

Youth worker aims to make a difference

SHE felt called to help this generation of teenagers cope with the pressures of modern life – and now she'll have the chance to do so.

Kathy Bacon has been appointed as the new pioneer youth worker, based at Park Community School in Leigh Park and working in partnership with local churches. The innovative project aims to offer chaplaincy and mentoring support to students, as well as a chance to consider spiritual issues.

She'll work with students who already have a Christian faith at the school and will aim to create an after-school worshipping community.

Kathy already volunteers with the ecumenical High Tide youth services, which meet once a month across this area, and as a School Pastor, in Miltoncross School in Portsmouth once a week.

She is chair of governors at St Jude's CofE Primary School in Old Portsmouth, and her current paid role is as part-time PA to the vicar of St Jude's, Southsea. Kathy hopes to start her new role in December.

"I've volunteered in youth work since I was a teenager, and that is my passion," she said. "My sense of calling to work in a secondary school began more than three years ago, at a High Tide youth service, when I felt deeply moved about the needs and aspirations of this generation of teenagers, and felt the Holy Spirit was nudging me to be a part of meeting those needs."

"It was a first step of faith to join



Kathy Bacon with (left) Chris Anders, headteacher of Park Community School and the Rev Jonathan Jeffery, vicar of Leigh Park and Warren Park

School Pastors at Miltoncross and helped me to test out my calling. As time went on, I felt increasingly called to go beyond just volunteering, even though that is really valuable in itself. Then this role came up, and the job description seemed to describe exactly what was in my heart to try to do.

"Teenagers of this generation are constantly being told that they can do anything. But the weight of such freedom and opportunity can actually be crushing. The contrast between being told what you can do and how to actually put that into practice is often huge. And they are constantly being tested and examined by our education system.

"Added to that are the unrealistic pressures of social media to be high achieving, or sporty, or to have the perfect skin or perfect figure. Body-shaming is something that now affects both boys and girls.

"The Christian understanding is that we all have a purpose and a value in this world, regardless of how much we have achieved or how much we have impressed anyone. This gives you a much more secure foundation to build your life on. Regardless of whether or not a young person shares my faith, I want to look them in the eye, see them as a valuable and precious individual in themselves, and communicate this to them.

"I am excited that this role will allow me to be an integral part of the school community, available to staff and students, in a school that is genuinely interested in the whole person – emotional, social and spiritual, as well as academic."

Strategic funding from the national Church of England is funding this post for the first five years. Read more on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/leighparkyouth