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Spring 2021



**Re-Emerging  
Stronger  
from COVID-19**



# Learning and Leading beyond COVID-19

## Letter from the Editor

Dear ministry friends,

Well, we made it! The year 2020 is now in the rearview mirror, and hopes for emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic are high. My personal hope is that the articles in this little magazine provide some help and encouragement as you reflect on your work with children in 2021 and beyond. Crossroads Kids Club partners with local churches to reach children and families with the gospel, and we want to add value to your ministry.

As we begin to turn the corner on COVID-19, I think it is important that we pause to reflect on a few of the lessons we've learned. Some of the things we tried failed miserably, and others are worth keeping as we move forward.

I have learned a lot during this past year, which marked my thirtieth year working with children—first in the educational arena and then in ministry. It was also the first year since 1999 that Crossroads was not able to meet with children inside of public schools. Reaching children in the public schools is part of our mission statement. So when the schools shut down last year, we faced something of an existential crisis. The following are lessons I've learned:

In times of crisis, values and principles may serve us better than our mission statements do.

Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, we discovered quickly that achieving our mission of reaching children inside of public schools would not be possible for a season. We also realized that the children were still out there and that their social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs were increasing. In other words, the need for hope was greater than ever, but our usual method of bringing that hope was no longer possible.

So we went back to the drawing board and created the Crossroads Crew Club, a whole new ministry model for reaching children with the love and Word of Jesus. As we worked to build this new approach, we leaned into our values:

We value **relationships**, so it would not be primarily an online approach.

We value **evangelism**, so it would need to lift up Jesus and the Good News.

We value **service**, so it needed to be easy for our church partners and to add value to children and families.

We value **consistency**, so it couldn't be an event. It needed to be ongoing and sustainable.

We value **diversity**, so it also needed to work in the inner city and the suburbs and rural areas as well as in our international locations.

These values formed a kind of guardrail around our planning. Each time we considered an option, someone on the team would ask something like, “How does this add value?” (Service); or, “What if we can connect only through Zoom?” (Relationships). The exercise of planning something new was both painful and helpful. Crisis clarifies.

Besides values, we found it important to create a set of operating principles to guide us. Our values were like a compass, and these principles became something of a road map. Some of our principles included the following:

**Something is better than nothing.** Yes, you may have had sixty kids in a gym at the local school last year, and now you have six kids in a park—and it’s raining! But something is better than nothing. God has those six kids there for a reason.

**Shorter is better than longer.** We divided the year into six-week increments. This allowed volunteers to commit for just six weeks at a time. In August, it was a daunting proposition to consider serving for an entire school year! But can you serve for six weeks in a park with masks and

social distancing? Framing things this way allowed more people to participate.

**Together is better than apart.** We formed regional cohort groups of team leaders for co-planning (and, let’s be honest, co-miserating!) and prayer. In seasons of challenge, standing together with others strengthens each person.

We believe that 2021 will be a new kind of a year, and we hope to get back to mobilizing churches like yours to reach kids in public schools. And while I certainly don’t want to go through another season like this last one, we have learned a great deal about ourselves and about how to navigate the challenges in times of crisis.

What have you learned about yourself, your ministry or children through the COVID-19 crisis? I’d love to hear from you. You can reach me at [matt@crossroadskidsclub.com](mailto:matt@crossroadskidsclub.com).



Your partner in ministry,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Armstrong".

Matt Armstrong, CEO





# Our Mission

The mission of Crossroads Kids Club is to mobilize God's people to share the Good News in public schools through church-led clubs.



# Our Vision

Our vision is to bring the hope of Jesus to children and families and to connect them to the life of a local church.

# Our Core Values

We have five core values expressed as an organization and at each club.



## Relationships

Focusing on people over process or program



## Evangelism

Sharing the Good News



## Service

Adding value to churches, schools and families



## Consistency

Keeping our commitments to others



## Diversity

Building teams with diverse backgrounds, skills and experiences



# Point Kids to Jesus, Not to a Building



By Dan Lovaglia

*Dan is the author of Relational Children's Ministry: Turning Kid-Influencers into Lifelong Disciple Makers. He partners with churches nationwide as a staffing and coaching associate with SlingshotGroup.org and serves dads and their kids as the camp pastor at CampParadise.org, a ministry of Willow Creek Community Church in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.*

"What do you do all day now that nothing's happening in children's ministry?" Believe it or not, I actually heard a senior pastor say this to the children's pastor at his church.

