opportunities for partnership that result in mutual blessing.

To conclude, the findings of this research clearly demonstrate that STM participants are not simply “givers” in the STM experience, but rather they themselves are significantly impacted. Further research is required to ensure beneficiaries are impacted just as positively by the efforts of STM participants. However, if this is the case, as evidenced by the signs, then STMs can be seen as partnership opportunities that result in mutual blessing. The opportunity to potentially be growing life-long disciples locally whilst simultaneously making disciples across all nations is perhaps one of the most exciting possibilities that exists through STMs.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter I have brought the research into discussion with three theorists as well as biblical example. In doing so I have reached the conclusion that STMs are most beneficial when engaged with as a group. This is because group trips enable participants to grow individually and explore God’s individual call on their lives, whilst simultaneously providing the opportunity to live out our collective call and mission as the wider body of Christ.

In addition, further discussion in this chapter has unpacked how the findings of this research challenge the commonly-held view that STM participants do not benefit themselves from STM engagement. Although more research is needed into the impact of STMs on beneficiaries, I have advocated for STMs to be seen as opportunities for partnership resulting in mutual blessing.

¹⁰ <https://www.thesmilesfoundation.org/from-kevin-hoy-february-2024/>

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

To bring this dissertation to a conclusion, I will relate the research findings to the aims and objectives, as well as offering recommendations. I will also recap the limitations of this research. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on what I have learnt through the research process, how it has impacted me, and what my next steps might entail.

6.2 Research objectives, findings and conclusions

The overall research aim was to explore how teenagers and youth groups from the UK benefit from engaging in STMs. The individual objectives were to:

- Outline and critically evaluate existing literature on this topic;
- Collect data from a UK perspective and use it to explore benefits to teenagers as individuals and youth groups engaging in STMs with *The Smiles Foundation*;
- Challenge the framing narrative for STMs, encouraging them to be seen as opportunities for partnership and mutual blessing;
- Encourage church and youth leaders to consider engagement in STMs in their discipleship strategies for young people in their church.

The first objective was fulfilled through an in-depth literature review that began by exploring the biblical grounding for STMs by highlighting the missional mandate of Matthew 28: 19-20, God's missionary heart as revealed in Scripture and the example of the early church. I also identified five valuable principles for STMs by examining commonalities in Paul's missionary journeys. These were:

- teaching the gospel message;
- demonstrating cultural sensitivity;
- building deep and meaningful relationships;
- empowering local people;
- having a servant-hearted attitude and an openness to God's will.

Additional principles emerged from the literature review, adding the following essentials to the above:

- seeking God's wisdom ahead of planning such trips;
- maintaining true to the biblical heart of missions;
- engaging with pre-trip preparation;
- embedding STMs within a longer-term plan of support.

These key principles for engaging in STMs will prove valuable for church/youth leaders wanting to pursue my first recommendation (see section 6.3).

My literature review also explored the benefits and drawbacks to STMs. I identified five benefits for STM participants:

- STMs deepen an individual's religious beliefs and practices;
- STMs impact a person's worldview;
- STMs impact vocational pathways;
- STMs increase long-term support for mission work;
- STMs transform participants.

I also identified five drawbacks:

- STMs are expensive;
- STMs potentially only serve as a means of assuaging guilt;
- STMs reinforce power dynamics;
- STMs disempower locals;
- STMs do not benefit the people intended.

In summary, I concluded that there is biblical grounding for STMs but they must be engaged with in the right way to avoid some of the drawbacks outlined above.

The second objective was met through conducting my mixed methods case study. Data from group leaders revealed that deeper relationships between group members was the primary benefit to *groups* engaging in such trips. Data from young people revealed numerous benefits to *individuals*, including that:

- STMs enhance their understanding of different cultures;
- STMs open their eyes to how God is at work in the world;
- STMs deepen their sense of purpose/calling;
- STMs impact their personal development;
- STMs encourage growth in faith;
- STMs impact their worldview.

For the full summary of findings, see section 4.4.

In addition, discussion in Chapter 5 regarding individual and group experiences also contributed to the fulfilment of the second research objective. In section 5.2 I drew on the perspectives of three theorists (James, Durkheim and Joas) and biblical examples of God commissioning individuals and groups, leading me to conclude that STMs are *most* beneficial when undertaken as a group. This is because group trips allow for individual growth whilst also allowing participants to recognise their role and collective call to mission as part of the wider body of believers, as depicted in Paul's analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.

The research results play a role in fulfilling the third objective as the findings challenge the stance that STM participants do not benefit from such trips themselves. As a result, in section 5.3 I was able to present the case that STMs might better be seen as opportunities for partnership that result in *mutual* blessing.

The fourth and final research objective is met through my first recommendation, as outlined in the following section.

6.3 Recommendations

1. Church and youth leaders should consider the role that STMs may play in the nurture of the young people in their church.

This first recommendation stems directly from the results of my research which reveal numerous ways that teenagers are positively impacted by STM engagement. For far too long the benefits of such trips for participants have remained undiscussed – perhaps out of fear of rendering STMs selfish experiences. However, my own journey through this research process in relation to this (see Appendix A) has led me to conclude that acknowledging benefits to participants does not nullify the servant-hearted attitudes of STM participants or the blessing they can be to those in need. Rather, it serves to highlight the abundant grace of God in blessing us as we seek to bless others. For this reason, I encourage all church/youth leaders to consider engaging with STMs, with consideration for the key principles that emerged in Chapter 2¹¹.

2. Church leaders should seek to develop a missions mindset.

This research revealed a link between a church's approach to world mission and the likelihood of congregation members engaging in overseas mission. If as Christians we are called to fulfil the words of The Great Commission, Jesus' instruction in Acts 1: 8, follow the example of the early church and reflect God's missionary heart in the world, then church leaders have a responsibility to display a missions mindset, whereby engagement in world mission is both modelled and encouraged.

3. Further research into the impact of STMs for beneficiaries could be pursued.

In section 2.4.5, I identified one of the drawbacks to STMs being that such trips do not help the people intended. At the time of writing, the only research that measures the impact of STMs on both participants *and* beneficiaries is Ver Beck's case study of house construction in Honduras in 2006. In section 5.3 I identified some indications that beneficiaries *are* impacted positively by STMs and have therefore advocated for STMs

¹¹ It is worth noting here that this stance towards STMs is not completely undisputed in wider literature (as highlighted in section 2.4.5). It is for this reason that I also include recommendation three to ensure that STMs are beneficial to those overseas too.

to be seen as partnership opportunities that result in mutual blessing, however further research into the impact of STMs on beneficiaries is needed to more confidently make this claim.

4. Additional perspectives relating to this research could be explored further.

Although thorough research has been conducted for this dissertation, there are other related areas of study that would be valuable. For example, a longitudinal study could investigate whether the impact of STMs on participants is sustained over time (thus addressing the concerns raised in sections 2.3.1 and 4.3.3). Additionally, further research could explore whether the benefits that exist for young people engaging in STMs are also true for intergenerational groups.

5. Practical application for *The Smiles Foundation*.

In a recent conversation with Kevin Hoy, Founder and CEO of *The Smiles Foundation*, he raised the concern that the charity currently relies largely on the support of an older generation¹². As my research focuses on the benefits to *teenagers* engaging in STMs, it could play a role in encouraging more young people to engage in STMs with *The Smiles Foundation*. I believe this is an area in which I could assist as a natural follow-on to this dissertation (see section 6.5).

6.4 Limitations

Although this research has achieved its aims and objectives, it does have to be acknowledged that it also has limitations, as detailed in section 3.5

One such limitation is the possibility that the research findings have been affected by “non-response bias” (Denscombe 2010: 20). As my research question concerned the *benefits* of STMs, people with positive STM experiences were possibly more likely to participate in the research, thus skewing the results. Increasing the sample size would offset this by enabling greater triangulation. However, my sample size of three interviewees and three focus group

¹² Zoom call 2 Feb 2024.

participants was sufficient for the length and time available for this research. A bigger project over a longer period would however benefit from a larger sample size.

In addition, the process of thematic analysis may have led to the suppression of individual thoughts, since the process focuses on identifying common themes across data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 7), thus resulting in the suppression of some voices in favour of others (Ward 2004: 134). That said, I did attempt to highlight instances when contrary viewpoints were expressed through the use of Xs on the prevalence of themes charts (see Figure 4 in section 4.2.2 and Figure 8 in section 4.3.2). However, it would have been impossible to report *every* individual thought, so the process of thematic analysis will have impacted the research in this regard.

