

ThirdSpace Evaluation Summary

February, 2019

Introduction

In December, 2018 Peninsula United Church contracted with Deirdre Goudriaan of Team Play Consulting to conduct an independent evaluation of the impact of the ThirdSpace ministry and support future planning. This is a summary of key results and learnings from the report.

The evaluation is based on a survey that was distributed widely to participants and volunteers, and two focus groups conducted in January. The majority of survey respondents are regular volunteers and/or participants in weekly programs, and most are connected to Peninsula United Church, and most are retired. One third (33%) of respondents are not connected to Peninsula United and, given our goals of serving our community and connecting with those outside the church, it is important to pay particular attention to those responses.

Key learnings from the Evaluation

Excerpts from the Evaluation report are italicized.

Goals & Impact

[The leadership focus group] *indicated a lot of convergence on the vision and noted words like “alternative, progressive Christianity, spiritual growth, community, engagement with others as well as an on-going presence in the Town Centre.” Others mentioned ThirdSpace was a place to “do church differently, build and connect more with community, inclusivity, church outside the sanctuary and a new non-traditional way of practicing faith.” (p. 23)*

“ThirdSpace gives me hope, a new way to experience church.” It gives “meaning; we have to look at fifteen years from now, and this is the new way of church.” (p. 26)

Survey responses about program impacts indicate that strongest impacts of our programs are strengthening social connections, improved mental and spiritual well-being and increased sense of community belonging (p.28). These impacts are consistent with our goals and indicate that we are having the impacts we hope for. Focus group responses confirm this, with words that align strongly with our goals, such as: “relationships and community building, inclusion, acceptance, hope, kindness, create community.”

Promotion & Advertising

Most attend because of a personal connection or invitation. The effectiveness of community notices had most impact on unchurched participants. (p. 18) We need to continue to explore more effective ways of promoting our activities through various media and word of mouth.

Location

There was a split in the survey respondents: 38% said the location was not at all influential and 28% felt it was very or extremely influential. (p. 18)

Slightly more than 63% of survey respondents indicated they would reconsider or be unlikely to continue if ThirdSpace moves out of the neighbourhood and interestingly 71% indicated they would continue if it moved to a church building. This raises some questions about the significance of the location and contradicts the previous question about the importance of location. (p. 21)

It seems that, although location is not significant for some participants, the central location is very important for others. It is significant that relocation to a “church” building would not affect participation for most respondents (71%) and surprisingly, this percentage of total respondents is actually higher than that of congregation members (64%). This suggests that maintaining a location in the centre of town is important, but that it could be within a church building without drastically affecting participation. Nonetheless, it is also notable that relocation to a church building would cause about a quarter of respondents to reconsider their participation. How the space is identified/branded may be significant, and it is essential that we maintain a culture of openness, inclusiveness and broad accessibility (p.29).

Collaboration

With limited time and resources, the volunteers and leadership committee need to be strategic in what strategies and impacts they want to pursue. Often this requires trade-offs—they simply cannot do it all. (p. 28)

People remain largely unaware of the current and attempted collaboration with community groups and agencies, and similarly unaware of the process for initiating new programs (p.24) We need to document and communicate this process. Further attempts at collaboration with community groups will be undertaken, as resources permit, and according to impact goals.

Volunteers & Congregational Engagement

There is no doubt that the volunteerism at ThirdSpace has met most of the defined targets, this is a huge asset to the program and should continue. (p. 27)

ThirdSpace “has not done a good job of engaging the congregation and it would be helpful to share the results with them” and “the congregation is elderly and doesn’t have the capacity to actively engage.” (p. 26)

The focus group comments capture the challenge of engaging the congregation with ThirdSpace. Over twenty members of the congregation are actively involved in volunteering and many more are involved as participants. But many congregation members lack either the capacity or an interest in engaging with ThirdSpace. It may not be helpful to expect that direct engagement with ThirdSpace will be widespread. Nonetheless, active communication and opportunities to engage need to continue and expand. A more structured and consistent program of training, affirming and recruiting volunteers is needed (p.27).

Conclusion

This evaluation has indicated that we are on the right track with our desired impacts, but that we need to clarify our target audience. We still have much to learn about what it means to engage more deeply with our community but we know that our work is making a difference in people’s lives, developing community and helping people grow spiritually. We have strong support from the congregation, demonstrated both by the participation in the ministry as a whole, and in this evaluation (two-thirds of the 91 respondents).

As the report points out, ThirdSpace is still early in its organizational development. The next step for us is to move past this initial development stage, to refine and mature our ministry and prepare for long-term sustainability.

This evaluation, together with feedback from gatherings that were held in December to consider the vision and goals of ThirdSpace, provide important direction for the future of ThirdSpace.