Until COVID-19 came along, my friend's children's ministry was running on all cylinders. Lay leaders were stepping up to serve weekly; kids and families couldn't wait for Sunday morning. The church leadership loved seeing spiritual and numerical growth. But then, almost overnight, the onset of a global pandemic resulted in stay-at-home orders. And this church, which had always preached, "The church isn't the building; it's the people," frantically scrambled to decentralize meaningful ministry.

Oddly enough, the senior pastor's pointed question didn't rattle the children's pastor's cage. She knew that her team had gone above and beyond from day one, even more than usual starting in March 2020, to point kids to Jesus on their own turf, not just on the church's property. Month after month they've gotten creative about providing at-home Bible activities for families, helping kids and leaders meet up

at parks and ice cream parlors, getting together on Zoom for games and tutoring, and finding other unconventional approaches to meet children wherever they are.

As we dream about the future of children's ministry, it's important to remember who told us how important it truly is: Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14, NLT).

It's familiar and comfortable to hold programs in designated ministry spaces, particularly at church facilities, but that's not what Christ modeled.

He reached people on the road, always making disciples of them along the way, as he was going about his Father's business.

Who would have thought that the absence of building-based ministry could become a barrier to genuine gospel-centered ministry with people? Jesus was serious about not hindering kids from being pointed to him. Building or not, this is our high calling.

If you're ready to reach kids anytime and anywhere, like my children's pastor friend, I challenge you to live out the following five words:

- **GO** — Figure out where kids and families hang out in your community, and get to know them in their world, not yours.
- **INVITE** — Remember, your number one goal is to introduce kids to Jesus, not to a building.
- **WELCOME** — Be ready to love children—and Mom and Dad—unconditionally in the way of Jesus, no matter how messy their home life is.
- **GUIDE** — Personally commit to walking with Christ daily so you can influence kids in this direction with integrity.
- **LEAD** — Grow as a kid-influencer, and multiply others to do the same.

More than being in a building, relational ministry is life-on-life. It's the heart of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 2:8: "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (NIV). The church hasn't done this perfectly during the pandemic, but it's making a lot of progress. Keep it up, kid-influencers!





# Everything Is Changing



By Esther Moreno

*Esther is the founder of Child's Heart Ministries, which is dedicated to training church leaders and children's ministry workers on best practices when it comes to maintaining a healthy children's ministry department. Esther is a gifted speaker, teacher and author. She holds a master's degree from Ashland Theological Seminary, with a concentration in Christian Education.*

Everything is changing. That fact was the catalyst for my book, *Children's Ministry Wake-Up Call*. For those of us who are passionate about reaching the next generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is absolutely critical that we understand not only where children's ministry is right now but also where it needs to go. The time for action is now. Church attendance is dropping precipitously. The suicide rate among youth is rising. Cyberbullying, sex trafficking, school shootings and online predators are far too prevalent to be ignored. All manner of unsound doctrine and New Age philosophies are enchanting the hearts and minds

of our children. Their access to unprecedented amounts of information is only a click away, and their views of authority, morality and God are under attack. In short, we are in a war for the hearts and minds of the next generation. Yet despite all these warning signs, children's ministry leaders are finding it difficult to move beyond the standard approaches, which are ill suited to address the needs of this generation.

If the church wants to be here tomorrow, then we are going to have to develop a new approach that is adept and

prepared to reach this generation as it never has before. Our success will hinge on our ability to shift our methods as needed. Our inability to communicate with these digital natives in their language can result in dire consequences. It's going to require that we leverage the best technology because that's the world that they live in. We must resist the temptation to wing it and instead commit to creative teaching methods designed to reach every child.

The key to unlocking their hearts to the gospel of hope is that our care for children outweighs our need to be right. We need to take the time to study the subjects that are affecting our children. The future of children's ministry requires that we address the taboo topics of the day head-on instead of tiptoeing around uncomfortable issues. It is going to necessitate a reevaluation of our methods while preserving our principles. The time is now. We have to become serious about how we do children's ministry.