Finally, as highlighted in section 3.5, my role as the researcher will also have influenced the outcomes of the research. Despite efforts to reduce the impact of researcher bias through the reflexive practice of journaling and openly informing readers of my experience regarding STMs (see Appendix A), it is impossible to achieve a truly objective stance (Denscombe 2010: 91). For that reason, it must be acknowledged that my own stance will have impacted this work. Similarly, it should also be noted that many writers discussing STMs write with an agenda of their own. Whilst this in itself is not necessarily wrong, the fact that literature on this topic is written with an agenda (and is frequently anecdotal rather than based on empirical research), also means that some of the perspectives drawn out in my literature review will stem from biased viewpoints.

6.5 Self-reflection and next steps

On a personal level, this MA journey has helped me grow into a more reflective practitioner. The course has provided a natural space for theological reflection and growth and so as it draws to a close, I find myself thinking about how I can continue to grow as a reflective practitioner beyond the MA. I am still processing this but am trying to notice and connect with the people and places that nudge me in my thinking and impact my practice.

With regards to this dissertation, researching STMs has confirmed my belief that these trips can be transformative experiences for participants. The reflective practice undertaken throughout the research process has both challenged and encouraged me, but ultimately helped me identify why God has positioned me where I currently find myself.

In brief, I have always felt a tension between my passion for overseas mission and children's ministry in the UK. This has often left me grappling internally with how God can be calling me to *both* these geographically distant worlds. This research has felt like a God-inspired collision of these two passions and it has encouraged me to consider how I might use the position God has placed me in to encourage others to engage in overseas mission.

As a result, I am planning a STM to *The Smiles Foundation* with my parish, encouraging and facilitating the involvement of youth. This will also provide an opportunity for me to continue growing in my role as I journey alongside young people, encouraging them to reflect on how a STM shapes how they understand themselves as disciples and how the experience influences what it means for them to live missionally in their contexts. It will also be an opportunity to draw on the key principles for STMs identified in this research. For instance, I have already initiated conversations about my church becoming a long-term partner with *The Smiles Foundation*, thus ensuring any STMs with this charity will be embedded within a plan for longer-term support.

I will also consider how my research can be more widely disseminated, for example through an article and/or in the charity's newsletter. I will consider using my networks as a children's worker to connect with other youth/church leaders who are open to engaging with STMs. To support leaders to engage in STMs effectively I have already begun creating a programme with pre-trip and post-trip elements that incorporate the key principles that emerged from this research. An outline of this programme can be found in Appendix M. Such a programme will prove helpful in pursuing recommendations one, two and five, as outlined in section 6.3.

Furthermore, Oxford Diocesan Synod recently voted in favour of bringing ministry with children, young people and families to the fore, calling on every deanery to develop strategies for discipling young people (Generations Newsletter, March 2024¹³). The words of Esther 4: 14 “for such a time as this” spring to mind as I find myself wondering what role this research could play in offering a potential component to discipleship strategies for young people, not just in my local setting, but across the deanery, diocese and beyond.

To conclude, when I embarked on my first ever STM in 2011, I could never have imagined the ways in which it was going to shape my life. It is remarkable to look back and see God’s hand at work in all the steps that have brought me to the position and place I am today. My hope now is that this research may play a part in others discovering the transformational nature of STMs for themselves and that they too may grow in love and awe of our incredible God as they witness His abundant nature in blessing them as they seek to bless others.

¹³ <https://mailchi.mpoxford.anglican.org/generations-march-24?e=22db424256>

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Appendix A: Reflexivity & My Story

Reflexivity (part 1)

Reflexivity is the practice of researchers being aware of their own beliefs, values, attitudes and experiences (Ho and Limpaecher 2022). It heightens self-awareness and enables the researcher to be self-critical throughout the research process so that the evaluation and understanding of their research findings, both by themselves and their audience, may be enhanced (Payne and Payne 2004: 191). In other words, reflexivity seeks to enhance the quality of the research (Etherington 2004).

As identified in section 3.5, reflexivity has been a particularly important practice for me in this piece of research since my life has been impacted by engagement in overseas missions. In Chapter 3 I explained the steps I took to aid awareness of my *own* biases and assumptions. The following summary of my personal story serves to enlighten readers, so that they too can approach it with an understanding of who I am.

My Story

“I went to give, but came away with so much myself”

I did my first overseas mission trip at the age of 20. I’d grown up attending a small Baptist church where I had helped lead a *Youth Alpha* course. After finishing the course, the group were keen to continue meeting and at some point during these times together, we started talking about the idea of overseas mission. After some online research, we identified *The Smiles Foundation* as a charity we could serve with. A plan was made and fundraising began. In August 2011, eleven of us (four leaders and seven 17-18 year olds) flew out to serve with *The Smiles Foundation* for ten days. None of us had ever done anything like this before.

That first overseas mission trip was eye-opening. I remember being shocked at the level of poverty that existed within an EU country. But there was something that affected me more

deeply than that too. I fell in love with the people and the country, I was moved by the immense compassion of the staff and I felt God stirring something in me – a desire to do more, to make a difference, to love as Jesus loved. I knew it wouldn't be long before I was back again.

And sure enough... in summer 2012 I spent a month volunteering with the charity in Romania. During this time, I had the opportunity to accompany a group of underprivileged children and youth to a week-long camp. I'm not sure whether the children or I enjoyed it more!

The following year I had some important decisions to make. I was finishing my undergraduate degree in French and German and had to decide what to do next. To the surprise of a lot of my friends, I decided to volunteer for a year with *The Smiles Foundation*. This time was transformational. I learnt so much, grew in my faith, grew in confidence and discovered what God had made me for! The CEO of the charity had asked me to create and head up a daily after-school spiritual development programme for the children from an impoverished community that the charity had been working with for a long time. It certainly wasn't without its challenges but towards the end of my year in Romania, I found myself thinking: "imagine if you could actually do this type of work for a 'real' job!". Then I found out you could... And here I am ten years later having worked as a children and families worker within the Diocese of Oxford for nine years.

During this time, I have taken out three more teams to serve with *The Smiles Foundation* on short-term (7 day) trips, I have encouraged another young person to spend time volunteering overseas with the charity, and most recently I participated in another short-term mission trip there with another member of my parish.

It is incredible to look back and see God's hand at work in the details of my life. If I hadn't studied languages at university, I wouldn't have spent the time living overseas that I did as part of my course. Without that experience abroad, I'm not sure I would have been confident enough to move overseas and spend that year volunteering in Romania. Without that year in Romania, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now. Without those initial short-term mission trips, I

wouldn't have had the connection with *The Smiles Foundation*. Those trips changed me and changed the course of my life. I went to give, but came away with so much myself.

Reflexivity (part 2)

Reflecting on my experiences volunteering overseas on mission trips, I have been struck by how generous our amazing God is in blessing us as we seek to serve and bless others. This was certainly true of my experiences. As I have journalled through this research process, I have grappled with the question: is it *selfish* to be exploring and emphasising the benefits of overseas missions to participants themselves?

Kelly speaks into my thoughts on this by observing how “people who participate in mission trips often explain the reasons for the trip in vague terms [like] we are going to ‘help,’ we are going to ‘make a difference,’ we are going to support those who need it, help the ‘unfortunate’” (2018: 6). This was certainly true of my own attitude ahead of my first mission trips. Participants “see themselves as ‘givers’ or ‘savers’ not as recipients of anything positive” (Kelly 2018: 10) and they certainly do not see their cross-cultural experience “as a source for their *own* conversion or that they can learn anything from the poverty of marginalization they find themselves in” (Kelly 2018: 10). This research challenges that “framing narrative” (Kelly 2018: 9) by opening up conversations about the ways in which participants *do* benefit themselves, as indeed I did.

Rather than being selfish then, I have come to the conclusion that the focus of this research could be better described as simply being *honest* – recognising that acknowledging the benefits to participants does not invalidate peoples’ servant-hearted attitudes or indeed the blessing participants can be to the beneficiaries they are visiting and serving. Recognising the benefits to mission trip participants simply allows us to better see the abundant grace of God in this experience of mutual blessing. Mack and Stiles also speak into this, affirming that “we don’t have to justify short terms due to the good they do for long-term missions”, emphasising that “they are good in and of themselves” since “they do powerful things for the kingdom – different from long term – but equally viable” (2000: 38).

