



In April 2009 we took a crazy step forward and here we are...on the other side of mission:h-NY and we have made it back in one piece and smiling too! It all began with a random dream, over 3 years before, of visiting New York and then doing a trial expedition last summer and then 4 solid months of fundraising and seeing God meet our needs in such a faithful way. The run up to the trip was eventful....parties, sponsored events, prayer meetings, form signing, team building, information giving, and so much more! We hardly had time to breathe and all of a sudden we were a day away from leaving Bristol with a nice set of aims and objectives!! Things like giving them an amazing, once in a lifetime holiday, helping them to see life outside of what they knew, providing them with opportunities to explore the Christian faith and just demonstrating the abundance of the kingdom of God like we have experienced ourselves. So off we went...

Suzie and Mike had flown over a day before to do some preparation for the trip so we landed safely in NYC on Tuesday 7th and were in the airport with 5 leaders, 5 young people and lots and lots of luggage! Everyone was excited about what the week had in store but I don't think any of us had bargained for what was to come. We spent the week doing lots of different things with little time to stop and breath, it was definitely action packed and kept idle hands much more than busy! Once we left our accommodation in the morning, we often didn't return until it was bedtime and ran from one thing to the next; it kept us on our toes and made us ever so tired too! Our timetable was rammed with things to see and do and golly gosh did we see some amazing sights! The boys got to see all the things that they had seen in films and on TV; a bus tour of all the bright lights (this happened on the first day we had arrived and was a reality check for us that we had eventually arrived!), watching the NY Knicks play an abysmal but fun game of basketball, a scavenger hunt in Central Park, a freezing cold visit to the Statue of Liberty, watching Shrek the musical on Broadway, meeting and greeting celebrities in Madame Tussauds, admiring the city that never sleeps from the top of the Empire State building, shopping until we could shop no more and visiting a very moving tribute museum to 9/11. The sights and activities gave us a rollercoaster of emotions to experience and explore and it would be very difficult to convey how we did this in words so I will leave it to your imaginations. The majority of mornings that we spent in NYC were early starts for us as we worked with a Christian organisation called Urban Impact. They work within NY communities and their aim is to witness to immigrant populations, helping them by providing English lessons, helping them to get to know the city and many other practical things. They have centres from which they work and part of our work with them was to help with some repairs and improvements. This was good for the boys as a lot of them had carpentry, painting and plastering skills, which they could put to great use. They also had the opportunity to help teach English, which a couple of them did and they loved it! So now, wandering around The Big Apple are a class of people speaking Bristolian English with the likes of 'gert' 'lush' and 'babber' mixed into their speech!! They all had the chance to try new things and gain new skills in the time we spent serving Urban Impact and when it came to saying goodbye to Larry, the director of UI, it was incredible to see him thank each and every one of the boys individually and for him to identify specific giftings that he had seen in them, over the course of the week, and to see him speaking these over the boys in such a natural and gentle way.

As leaders we met each morning to pray and give our day to God to ask him to keep us safe and for chance to share our faith with the boys in natural conversations. Each day we set aside time amongst

the manic timetable to chat: about why we wanted to bring the boys to NYC; about our own faith; about their own lives back at home. These times were great, it gave us all a focused time to be together and an opportunity for us all to find out more about one another. There were real times of honesty and questioning. We shared stories about how we've seen God work, how we hear him speak and how he makes a difference in every day life. A lot of this was a new concept for the boys but they listened intently and questioned lots, which was great as we walked through the week with them. Spending time together was great and made the idea of faith an accessible and personal thing. This all became very apparent in the Church services we visited. A part of the reason we went when we did was because it was over the Easter weekend and what more reason do you need to go to Church, than it being Easter. Good Friday came very quickly and all of a sudden we found ourselves running through the door of Times Square church with 44 baptisms happening on stage and amazing, funky music! We had taken them to a young people's service where they told the story of what had happened over 2000 years ago on Good Friday with a chance to respond after. The boys didn't moan at all but at the same time didn't seem to be loving it either. We had the chance to pray for them in the service and prayed for practical help from God when they got home to sort out things like relationships and jobs etc. We thought it would be a good time to leave and find something to eat but were quickly stopped when a couple of the boys seemed to be responding to what had been said in the service and just needed time and space to process what they had heard and felt. God clearly had made himself known to the boys and their hearts had softened dramatically. Amazing conversations had been had in that old redundant theatre building; much more than us leaders had anticipated. Following this, on Easter Sunday, we gave the boys Easter eggs and decided that we would do the talk/discussion before we left for the days activities. We spoke to the boys about how much God cares for us, even when we don't care about him or about ourselves. Then we shared with them specific messages that people at home had felt God give them for each of the individual boys. As leaders, we were blown away by the fact that the people who had been praying in a room back in Bristol seemed to know these boys incredibly well despite the fact they had never met them! It was obvious that the creator of heaven and earth had known these boys all along and wanted to show them that he cared. They were typical boys and once we had shared them, said thanks and went to brush their teeth!!! However, we knew that they were going to need time to process what had been shared and thought that our visit to Brooklyn Tabernacle would be a good opportunity for them to reflect on what had been told to them. When we arrived we weren't too sure what to expect but knew it would be big, with amazing music and very loud...and it was indeed! Such a mind-blowing experience of church, the Easter story though movie, bible readings and song, done utterly professionally and in a jaw dropping way! The boys were engrossed the whole time and when it came to the end gave a massive round of applause. Another opportunity was given to respond to what had been on stage and one of the boys decided it was time for him to acknowledge that he thought there was something in this God thing and so did! It was incredible! Conversations during the week between the leaders and lads could never have been instrumented by ourselves.

