

# Soul Space

Bearsden Academy

21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011



It was all about ways of being quiet & discovering your thoughts & feelings about life.

That was amazing, I learned a lot.



While I was in Soul Space I felt like I really connected with God and I thank the people who made it for that experience.

## Introduction

At a Chaplaincy team meeting in May 2010 one member brought up the use of the school's Contemplation Room and suggested we research how we may be able to use the room for its stated purpose.

At the following meeting the team were given a copy of the Church of Scotland 'Contemplation Space' paper which is a 'toolkit to stimulate conversation' between teachers, pupils and chaplains about the use of such a space, however after reading this paper there was no real sense of how to move forward. In November one of the chaplains suggested hosting a prayer space in the room which Alison Boyles (DHT) approached the Senior Management Team about. Meanwhile another chaplain heard about prayer spaces in schools and a training day being arranged by an organisation called **24-7 Prayer**\*

SMT agreed that the Contemplation Room could be used to host such a project which meant the chaplains could begin to organise for it to run before the end of the school year. One of the chaplains attended the training day by **24-7 Prayer** and a team of four chaplains agreed to move forward in developing the project. Meanwhile Alison worked out a suitable timetable which would allow every S1 class to visit the room, either during RME or PSE.

\* **24-7 Prayer** is a movement of people who believe in the power of Christian prayer. Prayer rooms have been running in churches since 1999 and to date there have been over 6,300 rooms in over 96 nations. Prayer spaces in schools have been held in England for a number of years, with the first one in a Scottish school having been held at the end of 2010. Spaces are held in both Primary and High schools and are often organised and led by teachers, youth workers and School Chaplains. **24-7 Prayer** encourage those leading the spaces to register their school and dates on 24-7 website so they can offer support if and when needed.

For more information please see <http://uk.24-7prayer.com>

## Soul Space

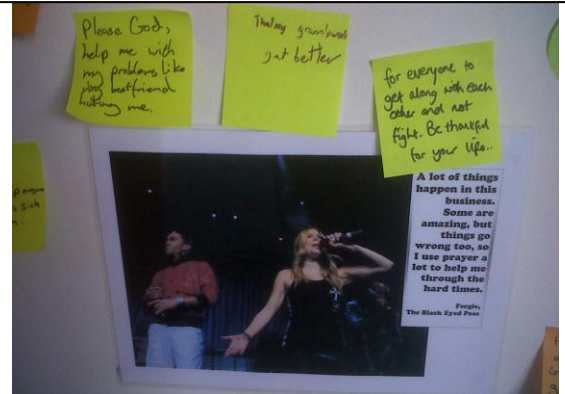
The room was transformed into a contemplation space the Friday before the project began. Stations included:

- General Prayer Wall
- Playing Cards Reflection
- Be Still Zone
- Self Esteem Area
- Thank You Board
- Forgiveness Stones
- Sorry Strings
- Big Questions
- Human Trafficking
- Why? (Reflection on the tsunami, earthquake and nuclear power disaster in Japan)
- Prayer Request Box

For information on running these stations, and for other ideas please see [www.prayerspacesinschools.com/resources](http://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/resources)

## General Prayer Wall

Pupils were able to read quotes about prayer and peace before being invited to post their own comments, thoughts and prayers.



## Playing Cards Station

**Club** – Write something that you are struggling with at the moment

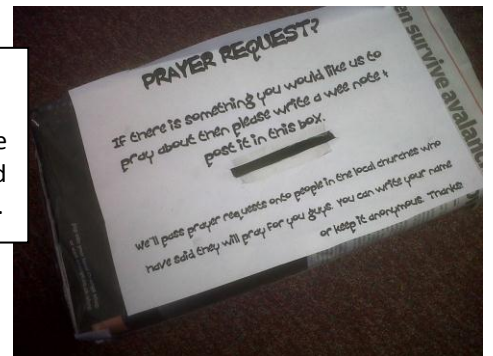
**Diamond** – What is precious to you in your life?