That being said, it is important to approach STM engagement with one's priorities in line. As Johnson highlights: "if we promote short-term missions based on thinking about our benefits, we run the risk of making short-term missions a selfish enterprise" (2017, Chapter 6). Although this research does focus on the benefits of STMs to participants, these benefits should never be the *primary* motivating factors for choosing to engage in STMs. Our primary motivation must always be a desire to expand God's Kingdom and bring glory to Him, whilst growing in our own discipleship as we strive to become more Christ-like. As summarised by Mack and Stiles: "Go first to give your life to get life. Then trust God to provide the other stuff as a byproduct of following Jesus with deadly reckless abandon" (2000: 58).

In summary, I have found peace in researching this topic. I unashamedly hope that this research *will* open up the conversation for youth and church leaders around the transformative potential that mission trips hold and the potential role they could play in the spiritual formation of the teens in their midst. If this research leads to more young people experiencing the abundant grace of God and growing in faith as they serve others, I am confident that this would be something that God would celebrate.

Appendix B: Gatekeeper Permission

Email approval from Kevin Hoy, CEO and Founder of *The Smiles Foundation*

Kevin Hoy <kevin@thesmilesfoundation.org>

Mon 02/10/2023 07:46

To: Anna Clarke (Student) <Anna.Clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk>

Dear Anna

Thank you for the details involved with your proposal to research into Youth Mission Trips through the Smiles Foundation. I believe this would be a very useful and beneficial research paper and the results very encouraging for more to consider the option.

You have my full support and approval to move forward with your proposal and if I can be of further assistance at any time, do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind Regards

Kevin D. Hoy

Founder & Chief Executive

The Smiles Foundation

Web: www.thesmilesfoundation.org

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Individuals

Anna Clarke's Research Project - Overseas Mission with *The Smiles Foundation*



My name is Anna Clarke and I am currently studying for a Masters in Theology, Mission and Ministry with a specialism in Children, Young People and Families. I am completing research which will form my dissertation for my MA. The research will explore the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip as well as the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers.

I am looking for the following people to help with my research:

- individuals from the UK aged 18-23 years old who participated in a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* between 2013-2018;
- youth group or church leaders from the UK who have led a mission trip to *The Smiles Foundation* with a group of teenagers in the past ten years.

If you meet the criteria above, you are invited to complete the following questionnaire. Taking part is completely voluntary but in submitting this form you agree to the data you provide being used in this research.

All data will be anonymised in my final dissertation so that individuals, groups and churches cannot be identified.

1. Please indicate in which capacity you are responding to this questionnaire: *

- I am aged between 18-23 years old and did a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* between 2013-2018
- I am a church or youth group leader who took a group of teenagers on a mission trip to *The Smiles Foundation* within the past ten years

Details about your mission trip(s) with *The Smiles Foundation*

2. Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements below: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My church encourages engagement in world mission.	<input type="radio"/>				
My mission trip experience helped me grow in my faith.	<input type="radio"/>				
I faced personal challenges or doubts during the mission trip, but they ultimately strengthened my faith.	<input type="radio"/>				
I made a personal commitment to God during or after my mission trip experience.	<input type="radio"/>				
Participating in a mission trip had a positive impact on my personal development.	<input type="radio"/>				
My mission trip experience deepened my sense of purpose of calling.	<input type="radio"/>				
I felt that I made a meaningful contribution during my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
I gained skills during my mission trip that I use in my daily life.	<input type="radio"/>				
My mission trip experience motivated me to get involved or continue being involved in volunteering or community service activities after my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
My mission trip experience allowed me to develop a greater sense of empathy and compassion for others.	<input type="radio"/>				
Participating in a mission trip as a teenager enhanced my understanding of different cultures.	<input type="radio"/>				
My mission trip experience has had a lasting impact on my worldview.	<input type="radio"/>				
I believe that overseas mission trips are valuable experiences for teenagers.	<input type="radio"/>				
I would personally recommend overseas mission trips to teenagers.	<input type="radio"/>				
I found myself getting more involved with my church as a result of my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
I found myself praying more as a result of my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
I found myself reading the Bible more as a result of my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
I increased my personal charitable giving as a result of my mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				

Details about you and your mission trip(s) with *The Smiles Foundation*

3. Full name: *

Enter your answer

4. Date of Birth: *

Please input date (dd/MM/yyyy)



5. Nationality: *

Enter your answer

6. Month and Year of most recent mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation*: *

e.g. September 2023

Enter your answer

7. Duration of this trip: *

e.g. 10 days

Enter your answer

8. Did you go as an individual or as part of a group? *

Individual

Group

9. Month, date and duration of any previous mission trips with *The Smiles Foundation*:

e.g. August 2011 (10 days); August 2012 (1 month); October 2017 (7 days)

Enter your answer

Your experience of mission with *The Smiles Foundation*

10. What did you enjoy most about your mission trip experience?

Enter your answer

11. What was most challenging about your mission trip experience?

Enter your answer

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Enter your answer

Engagement with Anna Clarke's research project

13. To further aid my research, I am looking to informally interview (via Zoom) a number of participants in order to better understand the impact that a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* has had on them. Interviews would be arranged for a mutually agreeable day and time and would last no longer than 30 minutes.

Please indicate below as to whether you would be willing to participate in the research in this way: *

- Yes - I would be happy to be contacted for an informal interview over Zoom (to take place in Jan/Feb 2024)
- No - I do not wish to partake in an interview but am happy for the questionnaire data I have provided to be used in this research

14. Email address: *

If you have selected "Yes" to question 13, please provide your email address so that a participant information sheet and a consent form can be sent to you and interview details arranged.
If you have selected "No", simply enter N/A below:

Enter your answer

Submit Form

In submitting this form, you agree that the data you have provided can be used in this study.

If you have questions or require further information before submitting this form, please contact me at:
anna.clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which this study has been conducted then please contact my supervisor:
sally.nash@stpadarns.ac.uk

Appendix D: Questionnaire for Group Leaders

Anna Clarke's Research Project - Overseas Mission with *The Smiles Foundation*



My name is Anna Clarke and I am currently studying for a Masters in Theology, Mission and Ministry with a specialism in Children, Young People and Families. I am completing research which will form my dissertation for my MA. The research will explore the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip as well as the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers.

I am looking for the following people to help with my research:

- individuals from the UK aged 18-23 years old who participated in a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* between 2013-2018;
- youth group or church leaders from the UK who have led a mission trip to *The Smiles Foundation* with a group of teenagers in the past ten years.

If you meet the criteria above, you are invited to complete the following questionnaire. Taking part is completely voluntary but in submitting this form you agree to the data you provide being used in this research.

All data will be anonymised in my final dissertation so that individuals, groups and churches cannot be identified.

1. Please indicate in which capacity you are responding to this questionnaire: *

- I am aged between 18-23 years old and did a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* between 2013-2018
- I am a church or youth group leader who took a group of teenagers on a mission trip to *The Smiles Foundation* within the past ten years

Details about you and your mission trip with young people

15. Full name: *

Enter your answer

16. Nationality: *

Enter your answer

17. Month and year of most recent mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation*: *

e.g. September 2023

Enter your answer

18. Duration of this trip: *

e.g. 10 days

Enter your answer

19. Number of participants aged 13-18 on the trip: *

Enter your answer

20. Role/Capacity in which you led the trip: *

e.g. Youth Worker / Church Leader

Enter your answer

21. Month, date and duration of any previous mission trips with teenagers to *The Smiles Foundation*:

e.g. August 2011 (10 days); October 2017 (7 days)

Enter your answer

Details about your group's mission trip experience

22. Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements below: *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The church I am part of encourages engagement in world mission.	<input type="radio"/>				
The mission trip experience was a positive one for the youth group as a whole.	<input type="radio"/>				
The mission trip experience encouraged the youth to ask deeper questions about faith.	<input type="radio"/>				
The mission trip experience positively influenced the relationships between members of the group.	<input type="radio"/>				
The group felt closer as a result of their shared mission trip experience.	<input type="radio"/>				
The group have become more interested in social justice issues following the mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
The group feel more empowered to make a difference as a result of the mission trip.	<input type="radio"/>				
I believe that overseas mission trips are valuable experiences for teenagers.	<input type="radio"/>				
I would personally recommend other church or youth group leaders to take their youth on short-term overseas mission.	<input type="radio"/>				

23. What would you say your group enjoyed most about their mission trip experience?

Enter your answer

24. What would you say your group found most challenging about their mission trip experience?

Enter your answer

25. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Enter your answer

Engagement with Anna Clarke's research project

26. To further aid my research, I am looking to gather a focus group of 3-6 church or youth group leaders who have led a mission trip to *The Smiles Foundation* with a group of teenagers in the past ten years. The focus group would take place via Zoom and would last around 60 minutes. Participants in the focus group will receive a short list of questions which will form the basis for discussion during the focus group but no advanced preparation or written responses are required.