In short, we have to move beyond the "Children's Ministry 1.0" status quo and position ourselves to become the church of tomorrow—a church that considers the shifting demographics in the communities we are called to serve. It means that leaders do the difficult work of understanding the schemes and temptations that stalk the children of this generation.

We can no longer ignore this transformative digital age but must effectively harness it for God's glory. May we never grow weary of the great work God has entrusted us to do, even through a pandemic.

God has chosen you! He has gifted you with exactly what you need to be successful right where you are. He has brought you to a place for such a time and has prepared good works that only you can accomplish.



# Five Ways Your Church Can Serve a Local School

1



Get to know the faculty and staff. Learn their needs and the things they like. Then find ways for your church to bless them throughout the school year. Some simple ideas include dropping off bagels or doughnuts, writing notes of appreciation to each person or buying classroom supplies for teachers that need them.

2



Hold a backpack drive for students in need at the beginning of the year. Coordinate with the school to find out how many students need assistance, and provide a backpack full of the required materials for the beginning of the year for each one.

3



Many schools have trouble finding volunteers for school-wide events. Many times parents from the school have to volunteer for events and miss out on experiencing the events with their children. Assemble a list of volunteers willing to serve, and let the school know you are available to help when needed.

4



Volunteer to tutor or mentor students. Coordinate with the school to provide help daily, weekly or on an as-needed basis for students who are struggling academically. Then seek to build relationships with the teachers and parents of the students you serve.

5

**Start a Crossroads Kids Club! You can share the gospel with kids right in their school building!**

*Turn to page 18 to learn how easy it is to start!*

# Did you know?

There are three churches for every one school.



90% of American kids are in public schools.



63% of Christians accept Christ between the ages of 4 and 14.



**Crossroads Kids Club helps churches share the gospel in public schools.**

Thanks to the support of generous individual donors, Crossroads offers our program **FREE** of charge to churches and families.





# COVID-19's Impact on the Next Generation



By Dale Hudson

*Dale is the founder and director of Building Children's Ministry. BCM helps ministries build strong leaders and teams. You can connect with Dale at [www.buildingchildrensministry.com](http://www.buildingchildrensministry.com).*

COVID-19. Who would have dreamed we would see a virus cause this much hurt in the world? It's been a complicated time not only for adults but also for kids and students. I believe we will look back at this time in history and see that COVID-19 was a major shaping force for the next generation. It may well be a defining experience for today's kids.

Think about the many ways the virus has affected the next generation.

Today's kids have spent extended time at home quarantined from their friends and in some cases even family members. The doors of churches they attended have been closed from time to time. Face masks and hand sanitizer have become top priorities. Kids'

schedules have been rearranged, their sports games postponed or canceled and their school lessons switched to online learning from home.

But in spite of the ravages of COVID-19, some positive changes have occurred.

Romans 8:38 says that God can take tragedy and bring forth something good from it. And that's been the case with COVID-19.

Here are a few examples.

seen parents lose their jobs and are concerned about the potential lack of finances. Help them see that God is in control and that they can trust him to meet their families' needs. Support your children. Pray for them.

Offer them encouragement.

One in three parents say they have gotten closer to their children during times of shutdown. This generation of kids is developing deeper relationships with their parents—many of whom are now working from home and have been able to spend more time with their children. In the toy industry, sales of games and puzzles are up 228 percent, and building-set sales are up 76 percent! Board games have doubled in popularity among kids ages 5 to 18 in the last few months. Family game nights seem to be making a comeback.

Kids are learning not to take their family and friends for granted. Many of them have lost people they love to the virus—grandparents, teachers, uncles, coaches and even parents in some cases. Thirty-five percent of kids say they are worried about their friendships as well.

In these uncertain times, you can make a significant impact on the lives of kids and families. What a great time to show them the hope found in Christ. In spite of all the technology today's kids have to connect with others online, they are longing for genuine relationships with caring adults who will walk through these days with them.

"The most important thing for children is to have caring adults that they are engaged with." Sherrie Westin, President of Social Impact for Sesame Street

What a great opportunity you have to be the hands and feet of Jesus for the next generation. Now is the time to ask God for wisdom, to lead by example and show kids how to trust God. Now is the time to reach and disciple children so they, in return, may know the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.