**Heart** – Write something you love or a name of someone you love

**Spade** – Is there something you feel you need to work at?

## Prayer Request Box

Pupils were given the opportunity to write something they would like others to pray about for them. These prayer requests were passed onto members of local churches represented in the Chaplaincy Team.



## Pupil comments:

"It was a good and new way to think about God."

"While I was in Soul Space I felt like I really connected with God and I thank the people who made it for that experience."

"I thought it was for hippies when I walked past it with my friends but it helped me let my feelings out."

"I thought it was a great experience and I felt that it made me think more of God."

"I feel relaxed not paranoid of tests."

"I really enjoyed doing this. Saying 'thank you' and 'sorry' were really good ways to tell God that you were grateful or sorry for something you'd done. Also the Big Questions was good, seeing other people's questions about everything."

"I think Soul Space is a good way of getting all your thoughts and feelings out. I like the idea of a prayer request box as it is nice to know that someone else in the world is praying for you."

"I enjoyed the Soul Space as it gave me the opportunity to express my true emotions about God."

"I liked the cards where you got to write down something that means the world to you."

There were 2 stations in the tent...

**Be Still and Self Image**



**Self Image**

Pupils were encouraged to look at themselves in a mirror and think about how and why they were made, and to reflect on their own self image. There was also a range of quotes related to self esteem and self image.

***Pupil comments:***

"I enjoyed the tent because it made you feel much more open with yourself & happy that it's open at lunch."

"The complete silence, it helped a lot."

"I enjoyed the experience because it helped you get over your worries and tell God your thoughts but my favourite was the quiet area that let you think about feelings."

"My favourite part was when you could just sit in the tent because it was peaceful and you had quiet time to pray and there was nothing I didn't like."

"It was good, not a waste of time. My favourite thing was the relaxing bit so I could reflect."

"I had fun and enjoyed relaxing in the tent thingy."

"I saw a tent church and it was good and peaceful."

"I enjoyed the tent because it made you think. I'm also happy it's open at lunch."

"It was a good experience. Favourite bit was the still room."

"It was great and my favourite bit was be still."

"The 'still room' was relaxing but I would probably have preferred it if the curtain went down to the bottom (for more privacy). Otherwise VG!"

"Somewhere to be still. Very peaceful."

"Chillaxing gazebo."

"It was really peaceful and quiet. It was good to let out your feelings on to paper. I enjoyed it. I liked the little tent. I could stay in there all day."

"I feel happy!!! I think this morning has been very quick."

I enjoyed the relax place - it was awesome.

"I thought that the mirror thing was a bit different & weird."

### Be Still

Pupils were challenged to be at peace, to not talk or do anything but to sit quietly.



"I enjoyed it a lot because it allowed me to relax and think clearly. I enjoyed the place where you could sit on your own and relax."

"My favourite bit was the tent and the stone."

"I thought Soul Space was good and relaxing, especially the tent."

"My favourite part was when we got to sit and think about anything and relax."

"I enjoyed the tent because it was a time to relax and think about stuff."

"My favourite part was the place where you could have a quiet moment to yourself."

"My favourite thing was when you went into the worshipping hut to pray."

"I really enjoyed Soul Space as it helped me relax and get rid of my worries."

"I thought the best thing about Soul Space was the quiet area where you just sat back and relaxed. I thought the bit with the pictures in it was quite random."

"I enjoyed the quiet space because it was very peaceful."

"I liked Soul Space because it was a quiet time to myself. I liked all the things that were there and thought they were well thought out."



### Thank You Board

Pupils were encouraged to reflect on what is good in their life and to be thankful for those things.

### ***Pupil comments:***

“I have realised how much my parents do for me and I am really dependent on them. This morning has really helped me think about this and to think what I can do to help my parents more often.”

“Calming. I liked the thankful board, I thought it was really nice.”

“I feel peaceful and happy for the life I have.”

“It made me feel a lot better and because I was worrying about something earlier on it made me feel a lot better and I realised how much I love my family and life.”

“I liked showing my feelings about what I’m thankful for. And what I’m sorry for.”