Please indicate whether you would be willing to participate in the research in this way: *

- Yes - I would be happy to participate in the focus group (to take place in Jan/Feb 2024)
- No - I do not wish to partake in the focus group but am happy for the questionnaire data I have provided to be used in this research

27. Email address: *

If you have selected "Yes", please provide your email address so that a participant information sheet and a consent form can be sent to you and interview details arranged.

If you have selected "No", simply enter N/A below:

Enter your answer

Submit Form

In submitting this form, you agree that the data you have provided can be used in this study.

If you have questions or require further information before submitting this form, please contact me at:

anna.clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which this study has been conducted then please contact my supervisor:

sally.nash@stpadarns.ac.uk

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet (Interview)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (INTERVIEW)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

ABOUT ME AND MY RESEARCH TOPIC:



My name is Anna Clarke and I am currently studying for a Masters in Theology, Mission and Ministry with a specialism in Children, Young People and Families. The course is run by St Padarn's Institute and is accredited by Durham University. I am also employed as the Children and Families Outreach Worker for a church in Reading – a vocational route I pursued after having spent 12 months volunteering with The Smiles Foundation in Romania. It is my belief that engaging in overseas mission work as a young person can prove a formational experience and this is my motivation for conducting the following research.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

The research will explore the impact of overseas mission on both youth groups as a whole as well as young people as individuals. In order to do this, I will:

- 1) individually interview (via Zoom) young people who engaged in short-term mission work with *The Smiles Foundation* in their teen years;
- 2) host a focus group of 3-6 youth/church leaders who have taken a youth group on a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* within the last ten years

WHY YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED:

I am at the stage of my research where I am looking to interview individuals who are currently between 18-23 years of age and who did a short-term mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* between 2013-2018. You are being invited because you meet this criteria and have expressed willingness to help with my research.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will arrange to informally interview you via Zoom on a mutually agreeable day and time. The interview will last a maximum of 30 minutes. During the interview I will ask questions about your experience of doing an overseas mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation*, focusing

particularly on how the trip impacted. You can refrain from answering any questions if you wish. By taking part you will enable me to gain insight into the impact of overseas mission on individuals.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

You can decide whether to take part or not. Even if you initially agree to take part, you are free to withdraw from the research at any point prior to 1st February 2024 without needing to provide an explanation. If you decide not to take part, any data already collected will be deleted and will not be used in the research.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

All personal information gained in this research will remain confidential. The names of people, places and churches will be changed so that no individuals or groups are identifiable, unless separate specific permission has been given. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by myself. The recording and transcript will be stored safely and destroyed after two years (in accordance with St Padarn's Data Policy). My supervisor will also have access to the transcript and it can be made available to you upon request, but no-one else will have access to the recording or be able to use it for any other research.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The data collected will be presented as part of the dissertation for my MA. A bound copy will be available in the library at St Padarn's Institute. A summary of the research findings can be made available to participants upon request.

GETTING IN TOUCH:

If you have any questions or require more information, please contact me at:

anna.clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which the research is conducted then contact my supervisor, Sally Nash: sally.nash@stpadarns.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you are happy to participate in the interview, please complete the attached consent form.

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet (Focus Group)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (YOUTH/CHURCH LEADERS)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

ABOUT ME AND MY RESEARCH TOPIC:



My name is Anna Clarke and I am currently studying for a Masters in Theology, Mission and Ministry with a specialism in Children, Young People and Families. The course is run by St Padarn's Institute and is accredited by Durham University. I am also employed as the Children and Families Outreach Worker for a church in Reading – a vocational route I pursued after having spent 12 months volunteering with *The Smiles Foundation* in Romania. It is my belief that engaging in overseas mission work as a young person can prove a formational experience and this is my motivation for conducting the following research.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

The research will explore the impact of overseas mission on both youth groups as a whole as well as young people as individuals. In order to do this, I will:

- 1) host a focus group of 3-6 youth/church leaders who have taken a youth group on a mission trip with *The Smiles Foundation* within the last ten years;
- 2) individually interview (via Zoom) young people who engaged in short-term mission work with *The Smiles Foundation* in their teen years

WHY YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED:

I am at the stage of my research where I am looking to form a focus group in order to hear from leaders who have taken a youth group on mission to *The Smiles Foundation* in the last ten years. You are being invited because you meet this criteria and have expressed willingness to help with my research.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to take part in the focus group along with myself and 2-5 other church/youth leaders and I will ask you to sign a consent form. You will receive a short list of questions which will form the basis for discussion during the focus group but there will be no expectation of any advanced preparation or written responses. The focus group will take place on Zoom and will last for around one hour. You can input into the discussion whenever you feel you have

something to contribute and feel comfortable sharing it. By taking part you will enable me to gain insight into the impact of overseas mission on youth groups as a whole.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

You can decide whether to take part or not. Even if you initially agree to take part, you are free to withdraw from the research at any point prior to 1st February 2024 without needing to provide an explanation. If you decide not to take part, any data already collected will be deleted and will not be used in the research.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

All personal information gained in this research will remain confidential. The names of people, places and churches will be changed so that no individuals or groups are identifiable, unless separate specific permission has been given. The discussion during the focus group will be audio and video recorded and later transcribed by myself. The recording and transcript will be stored safely and destroyed after two years (in accordance with St Padarn's data policy). My supervisor will also have access to the transcript and it can be made available to participants of the focus group upon request, but no-one else will have access to the recording or be able to use it for any other research.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The data collected will be presented as part of the dissertation for my MA. A bound copy will be available in the library at St Padarn's Institute. A summary of the research findings can be made available to participants upon request.

GETTING IN TOUCH:

If you have any questions or require more information, please contact me at:

anna.clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which the research is conducted then contact my supervisor, Sally Nash: sally.nash@stpadarns.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you would like to participate in the focus group, please complete the attached consent form.



26th September 2023

Appendix G: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN ANNA CLARKE'S RESEARCH PROJECT:

Research question: What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

Please complete this form after you have read the participant information sheet.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research outlined on the participant information sheet.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can notify Anna should I wish to withdraw from the research.
- I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous in the final dissertation and any related publications.
- I agree to the results from the research being used in subsequent research, publications (in print or online), or talks.
- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handles in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT:

I _____ (*insert full name*), agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the participant information sheet and understand what the research involves.

If you require further information before signing this consent form, please contact Anna: anna.clarke21@stpadarns.ac.uk

Signed: _____

Date: _____



ATHROFA PADARN SANT
ST PADARN'S INSTITUTE

Appendix H: Questions for Focus Group

ANNA CLARKE'S RESEARCH PROJECT:

What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP:

These questions will form the basis of the discussion during the focus group. No advanced preparation is expected, and no written response is required, but it may help to reflect on the questions ahead of the focus group.

1. What were your reasons for deciding to take your youth on an overseas mission trip?
2. Were there any particular reasons for choosing to do mission with *The Smiles Foundation* or in Romania?
3. Would you say there is a missionary culture in your church? (i.e. do they encourage engagement in world mission, have overseas mission partners etc?)
4. What were you hoping your group would gain from the trip? Did these expectations match reality?
5. Did you notice any changes within your group *during* the trip? If so, what?
6. Did you notice any changes within your group *after* the trip that you would say were a result of engaging in overseas mission? If so, what?
7. What do you consider to be the benefits of cross-cultural engagement?
8. How would you say the mission trip benefitted your group the most?
9. Would you recommend other church or youth group leaders to organise overseas mission trips for their youth groups? Why/Why not?

Appendix I: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

ANNA CLARKE'S RESEARCH PROJECT:

What are the benefits of taking a church youth group on an overseas mission trip and what are the implications for individuals who engage with short-term overseas mission as teenagers?

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:

1. What motivated you to do overseas mission work?
2. Would you say there is a missionary culture in your church? (i.e. do they encourage engagement in world mission, have overseas mission partners etc?)
3. Were there any particular reasons for choosing to do mission with *The Smiles Foundation* or in Romania?
4. Are there any stories of missionaries who have inspired you?
5. What do you consider to be the benefits of cross-cultural engagement?
6. What did you hope to gain from your trip and did your hopes/expectations match up to reality?
7. In what ways did the trip impact you?
8. What would you say the main benefits of the trip were for you?
9. In the years since your trip, have you approached anything differently as a result of your overseas mission experience?
10. Would you recommend a mission trip to someone in their teens? Why?/Why not?

Appendix J: Ethical Approval

Part of obtaining ethical approval included satisfying the conditions for data compliance stipulated by St Padarn's¹⁴. As such, electronic data such as questionnaire returns, recordings and transcripts were stored securely on the password-protected St Padarn's server and only made accessible to myself and my supervisor.