# Engaging and Serving Families



By Melissa J. MacDonald

*Passionate about Jesus, the church and kids, Melissa travels extensively speaking, training, coaching and consulting. She's the author of Missing: An Urgent Call for the Church to Rescue Kids. She's been to more than 30 countries and seeks out the best ethnic food in every city she visits. She and her husband live in Iowa. Find out more at [www.melissajmacdonald.com](http://www.melissajmacdonald.com).*

From health choices to schooling, these are tough times for parents and caregivers. They're struggling to navigate rough waters, and most would say they feel as if they're drowning. What a perfect time for the church to come alongside parents and encourage them!

I've been working with children full-time since 2003, and through the years I've done my share of trying to work around parents, to appease parents and to reach kids without considering their parents.

But honestly, when I stopped trying to take parents out of the equation and started engaging with them, the Kingdom impact shifted drastically.

While this might seem to be an especially challenging time to engage parents, I believe it is also the most important time to begin.

Here are some practical ways to engage parents in both your church and your community.

## Ask Them

Too often we assume we already know what parents need instead of simply asking them what would be helpful. Wondering if a children's class during second service would be helpful? Ask your parents. Thinking about whether or not to do an online kids' moment? Poll the parents. You will save a lot of time and energy if you ask parents how you can best serve them rather than just doing things and hoping they work.



## Encourage Them

Never underestimate the power of encouragement, especially when everything seems hard. I have said many of the same things to parents over and over again in different ways.

"You can do this."

"You're doing a great job!"

"Your kids are going to make it."

"You're not alone."

"We're here for you."

"Thank you for being an awesome mama!"

Taking time to notice and encourage parents when you have no ulterior motive can make a huge impact.

## Provide Resources

I have found, especially in 2020 and 2021, that most parents do not need something else to do, but they could use some help with what they're already doing.

- Provide a Spotify playlist of great children's music for them to play around their house.
- Host a webinar for them to watch live (or recorded, so they can do it at a time that works best for them) on understanding their kids and how to help them learn or on another topic that may be helpful.
- List some helpful parenting podcasts for them to listen to.

- Put together "grab and go" family night kits to help make their weekends more meaningful.

Look for creative ways to resource parents in ways that are useful and easy for them to engage with.

## Create Space for Them

Families should not be an afterthought when considering your church services and ministries; they should be the first thought.

- Is there a welcoming and comfortable place for families to sit together?
- Do you inadvertently use words only adults would know and understand?
- When a child is loud during a service, do you act annoyed or frustrated?

Families will not engage where they don't feel seen or wanted.

While this season of unknowns has been challenging, it may be the greatest opportunity for the church to serve families. Be sure you aren't missing the doors that God is opening for your church.

# PERSPECTIVES

## on the Future of School-Based Ministry

By Crossroads Staff

### Background

Since a landmark United States Supreme Court decision in 2001, faith-based nonprofits, such as local churches, have had access to public school buildings on the same terms as similarly-situated secular groups.<sup>1</sup> This has allowed Crossroads Kids Club to create a Christian character-formation club that local churches around the nation lead inside public elementary and middle schools immediately following the school day. This access to school buildings and students has presented a unique missional opportunity for churches desiring to impact their local community with the gospel.

### The 2020 Shutdown

In March 2020, nearly all schools across the nation closed for in-person learning, and they remained closed through the end of the school year. At that time, Crossroads clubs inside

schools either paused or moved to a virtual format. Very quickly, research showed that children were experiencing hunger,<sup>2</sup> witnessing more domestic violence<sup>3</sup> and living in situations that were generally stressful as parents struggled with anxiety, addiction and depression.<sup>4</sup>

Seeing that the needs were as great as ever and that schools might not open in the fall, Crossroads created a new approach for reaching children: The Crossroads Crew Club. This new model was explained to existing club leaders as well as leaders from new clubs, and it has been used successfully both to start new ministry as well as to continue existing clubs. A Crew Club is small and flexible and can meet in a park, backyard, garage or online.