“It was nice to see what everyone was thankful for.”

“It helped me to appreciate what I have and apologise for that I have done.”

“It was cool that we got to write down what we appreciate and are sorry for.”

“I really like the love heart shaped notes where you wrote what you were thankful for.”

“I loved the love heart sticky notes.”



### Forgiveness Stones

Pupils were asked to listen to a CD - an audio track that spoke about relationships and how we all at times hurt others and are hurt ourselves. The track explained that sometimes other people don’t care that they’ve caused pain and at times we can’t always see justice done but that we can choose to let go of the hurt and to forgive.

Pupils were invited to pick up a stone and choose to let go of their hurts through the act of holding and releasing the stone into the water, while being reminded that in the days ahead they may need to remember that they have chosen to let go.

**Pupil comments:**

"I enjoyed the relax place - it was awesome. I liked speaking my mind and putting my anger in the water."

"I loved the stone exercise - I really felt like I was letting go of my sore and anger."

"It was nice to let go of my anger and forgive. Also to say sorry for what I had done and said to others. And to see that everyone has something special about them."

"It made me feel a bit sad but also happy. I can now forgive people for mean things that they have done to me."

"I really enjoyed it. It made me think about all the bad things that I've done and hopefully God will forgive me."

"I felt forgiven and comfortable."

"I thought it was good and I could enjoy it a lot to forgive and be forgiven."

"I liked this a lot – the forgiveness, thank you."

"The forgiveness tape was good."

"Forgiveness tape = good. Tent = very good. Everything 5\*, 5/5, good fun."

"Good, it was something new! The forgiveness & stones were good."

"It was good, I liked the stone because it makes you feel better after it."

"The stones were cool and again PEACEFUL."

"I felt calm. I liked the forgetting stones. I liked Soul Space."

"I felt calm and sad. It was good to think about God. I liked the stones the most because it was tranquil and thought provoking."

"I especially enjoyed the part with the CD player, the stones and the water."

"My favourite bit was the tent and the stone."

"I thought Soul Space was good and relaxing, especially the stones."

"Soul Space taught us that letting go of things that have happened to us in the past can be a good thing. Soul Space helped me learn never to take advantage of people."

**Sorry Strings**

We all get things wrong at times and sometimes what we do hurts others and damages relationships. Pupils were encouraged to reflect and write something they're sorry for before clipping it onto the sorry strings



**Pupil comments:**

"I like the part about saying sorry and I think that some of the notes people wrote are really nice and now I forgive someone."

"I loved the sorry notes because it gets it off your chest. Overall it was a great experience and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

"I thought the time in the place to say sorry was nice and it helped me to feel free."  
"I think it was a great experience to have and it helps you let go of things."

"I think it was a good idea to have somewhere that you could post a sorry note, because it could lift a huge weight off your shoulders."

"I thought Soul Space was a chance to admit what you have done and accept who you are."

"I enjoyed Soul Space and thought it was good because we got to say sorry for things we've done and say what we're thankful for."

"I thought Soul Space was good because I enjoyed writing down what I was sorry and thankful for."

"I thought it was good for apologising to people and to appreciate what they have done for me."

"I think the Soul Space was really good. It gave you the opportunity to say sorry and say prayers for the less fortunate."



**Big Questions**

Pupils were offered the opportunity to write some of the big questions they have about life and faith and pin them up.

Questions ranged from 'Why do natural disasters happen?' and 'Is there life after death?' to 'Does everyone need to go to school 5 days a week?' and 'Why does my mum not like me?' As you can see, some pupils were extremely honest and personal in the questions they wrote.

**Pupil comments:**

"The strings were good because I felt like my thoughts were out there."

"I felt holy angry, holy worried. The whole time I was thinking about my Grandad with cancer. If God exists, why do bad things still happen, ie Japan?"

I really liked the Big Questions tent and the stone tape because they made you worry less and helped to make you calmer."

“God, can you help me to work harder at school to get a better job when I am older. Can you help my parents to be less stressed about work?”