13th October 2023

Dear Anna,

Thank you for taking the time to present your Ethical Research Application to the St Padarn's Committee. We enjoyed reading your application and think that your project is interesting and helpful.

After careful consideration the committee decided to approve your application.

Please contact your supervisor in the first instance, however if you need any clarification, please contact me directly on the contact details below and I would be delighted to help.

We wish you well in your research.

Cofion gorau / Regards,



*The Rev'd Dr. Manon C. James
Chair of Ethical Research Committee and Dean of Initial Ministerial Training.
St Padarn's Institute*

manon.c.james@stpadarns.ac.uk / 07776 591799

¹⁴ https://stpadarns.contentfiles.net/media/documents/St_Padarns_Learners_Data_Retention_Policy.pdf

Appendix K: Evidence for Themes in Data from Individuals

Personal stance – Valuable experiences for teenagers	
P2 L.127-135	“They have to go for so many reasons – it’s good for their relationship with each other, it’s good for their personal development. Yeah. Seeing further than this town and seeing God’s work in practice as well. When you go out there, you can see how Smiles have helped people and that this is all through God and what He’s doing for us. So I think for teenagers, they grow in their faith as well because they’re learning to... it’s like fellowship, isn’t it? They’re spending time together, praying together, going out together, sharing the experiences.”
P3 L.79-80	“I definitely think it is important for young people”
P3 L.162-163	“it’s definitely a rewarding experience that helps form connection I would say”
P3 L.264-265	“You have literally nothing to lose, and you might have everything to gain”
Q2 L.30-31	“I believe mission trips for teenagers are super important to grow their character and relationship with Jesus”
Personal stance – Personally recommend	
P1 L.308-311	“Do it. Don’t hesitate if you’re able to. I know that there is a financial aspect to it, so not everyone could, but if you can and you have the capability of being able to fundraise then absolutely do it and do it now. You won’t regret it. Do it with support – but do it”
P2 L.126-127	“I have two teenagers in my group at the moment who want to and I’m like, yes, come on. Like you have to go”
P3 L.263-265	“Do it. I always would say ‘what do you have to lose’, especially if you’re fundraising for it and you’re not paying directly for it. You have literally nothing to lose, and you might have everything to gain so definitely do it”
P3 L.269	“100% do it because it may just change your life”
P3 L.287	“I’d definitely say do it”
E2 L.32-33	Opposing viewpoint – “I would encourage anyone considering a mission to strongly think about going for an extended period of time, or donate the money instead”
Personal stance – Church engagement in world mission	

P1 L.13	“the first one was arranged by the local churches in our area”
P1. L.34-37	“it was another church that were actively getting involved with it and they came and spoke to us. And we were like, oh, yeah, this is really good. And she came and gave a presentation in the church”
P1 L.47	“it was the other church, our church <i>kind of</i> got involved”
P1 L.48	Opposing viewpoint – “I think my dad tried to push it a bit, but it just didn’t catch”
P1 L.49	“it was another local church”
P1 L.269-272	Opposing viewpoint – “It was the other local church. It was a church near us that kind of pushed it and things like that. It can be hard when your local church is a bit like ‘meh’... and you’re wanting to do all these different things and attend and be involved”
P2 L.10	“they were all like with the church”
P2 L.16-17	“it was the church and people in the youth group”
P2. L.29	“there is a massive Smiles profile in our church”
P3 L.14	“there were other members of the church who came along as well”
P3 L.16-18	“XXXX was the first time our church went out there but since then, I think they’ve been out four times. And I’ve been two times out of the four”
P3 L.30-36	“there’d been one guy in our church who’d run a mission group in Kenya or Uganda and had been a founder of a big charity that had a big orphanage out there. So there’s been quite a link with our church and mission. And then our pastor went out to America and did a three week long mission period and I think off the back of that the youth group leaders decided that we, as a group of young people, might be interested in doing it”
P3 L.45-49	“Since we went to Smiles I think that has probably grown the number of people who are engaged in (engage being either with monetary support or with fundraising support, rather than necessarily going out and being like on the ground support) but I do think that since we started going to Smiles, that level of overseas mission engagement has risen”
P3 L.288-289	“That’s not a problem at our church cause it’s become kind of like law now”
Impact on self – Positive impact on personal development	
P2 L.78	“They’re good for your confidence and also my outlook on life”

P2 L.129	“it’s good for their personal development”
P3 L.113	“it developed that level of faith in myself to be able to handle situations”
P3 L.120	“It definitely made me a lot more confident”
P3 L.217	“I wasn’t terrified anymore”
P3 L.239-242	“we knew in that situation we’ve got to be forced to talk to people. I think that’s definitely a skill that being able to talk to people in a different environment, different situation, from different areas or walks of life. I think that was definitely the confidence building skill that I gained”
P3 L.286	“It’s really beneficial and growing your character”
Q2 L.30-31	“mission trips for teenagers are super important to grow their character”
E2 L.34	“It did benefit me personally. The experience was priceless in that regard!”
Impact on self – Developed empathy / compassion	
P3 L.169-175	“I was walking up these stairs at school and I suddenly just stopped and felt a massive sort of overwhelming feeling of grief, not grief, guilt. Guilt as to why I was allowed to be walking around this rather nice school and having a wonderful education when people the same age as me or younger, however many miles away, in supposedly you know a First World country weren’t allowed the same thing”
P3 L.249	“creates that sense of empathy, like when the conflict in Ukraine started”
P3 L.258	“you’d have that empathy for the wider continent and wider environment”
Impact on self – Enhanced understanding of different cultures	
P1 L.74-76	“Experiencing different culture. I think that’s really important. I think that’s something that can open your eyes to different things. Different experiences. Experiencing different language.”
P1 L.191	“Your understanding of people changes”
P1 L.196-204	“meeting people of different cultures, different backgrounds, different faiths, different levels of poverty and seeing how they are, you know... they they’re the happiest people in the world and... those people who you were building houses for were dancing to music in the street. And you’re just like, you guys love (like you don’t know kind of any better) but you love your life. Like you guys are happy. Like yes, you’re in dire poverty. Yes, you know your houses are crumbling, but you’re happy dancing in the street. Like if that was this country, that’s not what would happen”

P2 L.41-43	“people overseas, they live such a different life and just the way of thinking and the way they do things is so different”
P2 L.46	“there’s different sorts of struggles that they have”
P2 L.48	“it’s a completely different world to this country”
P2 L.51	“it’s just a different world”
P3 L.240-241	“being able to talk to people in a different environment, different situation, from different areas or walks of life”
Q3 L.38-40	“I most enjoyed the experience of seeing God at work through other cultures, impacting others’ lives, discussing God with others from different backgrounds, sharing the same God”
Q4 L.50	“Most challenging was seeing how others live”
Q9 L.87	“I most enjoyed cross-cultural engagement”
E1 L.10-11	“It showed me a different part of the world”
Impact on self – Lasting impact on worldview	
P1 L.190-191	“everything changes... your whole world perspective changes”
P2 L.78-81	“They’re good for your confidence and also my outlook on life. Like not to get so caught up about little things. And it put things into a much larger perspective. When people are complaining about something, you’re like, actually it doesn’t matter”
P3 L.58-68	“I think you can live in a bubble in this country very very easily and see things on the news and not really be... and think ‘ohh that’s so far away’. But I think, and especially going to Romania, which is an EU country, you go and you actually realise this is part of a big you know what you would look at being a first world organization and actually, it’s not, and then you realise... you you have to go through other countries to get to Romania, you have to go through Hungary, and then you realise that this inequality isn’t just in this one localized area kind of thing, so I think it’s an important learning point and I think especially are a young person’s development point within your sort of how you process the world and your worldview is impacted by what you see out there”
P3 L.184-185	“that really was an eye-opener as to why we need that sort of shared understanding and shared aim towards peace”
P3 L.247-248	“it opens your eyes up to the world you’re living in”

