

## An Article for Crosskeys-Christmas 2011 Edition

### “EXPLORE” – an educational charity with a Christian Ethos – PROGRESS REPORT

It is nearly two years since Canon Paul graciously accorded me the immense privilege of allowing me to speak about the work of Explore to all the congregations in the Catholic Parish of Hampshire Downs.

A progress report on its work seems if anything, overdue, especially in view of an article which appeared in today's (15<sup>th</sup> November, 2011) issue of The Guardian newspaper entitled “There's more to relationships than body parts.”

#### SETTING THE SCENE

A few brief quotes from this article will help to set the scene.

“James says he has picked up most of what he knows about sex from the television; the only sex education he had at school was the biological basics at primary school and a few brief talks at the end of Year 11.”

“The U.K. still has the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Western Europe.”

“Its relationships that young people want to know about, dealing with emotions and real-life dilemmas as much as the nitty-gritty of sex” – Chief Executive of Sexual Health Charity “Brooks.”

“What we need is good quality relationships education; teaching them about respect, honesty trust and self-esteem.”

#### EXPLORE'S MISSION

Against this background Explore's mission of “enabling young people to get a better understanding of the realities of marriage in the context of today's society” seems more and more relevant.

#### EXPLORE'S CLIENTS

Since it became a Registered Charity in the year 2000 Explore has worked in over 170 schools, during the course of which some 33,000 students have been involved.

In the current academic year, here in Hampshire, it is anticipated that we shall have 25 client schools. What is particularly exciting is that this will include 5 out of the 8 state maintained Catholic schools in the Portsmouth Diocese, St. Anne's & St. Georges in Southampton, St Edmunds in Portsmouth, Oaklands in Waterlooville and Bishop Challoner in Basingstoke.

An added bonus is that we expect to start work in Winchester University early in the New Year – Explore's very first ‘Uni’ client!

## OUR PRINCIPAL RESOURCE

Our principal resources, without which the whole project would collapse are our couples – couples of all ages who share a deep concern about the current unacceptably high level of marriage and family breakdown in this country and would like to do something about it.

## EXPLORE'S METHODOLOGY

Explore's methodology works by bringing together volunteer married couples who undertake to share their actual experience of being married – the downs as well as the ups – with groups of students in a dialogue led by the young people themselves. Every Explore event is facilitated by an Adviser-Coach, trained by Explore.

In this process, which can best be described as “experiential learning,” what the young people appreciate above all else is the honesty and openness of the couples.

Fr Michael Dennehy, Coordinating Pastor for St Swithun Wells said recently “marriage and family life are THE PRIORITY for the Catholic Church” and that although marriage preparation was obligatory it had been recognised that there was a real need to start further back. This is where he felt Explore's methodology had an important contribution to make.

The Most Revd. Peter Smith, Archbishop of Southwark who is one of Explore's most distinguished Patrons wrote in a letter recently,

“The focus of Explore is explicitly on the nature of the marriage relationship and family life within the Christian tradition. Explore works on a non-judgemental basis with the young people but provides a valuable method of outreach that offers insights and awareness of great value for all young people.”

We are particularly proud that this year's President of the City of Winchester's Catenian Circle, who, with his wife, has participated in Explore's work in schools and colleges in Hampshire, has chosen Explore to be his " Charity of the Year."

## QUEEN'S AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Explore (Hampshire) was nominated for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2011. The award recognises excellence in voluntary activities carried out by groups in the community.

## APPEAL TO ALL MARRIED COUPLES

As Explore's work expands so the need for more couples willing to come forward prepared to share their experience of being married is ever increasing. Here is a Heaven-sent, surely, opportunity for married couples to stand up and be counted for that God-given institution of marriage. The majority of couples who have taken part have said that they believe their own marriage has been enriched in the process, as well as expressing surprise at the courtesy and thoughtfulness of the students.

“It was almost like a crash course for life. The fact that we could ask anything, face to face with real couples was hugely empowering. Explore has had a huge impact on my life. I would wholeheartedly recommend it to any student who has ever wondered about how relationships work in reality.”

[Year 11 student]

Do please PRAY for the Lord’s guidance that He may empower you to want to share your experience of marriage and make a *real* difference to the next generation.

To find out more – visit our website: [www.theexploreexperience.co.uk](http://www.theexploreexperience.co.uk) and/or contact **Rex Chester** – (01962) 626043 email: [rex.chester2@btinternet.com](mailto:rex.chester2@btinternet.com)