“I liked the part where you could write a question.”

“I think they should answer our questions.”

“I thought Soul Space was good and you could ask questions.”

“I am writing for forgiveness about that note that I wrote up on the big questions. I hope you can forgive me.”

“It gave you the opportunity to ask questions I don’t know the answers to and just think. The people were so nice and helpful.”

### Human Trafficking

Information was available for pupils to read about children and adults who have been bought and sold in the modern day slave trade. There was also an audio track telling the story of one particular girl.

Pupils were encouraged to respond by writing prayers and thoughts onto strips of paper which they then attached to other peoples’ prayers and thoughts to create a paper chain. There was also a petition available from the charity *Stop the Traffik* for pupils to sign if they wanted to actively support the campaign against slavery.



### ***Pupil comments:***

“I found the trafficking stories quite depressing as people could do such things to people.”

“It opened my eyes to things that happen in the world and it touched me.”

“In soul space there are lots of interesting things to do. The story about the human trafficking was quite distressing. But the experience was good.”

“In Soul Space I wrote on loads of walls. I listened to Helena’s story and how she was made to be a prostitute. That really hit me how easy it is to steal innocent girls and how vulnerable they are. The evil that can do this.”

“It was really good because I have learned how other people suffer and I have let go of some of my guilty conscious.”

“I was really shocked by the trafficking station because it’s made me realise things like that really go on in the world.”

“I felt bad for Japan for what happened. I am sad because a lot of people died.”

“I felt really bad for the people who are less fortunate than I am. It’s really nice just to stop and think about things that happening in your life.”

“I enjoyed Soul Space because of the story about the girl because I enjoyed listening to her sad story.”

“I enjoyed Soul Space because it was a good chance to reflect on all the problems in the world.”



**Why?**

Photos were posted of the recent tsunami and earthquake in Japan for pupils to view and reflect on. They were then invited to post comments, questions, thoughts and prayers.



**Pupil comments:**

"It is really bad that all the people in Japan are suffering and everyone should help them."

"I felt sad for all the people in Japan and I also felt sad for some of the stories that were on the sticky notes."

"In Soul Space I saw how bad the situation is in Japan."

"I felt sorry for the people in Japan and it makes me think how lucky I am to actually have a house, because at the moment the whole population do not have a house."

"It was really good and makes you think about things in a different way. It makes you think about the bad things in the world and what people desperately need, like food, but you take it for granted."

"I liked it because you get to see all the people that are in pain and can get to help them."

"It's given me time to think about disasters in the world – Thank you."

"It let me say how I felt about the tsunami in Japan. I wrote that I felt very sorry for them all."

"People from 'The Den'\* kindly came in and showed us lots of photos from the Japan disaster which was very thoughtful. It was a good, imaginative and quiet time."

\*'The Den', is a lunchtime initiative run by some of the Chaplains for Bearsden Academy pupils. It is held in a local church.

## **Strengths & Challenges**

### *Contemplation Room*

The Contemplation Room was a great space and it was very positive to be able to use it for its stated purpose. Setting up the space was slightly challenging as the room had chairs and fold away tables in it which could not be stored elsewhere. This meant the space was messy which distracted from the atmosphere we were attempting to create. In the end we were able to cover the items with material which improved the feel of the room.

### *Personnel*

Soul Space was organised by the school Chaplaincy team with support from Alison Boyles, DHT. A rota was developed so that there were three people staffing the room during each sessionsm as well as the class teacher, and two people during each lunch time. As well as the Chaplaincy team we engaged two volunteers who run Scripture Union groups in local schools. Where possible we ensured there was always at least one male and one female staffing the room at any one time.

The practical support of Alison Boyles also meant we had a class timetable to work with and all the classes knew when to visit the room. It was positive to have the teachers attend Soul Space along with their classes as this allowed them to see the activities their pupils were taking part in and monitor how they were engaging. It also meant they were available to deal with any behavioural issues if needed and made it easier to gain feedback from the pupils - all pupil comments were gathered from short evaluations they wrote either in the room at the end of Soul Space or back in the classroom, with support from their teacher.