Impact on self – Motivated continued volunteering

P3 L.142-147	“I went out with two my best friends and it’s always been something, I mean it’s massively impacted them – the two of them were going to Africa in 2020 with Tearfund I think and they’ve been out several times since 2018 the two of them, and did like week-long student or two-week-long student trips and things like that”
P3 L.175-185	“I kind of tried to gear what I wanted to do or figure out what I wanted to do in that way of serving community. So one thing I’ve done literally in the last year has been working for the XXX and trying to get young people involved with XX and that understanding that UNESCO wants to develop a shared culture and a shared understanding and ultimately that their goal is to spread peace. And I tell people that my love of UNESCO, my love of world heritage, this global aim of sharing peace and culture comes from a lot of my work out when in Romania, because that really was an eye-opener as to why we need that sort of shared understanding and shared aim towards peace”
P3 L.205-206	“how can I do what they’re doing here”
P3 L.222-225	“it was doing things with the Youth Theatre as like a member of staff and then obviously doing Hadrian’s Wall, which is a more wider peace engagement. So it’s been more calling of spreading the Lord outside of faith environment cause that’s what I came away feeling”
P3 L.230	“I assimilated that into my own life”
Q5 L.60	“Extremely motivating trip done with girlguiding”
Impact on self – Deepened sense of purpose / calling	
P1 L.192-195	“sparked off my interest in people a bit more, so it probably is one of the reasons I am where I am at the moment. My undergraduate was XXX and then I did my Masters in XXX. It definitely contributed to where I am now”
P3 L.69-71	“my word is sort of in community engagement now which I would say is probably a little bit to do with the fact that I had such an engagement with a particular community out there”
P3 L.147	“it’s definitely shaped the three of our lives”

P3 L.182-184	“my love of world heritage, this global aim of sharing peace and culture comes from a lot of my work out when in Romania”
P3 L.219-221	“it just gave me a calling, to remind me to trust the Lord kind of thing and just be like, yeah, I’ve got you so go where you feel I’m telling you to go”
P3 L.224-225	“it’s been more calling of spreading the Lord outside of faith environments”
P3 L.282	“that’s why I’m here. Ok, I’ve got a purpose”
Q11 L.102-108	“The lasting impact it has had over my life. I was given the opportunity to meet a young girl on my trip who had PMLD. Her opportunities were limited and the care that she received was poor. It was here that I first thought that, in my future, I could work with children with additional learning needs. This experiences sparked a passion and a need to help all children reach their full potential. I am now a teacher working with children who have ALN”
Impact on self – Made a meaningful contribution	
P1 L.90-91	“look at this incredible difference we’ve made. It’s really profound”
P1 L.232	“And that’s the difference we make”
P1 L.235	“We had such a profound impact on their lives”
P2 L.45	“we’re the only people who are going to help them”
P2 L.68-74	“I thought there’d be loads of need, why they are, but also I didn’t think about that these are people and then you can build relationships with these people. You don’t just go in with like, a mission pack. Like, here’s your food and then you go. You actually speak to them and find out about their lives. And you connected with them on a deeper level, which is something that I didn’t really think could happen”
P2 L.110-112	“it made me feel like I was actually doing something good. And using my time and skills to actually help people”
P3 L.76	“you’re actually providing assistance”
P3 L.101-105	“the level of engagement that you had with all of their communities was definitely a surprise”
Q1 L.11-12	“Seeing the difference you can make in someone’s life like that was what I enjoyed the most”

Q3 L.39	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “impacting others’ lives”
Q5 L.56	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “helping others”
Q7 L.71	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “getting to help various people in the community”
Q10 L.94	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “getting to volunteer and make a difference to the children and families living out in Romania”
E2 L.27-30	Opposing viewpoint – “In reality, it was a massive wake up call to how massive a charitable organization is required for systemic and financial support for struggling people and one tiny troop of teenagers isn’t going to make much difference over such a short period of time”
Impact on self – Gained skills used in daily life	
P1 L.146-154	“And even since then, so one of the kids in my school is Romanian. So I’ve been able to kind of speak to her in very broken Romanian... I mean it’s been XXXX was the last time I was across so it’s been a while, but I could share that experience with her. And she went to Romania and brought me back Milka chocolate and she like... ‘from when you were across...’ So it’s been really nice that that was an experience I could share. You know I was able to share that experience with her and things like that. So even learning the language is still impacting me. I’m still fortunate enough that it’s still impacting my life.”
P1 L.170	“even being able to come back and do talks in school”
P3 L.235-236	“I think one thing was communicating with different levels of, engaging with different ages”
P3 L.242	“that was definitely the confidence building skill that I gained”
Impact on faith – Helped me grow in my faith	
P1 L.246-249	“being in Romania confirmed my relationship with God and my commitment to God for me personally. It wasn’t necessarily like an official thing... I’d already been baptized and everything. So it wasn’t an official thing, but it was to do with me and my relationship to God”
P2 L.93-94	“one different I found it made was I felt confident to pray with people”

P2 L.104	“a deeper connection”
P2 L.128	“it’s good for their relationship with God”
P2 L.133-135	“they grow in their faith as well because they’re learning to... it’s like fellowship, isn’t it? They’re spending time together, praying together, going out together, sharing their experiences”
P3 L.197-198	“it was very much a reawakening of faith and belief in God”
P3 L.201-202	“It was definitely a willingness to go out and share the word of God”
P3 L.219-221	“it just gave me a calling, to remind me to trust the Lord kind of thing and just be like, yeah, I’ve got you so go where you feel I’m telling you to go”
P3 L.224-225	“it’s been more calling of spreading the Lord outside of faith environments”
Q1 L.17-18	“My faith in God grew exponentially as my time across there went on”
Q2 L.30-31	“I believe mission trips for teenagers are super important to grow their character and relationship with Jesus”
Q2 L.34	“encourages them to grow in faith”
Q3 L.39-40	The thing I most enjoyed about my mission trip experience was “discussing God with others from different backgrounds, sharing the same God”
Impact on faith – Challenges / doubts strengthened faith	
P3 L.111-112	“to be put in their environment as the stranger, I think it develops a certain level of faith”
P3 L.113	“it developed that level of faith in myself to be able to handle situations”
Impact on faith – Personal commitment to God	
P1 L.246-249	“being in Romania confirmed my relationship with God and my commitment to God for me personally. It wasn’t necessarily like an official thing... I’d already been baptized and everything. So it wasn’t an official thing, but it was to do with me and my relationship to God”
P2 L.103-104	“I think because I already had that relationship, I think it was more like a mindset. More like a deeper connection”
P2 L.128	“it’s good for their relationship with God”
P3 L.200-201	“It wasn’t like I came back and got baptised because I had already got baptized before then”

Q1 L.18-20	“Seeing the joy and light when they have nothing and the faith they have through adversities was incredible”
Impact on religious practices – Personal charitable giving	
E2 L.35-38	“of all the charities I come into contact with, it’s the ones that have a personal connection to that I actually come through and support financially. It certainly makes a difference having seen where the money goes”
Impact on religious practices – Church involvement	
P1 L.264-265	“Still involved in churchy charities, still involved in church organisations and church group”
Impact on religious practices – Prayer	
	N/A
Impact on religious practices – Bible reading	
	N/A
Additional themes – Friends	
P1 L.15	“I’ve got friends in Wales that came out”
P1 L.22-23	“there was a group of us, like a few of us, that went just the same”
P1 L.284-288	“we used to go knowing people... there’s people you can cry with in the night, in the evening, there’s people you can laugh with, there’s people you can distract yourselves with, you can play pool with, you can spend time with, you can go <i>in</i> the pool with, you can kind of laugh with about life”
P1 L.299-301	“there’s fellowship in the evening and everyone, everyone’s there together. But it would make a difference if you didn’t know anyone, I think”
P2 L.128-129	“it’s good for their relationship with each other”
P2 L.134-135	“it’s like fellowship, isn’t it? They’re spending time together, praying together, going out together, sharing their experiences”
P2 L.143-145	“you have each other as a support network. And you can talk about things. And you’re all learning together as well growing”
P2 L.150-156	“Oh, were all closer. A lot closer. Yeah, and the connection with my group... I still, we’re still like, really close now. And these people that you went on mission trips with but you haven’t seen since but you pass them in the street and you just click and you talk to them and it’s really nice. Yeah. And you wouldn’t get that with someone you just met just through

	something else like a sports club or something. Yeah, so you do have a connection. 100%.”
P3 L.129-130	“I think it created a lot of sort of shared experience with a lot of our friends and the leaders as well”
P3 L.140-143	“we were more sort of on the same wavelength when we came back. I do remember that I wasn’t scared of certain people in the group, whereas I was before, which is quite interesting. I went out with two my best friends...”
P3 L.151-152	“everyone that went out I’m still in touch with”
P3 L.161-163	“we became quite good friends. And so like keep up with each other on Instagram and kind of things so it’s definitely a rewarding experience that helps form connection”
P3 L.303-307	“it kind of developed a humanity amongst us all that we, even though there was an age difference, we’re all human and all kind of viewing everything through similar lenses and I think that definitely brought us all together. And yeah, it just kind of brought down barriers between some of us young people”
P3 L.332	“everyone talks to each other”
Q2 L.31-33	“Groups (such as youth groups) who go together also share in valuable fellowship and strengthen their relationships as a result”
Q3 L.39-40	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “discussing God with others from different backgrounds, sharing the same God”
Additional themes – Revelation	
P1 L.92-97	“I also think that we have a tendency as people to ignore poverty on our doorsteps and sort of not really acknowledge it. But when you go to conditions like that, you can sort of see how bad it can be. And I think for anyway, then when I came back, I was like: ‘oh, actually, there’s so much more poverty in the world’ and it maybe opened my eyes to a bit more of what’s going on in our country”
P1 L.108-115	“I think sometimes if you live in a nice neighbourhood you might never see what’s going on around you”

