

**AHRC funded project: Youth transitions, international volunteering and religious transformations: the experiences of young evangelical Christians in Latin America
1st May 2009 to 31st April 2010**

Investigators and contacts

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Summary

Studies of youth and religion in the UK have emphasized the emergence of 'generation Y' as largely disaffiliated from formal religious structures (Voas et al 2006). Unlike previous generations, this generation of young people are finding inspiration for belief in new places and networks, often emphasizing the importance of Christian concerts, faith-based volunteering, religious retreats, and other 'non-Church' activities in their understandings of their place within the world as faithful young people. In short, young people are often developing their religious identities and spiritual meanings outside of 'adult' Church structures. This project aims to investigate what happens to the religious identities and spiritual understandings of young people through their participation in faith-based international volunteering projects, with a special focus upon the experiences of young evangelical Christian volunteers in Latin America. More specifically, we explore themes and debates in four key areas: youth transitions; understandings of religious identities, experiences and transformations; global citizenship; and international development and social justice. The project will draw upon and synthesise debates in these areas from an interdisciplinary perspective, as well as integrating practitioner insight and debates concerning the aims and intents of youth volunteering through faith-based organisations. The research includes a case study on Latin Link, a Christian organization which supports youth volunteering in Latin America. Latin Link sends more than fourteen teams of young people a year on short term STEP programs across Latin America. As a non-denominational organisation it attracts young people from a variety of UK churches to work with Latin American evangelical churches on a range of projects.

Young people will be individually interviewed at an induction event organised by Latin Link before participating in faith-based international volunteering in Latin America. Whilst in the field, all young people will be asked to keep a diary of their experiences, focusing specifically upon their interactions with others, their observations of the host community, and key moments and meditations. Following return to the UK, all young people will be contacted for a telephone interview, and will then take part in focus group discussions during the de-briefing sessions organised by Latin Link. Analysis of the data collected will be team-focused, and findings will be disseminated through an international conference panel and conference presentations, peer-reviewed journal articles and a two-day workshop involving youth-focused activities followed by a series of discussions and presentations for practitioners and policy makers.