### *Activities*

There were 11 stations in Soul Space and we tried to ensure a range of issues/themes and activities so as to engage the range of young people who were going to visit the room - writing, listening, reading, looking, answering questions, reflecting. The number of stations meant there were around 3 pupils per station at any one time – the activities were harder for us to manage and harder for pupils to engage with if there were more than that. We understood that certain activities would require more supervision than others and so kept a particularly close eye on them, for example the tent area.

Some pupils commented on the range of activities available:

*"In Soul Space there were lots of activities to do. Some of them made you think. There some depressing stories that made you think. Some made you express your feelings. I quite enjoyed it and it made me think."*

*"I think Soul Space was a really good idea. All the stations were interesting. It was a good way to let your feelings out without saying them aloud and without anyone knowing."*

### *Attendance*

Every S1 class visited Soul Space with their teacher, either during RME or PSE. It was also open to other year groups during lunch time. In total, lunch time attendance, came to 107 young people. Many of these young people had already visited the room with their class and choose to come back which was very encouraging.

By the end of the week the room was covered in post-it notes, comments, thoughts and prayers which made for some very interesting, amusing, thought provoking and at times, heartbreaking, reading. The Chaplains and Alison felt it was important for the school staff to be given an opportunity to see the pupils' contributions, particularly staff involved in Guidance. Although staff had been invited to visit and take part in Soul Space during the week only a small number did and so we kept the room open for the following week as well. It is not known how many school staff visited the room during that week.

### *Pupil Engagement*

The behaviour and engagement of the pupils was very good. They respected the various activities and many posted extremely thoughtful and personal comments, thoughts and prayers – particularly impressive when you remember they were doing so amidst their peer group. Occassionally some pupils found it harder to focus on the stations and needed

support and encouragement from those staffing the room. Every comment received from the S1 pupils had something positive in it, with only three from the entire year group seeming unable to engage so well with Soul Space:

*"What was the point in this cos I don't know. The only bit I found good was the funny big questions."*

*"It was very good but I couldn't connect with it as I am an atheist."*

*"I did not learn much but the stuff I did learn I will try to remember all I can. I would not like to do it again because I did find it a waste of time."*

It should be noted that these pupils still all participated in the activities and were able to reflect on their experience which is in itself positive.

### **Staff Feedback**

*To be added by Alison Boyles*

### **Pupil's Thoughts on the Future of Soul Space**

*"I think it would be useful repeating but not too soon after. I also think it would be good for other teachers and year groups."*

*"I think that the Soul Space was a worthwhile opportunity and is a good way to help you feel better about yourself. I think it is a good idea to extend it further because it was quite enjoyable too."*

*"I thought it was very useful. I definitely think it is worth repeating because I really liked the things we did. I think it should be extended to everyone else in the school to give them a chance to do the things we did."*

*"I think we should have it again. I think it shouldn't be extended to other year groups because it would get silly and that's not the idea."*

*"I thought that Soul Space was a great experience and I think other schools should do it as well."*

*"I thought it was a good idea to come to the school because it was a good opportunity. I think you should do it again."*

*"It was all very good and should be shown again as it brings great interest and gets you thinking."*

*"I would recommend it to anyone and hope it comes again."*

*"It was a useful experience and I hope Soul Space comes back again."*

*"There were many stations and all very interesting. It was all very good and should be shown again as it brings great interest and gets you thinking."*

*"I thought that the Soul Space was very good because there were a lot of different activities to do. I also liked how the different places were dotted about the room and sectioned off so it was a bit private. It was also a good activity to do with friends and I also think that the Soul Space should stay because I really enjoyed it, it was very interesting and fun!!"*

*"I felt a lot better after it. I think it was very useful and is definitely worth repeating."*

### **Additional Pupils' Feedback**

*I felt like I really connected with God - I thank the people who made it for that experience*

*I enjoyed it a lot*

*I have said sorry*

*Really interesting*