P3 L.184-185	“that really way an eye-opener as to why we need that sort of shared understanding and shared aim towards peace”
P3 L.247-248	“it opens your eyes up to the world you’re living in”
E2 L.27-30	“it was a massive wake up call to how massive a charitable organization is required for systemic and financial support for struggling people and one tiny troops of teenagers isn’t going to make much difference over such a short period of time”
Additional themes – Gratitude	
P1 L.159	“It made me appreciate and made me more grateful for everything”
P1 L.163-178	“seeing <i>that</i> world made me appreciate everthing I had even more... to the smallest of little things and being able to say ‘actually I do have a lot’ and it’s that kind of reminder in the back of your mind. Even when things get hard, when life’s hard or money’s tight or something like that, you’re like ‘but actually, I still have a house over me, I still have running water, I’m surviving, I’m doing OK, I will be OK.’ So it’s totally give a perspective on my life that is uncomparable to anything else. And even being able to come back and do talks in school and be like this is what it’s like in the world. And school was interesting because no-one else had experienced that. So I’m sort of saying: ‘you’re really lucky for what you’ve got’ and you can show all the pictures in the world but like I said earlier, until you’ve been, you’ve seen it, you can’t see how lucky you’ve got it. It’s just not possible until you’ve seen it. It’s like the TV ads you see and go ‘oh that’s really sad’, but when you go and you see it, it leaves a permanent little mark, it totally permeates you and leaves a permanent little mark in your heart. And that is what changed me.”
P1 L.185-189	“I knew how lucky I was to be at university so I worked really really hard because I was like I’m so fortunate to be able to do this. And everything in my life, it’s like I said a minute ago, it burrows into your heart and leaves like a genuine permanent realization: I am so lucky to be here.”
P2 L.79-80	“it puts things into a much larger perspective. When people are complaining about something, you’re like actually it doesn’t matter”
P2 L.81-82	“I just feel like I have a greater appreciation of things that we have”

E1 L.9-10	“I was a very entitled teenager and never really saw past the struggles of being grounded or my mum taking my phone off me”
E3 L.42-44	“I think it helped me realise how privileged we are with that and who we have around us at home”
Additional themes – Life-changing experience	
P1 L.55	“for me it’s a total five sense experience”
P1 L.176-178	“when you go and see it, it leaves a permanent little mark, it totally permeates you and leaves a permanent little mark in your heart”
P1 L.189-191	“it’s life-changing – and it does. I do feel like from the first trip, everything changes... your whole world perspective changes. Your understanding of people changes”
P1 L.187-188	“it burrows into your heart and leaves like a genuine permanent realization”
P3 L.147	“it’s definitely shaped the three of our lives”
Q11 L.102	The thing I enjoyed most about my mission trip experience was “the lasting impact it has had over my life”
P1 L.216	“that’s life-changing”
P1 L.228	“that’s life-changing”
P1 L.234	“It’s so life-changing”
P3 L.72	“I don’t know anyone that I went with that <i>wasn’t</i> impacted by it”
P3 L.212-215	“seeing the impact that people of faith have in environments with limited resources shall we say, especially the sort of the impact that they can make to children’s lives was something that impacted me quite a lot”
P3 L.265	“you might have everything to gain”
P3 L.269	“100% do it because it may just change your life”
E1 L.8	“The mission trip to the Smiles Foundation changed a lot for me!”
Additional themes – Guilt	
P3 L.171-175	“Guilt as to why I was allowed to be walking around this rather nice school and having a wonderful education when people the same age as me or younger, however many miles away, in supposedly you know a First World country weren’t allowed the same thing, and that definitely sort of hit me”
E2 L.31-32	“I will always feel guilt about how much it cost”

E3 L.40-42	“I found the disparity between the homeless and refugees and the mission centre really difficult as we’d be out with people with nothing all day and then go back to a pool and a hot meal in the evening”
Heartfelt connection between participants and beneficiaries	
P1 L.213-214	“I spent time going to the village and getting to know the people. And some of them had photographs on their walls of me”
P1 L.225-228	“she phoned me one day to show me her wall. And she was like, ‘this is my family wall’. She was like ‘family’ [...] We’ve kept in touch as best we can, but she still is like this person is part of my family”
P1 L.229-234	“somebody added me on Facebook and was like 'is this you' and sent me a photograph of a guy holding a photograph of me and him. And they said 'we just wanted to show you that he has this on his wall. And that's the difference we make. They're in our hearts, but we're in theirs. And that's it. There are no words and that's the truth. It's so profound”
P2 L.69-74	“I didn't think about that these are people and then you can build relationships with these people. You don't just go in with like, a mission pack. Like 'here your food' and then you go. You actually speak to them and find out about their lives. And you connect with them on a deeper level”

Appendix L: Evidence for Themes in Data from Leaders

Personal stance – Valuable experiences for teenagers	
PA L.32-33	“I’ve always tried to get as many youth as possible to come out”
PA L.35-37	“I think it’s great taking young people out because it really starts them off on their journey”
PA L.83-84	“I wanted to get a group out and I felt like the young people could really benefit from it”
PA L.207-208	“I think it does make a difference to them and it will impact them somehow”
PA L.297	“I think it affects everybody”
PB L.26	“it was a really enlightening trip for them”
PB L.164	“was very touching for them”
PB L.375-376	“I think they all grew in their own ways”
PC L.263	“it was a growing thing for them”
PC L.334	“grew in confidence”
PC L.346-349	“it was the confidence aspect, that they sort of knew who they were in the world, they knew a little bit more and of course it looked fabulous on all their university applications that they could say that they’ve done this”
QB L.24	“gave our teens a great sense of respect for the work”
Personal stance – Personally recommend	
PA L.364	“PC: Go. It’s a life-changer. (PA nods) PB: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I’d say the same. (PA nods) PA: Yeah.”
PB L.362	“PC: Go. It’s a life-changer. (PA nods) PB: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I’d say the same.
PC L.360	“Go. It’s a life-changer”
Personal stance – Church engagement in world mission	
PA L.79-80	“I went out on a mission trip myself when somebody from our church had already been out there”
PA L.88-89	“somebody from the church went out”

PA L.91-93	“there wasn’t a lot of mission work going on, but since then we do now support a lot of mission work. And it is every week it is discussed and promoted really”
PB L.7-9	“we now also develop and have a programme called XXX that trains people and gets them ready to go and be disciple makers basically in all parts of the world”
PB L.13-14	“being missionaries ourselves...”
PB L.97-99	Opposing viewpoint – “what we saw in the churches around us, not very many of them really did much with missions other than more <i>local</i> missions”
PC L.107	“it was a very outward looking church”
PC L.110	“the young people were very clued up”
PC L.122	“the church totally backed them”
PC L.125	“It was all supported by the church”
PC L.126	Opposing viewpoint – “I wouldn’t say that it was necessarily a missional culture”
Impact on group – Positive experience for whole group	
PA L.207-208	“I think it does make a difference to them and it will impact them somehow”
PA L.297	“I think it affects everybody”
PB L.136-138	“when you do it someplace other than your home, you tend to be more open to getting involved and maybe not afraid of what others, especially as teens, if others know you, what they think”
PC L.366	“A life-changing experience for everyone”
QB L.24-25	“The staff were so kind and patient with our group too”
QE L.52	“a really memorable experience”
Impact on group – Positively influence group relationships	
PA L.329-331	“I think it’s built closer relationships as well. Closer friendships with the teams that came out... the girls particularly have tended to stay together and have formed their own friendship group from trips”
PB L.21-22	“the whole group everybody, raised funds”
PB L.370-375	Opposing viewpoint – “theirs had a special bond together, I don’t know if ours did or not. I mean they kind of did, but I wouldn’t say it was on...”

