

# THE BACKPACK

— ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR LIFE —

welcome to the backpack e-newsletter



Hello!

We are very excited to introduce to you the e-newsletter of The Backpack. Thank you for your interest in our program!

This email is the first of a regular series that we will be sending out. In this e-newsletter we will include updates on the Backpack program, both within the Kilmore Diocese and on an international level, as well as answer some frequently asked questions and give helpful tips and guidelines on running the program. If you have any questions or suggestions for topics you would like to see included in this e-newsletter, or would like to update us on how your program is going, please call or email us.

Today we are going to address what is probably the most frequently asked question of all time with regard to the Backpack parish groups; *"How do you get the young people to come?"* While this (understandably) can seem like a daunting prospect initially, there are a number of ways to reach out to the youth in your area.

- **Approach the local parish priest.** You can always enlist the help and support of your parish priest in reaching out to young people, through warm announcements at weekend masses, or through notices in the parish bulletin. Your priest might have some people in mind who would like to attend the program or have some ideas about how to spread the word.
- **Approach the parish council.** Every parish has a parish council of lay people. You can speak to your parish council about the program and get their insight and support. We have presented at numerous parish councils already and would be happy to assist you in setting up one of these presentations!
- **Approach parents or teenagers you know personally.** Some students may be more likely to attend if their parents are encouraging or reminding them about the program.
- **Approach the local school.** Giving a five-minute presentation at the morning assemblies in local schools is a great way to get the students buzzing about the new program in their area. You can speak to the principal and ask him to extend the invitation to all students, as well as post backpack fliers around the school as visual reminders. (We can provide you with the fliers!) You can also hand out fliers to the students to take home!
- **Approach the local youth officer.** Every parish has an appointed youth officer who could be of great assistance to you in getting the program started. They will know many of the young people in the area and will be familiar with the logistics of working with youth.

Once you have a starting group assembled, just remember:

- **No group is too small and there is no “wrong size”.** If you have two or three students in a parish hall to begin with, that is a great start! Once the program is up and running consistently, word of mouth among the students will see the group grow over time.
- **Pizza, pizza, pizza.** The objective of the program is to feed our young people, spiritually, mentally, and – perhaps most importantly in terms of getting their attention – physically. Everybody likes to be welcomed with snacks and drinks, and EVERYBODY likes pizza.
- **The environment is important.** Make your Backpack space as colourful and welcoming as possible!
- **Make eye contact and smile!** Be as welcoming as you can! The personality and attitude of the program leader will have a big impact on the students. The most important thing a group leader can do for these teens is love them and make them feel welcome and cared for.

We are happy to assist you with any of these steps, and if you have any more questions about making a parish group appealing to students don't hesitate to call us. There are many freedoms of running The Backpack in a parish setting rather than a classroom, and you will be amazed at just how successful these outside groups can be and what a difference they can make in the lives of our youth.

We will announce the date of our next training day soon. As always don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments!

God bless,

The Backpack Team.

*“Teaching the Backpack has become one of the most gratifying experiences that I have ever had the privilege to participate in. I was very concerned that I would not be capable to present the program accurately. My worry was unnecessary as the program teaches itself. The most important guideline that I got from the team was make eye contact and smile at each one of these kids as they enter and leave... We are now in our 10th week and I see kids who were sullen and disinterested lighting up and contributing. I learn something new about myself with each week's lesson!”*  
– Backpack Group Leader

*“For me this program was a very fun way to learn important things. I found myself looking forward to the Monday evening dedicated to the Backpack. Most of the teachings seemed to teach themselves as they were all very relatable to all of us teenagers. I especially liked the way the Backpack leaders were very friendly and welcoming, and the way they participated. They got involved in all the activities.”*  
– a past Backpack Group Participant.

# One of our Backpack Classrooms!



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