<sup>1</sup> *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, 533 U. S. 98 (2001).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200818/radiology-study-suggests-horrifying-rise-in-domestic-violence-during-pandemic#1>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>.

## The Current School Year

As the school year 2020–2021 began, nearly half (49 percent) of 907 school districts surveyed used remote learning only, and another 27 percent used hybrid instruction.<sup>5</sup> Even in schools that opened, community groups were generally barred from entering because of cross-contamination concerns. Things are far from normal this year. Crossroads Crew Clubs have been able to meet in person with social distancing, and Crossroads has also partnered with churches that created e-learning centers to meet students' needs.

## 2021 and Beyond

Looking to the school year ahead (2021–2022), Crossroads believes that a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine will be widely available between June and September 2021.<sup>6</sup> We believe that the vast majority of schools will fully reopen at some point during the 2021–2022 school year. This could be a full reopening at the beginning of the year, or it could be later in the year (after Christmas 2021, for example). We remain optimistic that we may see a return to normalcy by August 2021, but we know that it depends on a number of factors and that normalcy may not come until later in the school year.

Whenever students do return to school for in-person learning, we believe their social and emotional needs will have grown and will be obvious to educational leaders. Being at home for many months without a strong network of community support will have taken a toll on children's mental health.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/school-districts-reopening-plans-a-snapshot.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/oct/07/covid-vaccine-tracker-when-will-a-coronavirus-vaccine-be-ready>.

Therefore, we believe schools will welcome Crossroads Kids Club and other groups that provide social and emotional support to kids soon after reopening.

## Starting New Ministry in 2021

Crossroads plans to expand our regular in-person equipping retreat in August 2021. This will be the only opportunity for churches wishing to launch a school-based ministry in the 2021–2022 school year to receive the training and support they need. In addition to a thorough explanation of the Kids Club model, we are adding content about how to launch and lead a Crew Club. The result is that leaders will be equipped both to start and lead a school-based Kids Club, and they will know how to launch a Crew Club in the neighborhood in case the schools in their community do not open for the fall semester.

In 2019, Crossroads saw a 92 percent success rate of helping churches gain access to schools to start new clubs, and we believe this is indicative of future success. In 2020, only six churches chose to attend the retreat and attempt to launch a new ministry. Four of those (67 percent) were able to reach kids even in the midst of the pandemic. Therefore, we are confident that regardless of the public health situation in school year 2021–2022, we can help your church to impact the next generation.



# FREE for your church!



## Three Steps to Start a Kids Club

1

### Apply

Applying to start a new club takes fewer than 30 minutes.  
Applications are accepted until June 30.

2

### Attend

Send up to two people to Crossroads free equipping retreat  
in August.

3

### Activate

Launch your club! It's easy, and step-by-step instructions  
will be provided at the retreat.



**"We teamed up with Crossroads because it was in our hearts to get into the schools. Crossroads provides us the perfect opportunity to bring a gospel impact into our community. And one of the great benefits for us is that a whole family has been added to our church as a result."**

Kevin Olson | New Life Assembly | Milwaukee, Wis.

**"Crossroads training is energizing and so helpful. They include both the head and the heart of the ministry. They are thorough in the details of the process of starting a club and providing loving support and a wide variety of examples that they have gone through before in obstacles and successes. Not only that but their focus on the Gospel is central, and pointing back to Jesus throughout the process provided the foundation of all they do."**

JoAnna Jones | First Free Church | Colorado Springs, Col.

**"Crossroads Kids Club's curriculum is very user friendly. It has a nice variety of teaching ideas and methods. Anyone can download it and share the gospel truth with boys and girls. The simple games and activities provided allow each child to share their thoughts! It is very interactive, and the emphasis is on building relationships by listening to the children's perspectives."**

Jackie Pegram | Reynolda Church | Winston-Salem, N.C.

**[www.crossroadskidsclub.com/connect](http://www.crossroadskidsclub.com/connect)**  
for more information or to schedule your free consultation

# Crossroads Kids Club

*Sharing the Good News of Jesus with children since 1998*

**Learn more and view this brochure online at**

[crossroadskidsclub.com/connect](http://crossroadskidsclub.com/connect)



**I would love to talk with you!**

**Kim Kline, Director of Ministry Development**

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