

# Summer trip inspired me to be a disciple

She was already a churchgoer, but **Alicia Lea** only committed herself totally to the Christian faith on a summer holiday

SHE has been coming to church all her life – but things only really clicked into place when she went away last summer.

Alicia Lea, who is 15, has been a regular at the youth group run by Church of the Good Shepherd in Crookhorn, for years.

She joined dozens of other teenagers from churches across Portsmouth, Havant, Fareham and Gosport for a four-day residential in Surrey last August. The High Tide holiday included baking, craft, games, lasertag, a water slide and a silent disco – as well as worship, prayer and Christian teaching.

And one session in particular stood out for her. After a talk in which leader Jenni Whymark spoke about friendship, Alicia was prayed for and experienced God's Holy Spirit. From that moment, she's been committed to her Christian faith.

"The talk was about friendship and her experience, which she related to the Bible," said Alicia. "It was a sensitive area, as I've struggled with friendship with the right people. I was trying to keep in my tears. I went outside with three of my friends and they prayed for me. I could feel the Holy Spirit, and I realised how deep it all is. I realised how important it was to place your trust in God. So I decided I would take this seriously from now on."

Alicia's parents were part of the Church of the Good Shepherd,



**Above: Alicia Lea at Church of the Good Shepherd; right: water games on the High Tide summer residential**

and she's grown up going there. She's tried other churches, but kept coming back to their Sunday services, and The Zone, which gathers together teenagers on a Friday night for food, games, worship and teaching.

She was also a regular at the monthly High Tide youth services, which launched in 2018. They bring together church youth groups from all denominations, so between 50 and 100 young people aged 11 to 18 can enjoy games, worship, prayer and food together. It's hosted by a different church each time, allowing the young people to develop bonds between churches and deepen their discipleship.

"I'd grown up believing in God, but not really doing anything about it," she said. "When the lockdown happened, I had some real doubts over a couple of months, although I kept coming to The Zone and High Tide."

She was one of 50 young people who went on the first High Tide residential on the Isle of Wight, over a weekend in April 2022. They enjoyed paintballing, swimming, bushcraft and making tie-dye t-shirts at the Westbrook Centre near Ryde. There were also sessions of worship, prayer and teaching.

"The first High Tide residential really



## Privilege to help lead holiday club

WHEN Alicia Lea first came to holiday club aged four, she never imagined that 11 years later she'd be helping to lead it.

But the 15-year-old was one of two presenters who introduced the games, songs, drama and stories at the four-day holiday club hosted by Church of the Good Shepherd.

Children aged four to 11 have flocked to the annual February half-term get-together there for more than 20 years. This year's was the first full-length holiday club since before the pandemic, after a series of digital and then one-day versions.

"All I can remember of being here in Year R is that I had the time of my life," she said. "I was quite shy to start with but

by the end of the week, I'd be engaging with the activities. I've been here every year since. When I was in the youngest groups, I couldn't wait to be in the older groups, and then I wanted to be one of the group leaders.

"I was a bit nervous when I was asked to be upfront, but it's great to be able to fill in the gaps and hold everything together. It feels like I've got more confident as the week has gone on."

The theme of this year's holiday club was 'The Great Transformer', with Bible stories examining how Jesus transformed the lives of people he met. Crafts, drama sketches and games were based on similar themes, with the chance



Alicia at the holiday club at Church of the Good Shepherd

to design butterflies in paper and clay, and play games based around transformations. The drama serial was based around the transformation of a rubbish tip.

The holiday club ran from Tuesday afternoon to Friday afternoon, with a special family session on Friday evening. The fun then continued with a holiday club service at the church on Sunday morning. Courtney Harris, 25, first

came to the holiday club 20 years ago as a child herself. Now she's bringing four of her cousins along.

"It's good to have something local that doesn't cost much," she said.

The vicar, the Rev Janette Smith, said: "Almost all the children who come are from families who don't come to church, so it's great that we can reach out to the community in this way."

Shop, Hunted, Million Pound Drop and Taskmaster. The talks were also based on the idea of Jesus being a 'gamechanger'.

It was organised by the youth leaders who run High Tide, in collaboration with Scripture Union. And it was the talk by Scripture Union development worker Jenni Whymark that was the catalyst for Alicia's renewed commitment.

"I heard how God valued me and had restored me, and that had an emotional impact," she said. "It really changed me."

Alicia was one of the High Tide teenagers who then signed up to the Jeremiah Project, which is aimed at 15 to 18-year-olds who want to go deeper in their faith and have an impact on their local church, school or community.

They meet every half-term for discipleship sessions and to learn practical skills to help them to serve others. Among other things, those young people have recorded Bible reflections to share via the High Tide

Instagram account.

"It's great to be part of this smaller group that is thinking about what it says in the Bible and how to apply it to our lives practically," she said. "And one of the things it's inspired me to do is to invite friends to come to High Tide."

High Tide leaders are organising a second summer holiday this year at Luckley House near Wokingham. There are places for 50 young people on each of the two weeks on offer – August 12-16 and August 16-20. Alicia will be there.

"If people are thinking of coming, I'd tell them it's great fun and a way of receiving God's love," she said. "Meeting with God with other young people is one of my favourite things. Talking to God can give you the freedom you need, because it opens up your heart and gives you confidence and love."

For more about High Tide, or to book places on its summer holiday, see: [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/hightide](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/hightide).