All of this would never have been happening if we hadn't of had such amazing support back at home. Each day that we were away, Ruth Reddecliff was coordinating prayer meetings for an hour a day and we sure did feel the benefit of these! We had no incidents (minor or major), everyone got on fantastically, we were able to share our experiences of faith so many times with the boys, exciting activities, new adventures, safe travel and so, so, so much more! To hear from people back home was such an encouragement to us on a daily basis and definitely made us smile. One of the things that was sent to us whilst we were away was "...just to know that God is here and will be in Hartcliffe when you all return and yet he is in New York and that is where he's chosen to reveal himself is incredible." So, for us to be supported in all we did really did remind us that the week we were away, was just a small part of God's grand plan and there was so much more to it than we were able to glimpse whilst we were in NYC.

As leaders, we were being regularly humbled as to our own abilities and talents when God was using us in such dramatic ways. We had ideals when we chose the leaders and felt very much that as a team, we wanted to be used by God in whatever way he saw fit. For us, the reasons as to why we had been involved in God's big plan were puzzling but nonetheless, he sure did use us. Steve, Mike and Steve

were great, quite literally this week would not have been the same without them there. Mike had a number of awesome conversations with one of the boys especially about God and if he speaks, how he speaks. Mike was such an asset to the team as he was gentle, hardworking and is a very deep thinker so was able to help answer some of the deeper questions. Steve B was an instant hit with the lads, having a similar background to the boys, the boys took him on as one of them. They had lots of banter and fun but much more than this, from the first day Steve had unplanned, deep conversations with the boys about his life experiences and his belief in God in such a real way that none of the rest of us could have done. Steve H, as usual, was amazing! He doesn't seem to realise the difference he makes in the lives of the boys. After supporting Zoe & Suzie throughout all the planning of the trip, he was, as always the calming, strong influence. He was a fine example of what it truly means to be a man of God to the boys who so often have positive male role models missing in their lives. The boys show such a great respect for him, looking for reassurance and affirmation that cannot be underestimated.

The boys....what can we say? Their reputation on the estate had not been glowingly great but, to say that they were fun, an utter pleasure, hardworking, open to new things, a great support for one another, hilarious, responsible and grateful would be a huge understatement! They were wonderful and a complete joy to spend time with. Each of them provided amusement and challenge at different times and, as a group, were great! We never envisaged them being such an easy group to take across the ocean. We often said that they were the least manic of our bunch but never that we would be able to say on coming home that they were a pleasure and lots and lots of fun. Since we have been back and seen them around there is a definite difference to the boys who came away with us. It's hard to put into words but 'radiant' is the closest we've come to defining it.

The relationships that were built that week and existing relationships that were built upon, will never be the same again. They are lasting and have made a huge impact on both the leaders and the boys who were in NYC over the Easter weekend. Some memories that will stay with us are: their willingness to try food from all over the world, saying grace before every meal, watching the boys giggling their way through Shrek, the snow in Times Square, the foam fingers in the basketball game, the early morning kebab, never ending games on the subway, counting the boys everywhere we went and occasionally panicking because you hadn't counted the one you were walking with, unexpected tears, and being let back into the country just because we didn't have an accent! So that's that! Our trip was a huge success but we know that it was just the tip of the iceberg in terms of our work in Hartcliffe with ENOUGH. We all loved every second of it and cannot believe that it's over, God completely surpassed our longings and our expectations were obliterated in order for higher plans and purposes and for that, we could not be more grateful and excited. We valued your support much more than we could ever convey, your prayers, generosity and enthusiasm have been sources of encouragement and strength for us.