	they didn't form like... they were still all very separate people. There were some groups within that had been like best friends, but actually, there was even a falling out of one of the girls afterwards over something"
PC L.237-238	"It was a very bonding time because like I said, I'm still in touch with them"
PC L.245	"they've been to each other's weddings and things"
PC L.247-249	"they got a closeness I don't think will ever go, and that was partly because of Smiles and just the shared experience"
PC L.282	"deep and meaningful chats"
QA L.6	The group most enjoyed "working together as part of a team"
QC L.29	The group most enjoyed "team bonding and experiencing new things together"
Impact on group – Empowered group to make a difference	
PA L.201-202	"Some of them will go back... Some have been back numerous times"
PA L.306-308	"she went on and came out with me on my week trips when I was doing them. And then later, when she got to 18, she went out and did six months out there"
PC L.210-211	"one of mine went on to do long-term mission work, one of mine went on to do two-years mission work as a teacher over in Vietnam"
PC L.336-337	"they all got very very involved from then on in... in any outreach that was going on in the church"
PC L.339-342	"they became really really entrenched in the church, in the gospel. But also being demonstrative about the gospel, not just keeping it as a secret behind the walls. They were out there running Christian Unions in high school and stuff like that"
QE L.45-46	The group most enjoyed "meeting and interacting with families and children in their homes and schools, and being able to share God's love with them"
Impact on group – Encouraged deeper questions about faith	
PC L.282	"we had a couple of deep and meaningful chats"
PC L.333	"my group became quite reflective and learnt to ask questions"
PC L.351-352	"it just made them very much more thoughtful"

Impact on group – Stimulated interest in social justice issues	
PC L.167	“ours were opened to a lot of socio-economic issues”
Additional themes – Impact on vocation	
PA L.33-35	“a couple of them have gone on and went to serve with YWAM. And since then, one has become a missionary herself as well”
PA L.293-295	“a couple of mine have gone on to go out on other mission trips as well with different places like YWAM and one has come a pastor in South Africa as well”
PA L.306-308	“she went on and came out with me on my week trips when I was doing them. And then later, when she got to 18, she went out and did six months out there”
PC L.210-211	“one of mine went on to do long-term mission work, one of mine went on to do two years mission work as a teacher over in Vietnam”
Additional themes – Deepening of faith	
PA L.36-37	“it really starts them off on their journey”
PA L.145	“become more open-minded”
PA L.296	“their love for God has grown as well”
PB L.104	“to see what God is doing in other parts of the world”
PB L.139	“be more open to hearing God and being involved with the work”
PC L.239-240	“they are all still Christians”
PC L.262-263	“it was a growing thing for me, and it was a growing thing for them”
PC L.339-340	“they became really really entrenched in the church, in the gospel”
PC L.343	“it really cemented that faith for them”
PC L.375-376	“I think they all grew in their own ways”
QB L.13	The group most enjoyed: “experiencing several different ways to serve people”
Additional themes – Exposure to difference	
PA L.45-46	“I wanted her to see what else was out there”
PA L.141-145	“I think going abroad takes you more out of your comfort zone”
PB L.14	“we were keen to educate some of the teens”
PB L.49-50	“We wanted to take our teens out of their comfort zone and let them see a world outside of what they were experiencing in their own little world”

PB L.102-104	“we could help teens to see different ways that you could serve, whether it be something closer at home or going further abroad”
PB L.136	“do it someplace other than your home”
PB L.320-321	“it helped them to see outside of their world and see the needs of others”
PC L.171-174	“It reminded us how very first world we are in this country”
QB L.13-14	The group most enjoyed: “experiencing several different was to serve people with varying levels of needs in a cross cultural environment”
QB L.16-17	The group found most challenging: “being faced with the level and greatness of the needs of people beyond anything they had ever experienced”
QC L.29	“experiencing new things together”
Additional themes – Revelation	
PA L.157	“So that really opened their eyes”
PA L.195-197	“they were upset that people could live in the way that they were living and they didn’t realise that it existed”
PB L.26	“it was a really enlightening trip for them”
PC L.167-168	“ours were opened to a lot of socio-economic issues”
QB L.20	“Seeing the environment and state of the housing of the people the Smiles Foundation helps was an eye opener”
Additional themes – Life-changing experience	
PA L.44	“it changed my perspective on everything”
PA L.82	“it just made such a difference to me”
PA L.198-203	Opposing viewpoint – “So the impact on their lives, it was while we were there, most definitely affected them, but like XXX said, I think once we came home some of them have drifted... Some of them will go back... Some have been back numerous times and for others it was a one-off experience and they’ve come back, gone off to college or uni, and forgotten”
PA L.297-299	“I think it affects everybody. I don’t think you can go on a Smiles mission trip and not be affected personally”
PA L.302	“I think it affects everybody”

PA L.311-313	“it’s definitely changed her views of the way she lives her life really. And to quite a great extent. So I do think it affects everybody and it wil always come out at some point in their life”
PA L.364	“PC: Go. It’s a life-changer. (PA nods) PB: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I’d say the same. (PA nods) PA: Yeah.”
PB L.362	“PC: Go. It’s a life-changer. (PA nods) PB: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, I’d say the same”
PB L.183-184	Opposing viewpoint – “I think with our teams it changed the way they thought for the moment, but I’m not sure how long it lasted unfortunately with some of them”
PC L.360	“Go. It’s a life changer”
PC L.366	“A life-changing experience for everyone”
Additional themes – Gratitude	
PA L.44-45	“it just made me think about what I have”
PA L.150-156	“I just wanted them to understand that you don’t have to have everything. And just by having something little, you can still be happy. It’s not all about material things. I think that was my biggest thing. We’re quite an affluent area XXX and the young people are expecting things quite a lot. And I think they were totally surprised when they found the Gypsy children, just by having a balloon or something, they didn’t have a lot, but they were happy”
PC L.261	“you have nothing to complain about”

Appendix M: Short-Term Missions with *The Smiles*

Foundation – a guide to leading effectively

Overview

This is a guide aimed at UK-based church or youth leaders taking groups on short-term mission with The Smiles Foundation (UK Charity Number 1087961) in Romania.

A guide to pre-trip preparation

Once a group of people have committed to a short-term mission trip and practicalities have been discussed, the following outline provides suggested sessions for effective pre-trip preparation.

Session 1 - Why Mission?

This session allows individuals to consider their own motivation for involvement in a short-term mission. It also uses key Bible passages to explore the biblical heart of missions, including discussion around the missionary heart of God, The Great Commission, and the example of the early Christian church.

Session 2 - Fundraising

This session addresses the financial aspects of the trip. As well as sharing ideas, setting aims, making plans and communicating expectations for both individuals and the group, this session will also encourage conversation around how the short-term trip can be embedded within a longer-term plan of support.

Session 3 - Effective Engagement

This session examines some of the criticism levelled at short-term missions and draws on examples from the Apostle Paul to establish valuable principles for effective short-term mission

engagement. With input from a Smiles ambassador or someone who has experience of a short-term mission with The Smiles Foundation, the group will consider how these principles might be outworked in their mission trip.

Session 4 - Language and Culture

This session helps the group grow in understanding of Romanian culture, enabling participants to consider how they can demonstrate cultural sensitivity when overseas. It also provides an introduction to the Romanian language.

Session 5 - What on earth am I doing?

This session is a more relaxed session that seeks to give participants space to share their thoughts, feelings and/or concerns ahead of the trip. There will be space for questions as well as time for prayer. The session will also include suggestions for processing difficult things, thus equipping the group for the journey ahead and ensuring all participants (particularly young people) know who they can talk to if needed.

Prayer and Commissioning

Before the group leave, do also consider some form of prayer and commissioning for those going. Involve the wider congregation and let them know what they can be praying for whilst the group is away.

A guide to post-trip reflection

On returning home, your group will want to consider how they share the experience with friends, family, the wider congregation and other supporters. However, this is not the end of the mission trip experience. As a leader, it is important to consider how you can facilitate the group in post-trip reflection. This may involve additional sessions such as those outlined below.

Session 6 – Post-trip Reflection

This session should be an open time for sharing about the mission experience. It will include times of laughter reflecting on some of the joys of the trip, as well as times of honesty thinking about some of the challenges of the trip or questions that the trip raised. It will include reflection on how the trip has impacted both the group as a whole and individual participants, what has been learnt, and how it might affect how we live as Christians in our current context.

Session 7 - What Next?

This session will return to some of the ideas shared in session two around how the trip can be embedded within a plan for longer-term support. It might involve practically organising a follow-up fundraising event to support the work of the charity, or consideration for how the church can partner with the charity (in prayer/finance/people power) in the coming years.