



Faith Shapes a Network of Young Leaders

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Dear readers,



No single person can change the world. Meaningful impact begins when people choose to connect, collaborate, and grow together. As I reflect on the Youngstars International journey, I am reminded that true community is about more than connection – it is about responsibility. We are called to encourage and support one another, celebrating victories together while also helping carry each other's burden.

I am continually inspired by the strength of our network. We are a global family of leaders, mentors, volunteers, and partners, united by the Holy Spirit and a shared purpose: to ensure that every young person within our sphere of influence has the opportunity not only to know Christ, but also to grow into spiritual maturity.

This issue celebrates the power of teamwork and community. It reminds us that our greatest achievements are rarely individual accomplishments; rather, they are the result of many hearts, hands, and prayers working together toward a common goal. As Scripture reminds us, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor" (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

In a world that often prizes competition and individual success, we are called to build bridges, create opportunities for meaningful connection, and encourage one another as we pursue Christlikeness. As you read these pages, I invite you not only to be inspired by the stories you encounter, but also to engage more deeply in the community that makes our mission possible. Together, we can continue to strengthen this network, expand our impact, and help the next generation discover and follow Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hensie van der Merwe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Hensie van der Merwe
President sBoard Youngstars International

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The Network Is Expanding in Depth and Width

The National Coordinators' Meeting was a memorable five days filled with faith, friendship and inspiration.

Setet Noemi, Volunteer Horgony (Hungary)



A Hungarian evening served as an introduction to the culture.

From April 22–26, we hosted our National Coordinators' Meeting in Hungary, welcoming leaders from across Europe as well as participants from Brazil and Cuba. Set in a peaceful village in the stunning Danube Bend, just 90 minutes from Budapest, the location provided the perfect backdrop for a week of learning, connection, and encouragement.

I joined as part of the Hungarian team. Together with Cosmin, we prepared the event with great excitement and prayer, hoping that every participant would leave refreshed, inspired, and equipped for their ministry. Each day included special activities that brought the week's message to life in creative and memorable ways.

Our spiritual theme was based on the story of Noah. We began by exploring God's calling and the choices He asks us to make. The second day reminded us that God Himself equips us for the work He gives us. Finally, we were encouraged by the truth that He not only equips His people but also blesses and grows their ministry.

Because experiential education is at the heart of YI, participants did far more than listen to talks. Through interactive activities, they stepped into Noah's story and experienced its lessons firsthand. This helps us carry these values authentically into our work with children and young people.

A prayer walk guided us through key moments of Noah's journey, ending with each participant receiving a small packet of flower seeds as a reminder of growth and hope. Creative workshops invited us to build an ark, learn debating skills, and practice calligraphy. We laughed, competed, and worked together through games, including a lively circus-themed challenge where teams gathered animals from around the campsite.

The evenings were filled with culture and celebration. During Hungarian Night, participants enjoyed traditional food, language quizzes, folk dancing, and presentations about the Horgony Association and Bika Camp. One of the most moving moments came when the entire community gathered to pray for the Hungarian team and seek God's direction for the future.

My favorite moment was the final evening, when every nation prepared traditional food and shared it with the whole group. Around grills, cauldrons, and campfires, strangers became friends. For me, that was the true gift of NCM: experiencing the community God created us for and building connections that will continue long after the week ended.



Strengthening friendships around the fire



Participants of the basic course taste their menu, which they have cooked on the fire.

Faith Shapes a Network of Young Leaders

Training courses, camps, and local groups help young people grow into leaders who take responsibility and share hope.

Rudolf Hächler, National Coordinator Austria

On a Sunday morning near Salzburg, a group of young people sits around a table discussing a passage from the Book of Acts. At first glance, it seems like an ordinary gathering. But a closer look reveals something remarkable: future leaders are being shaped.

Only a day earlier, most of these young people had never met. Today, they are one of four groups participating in this year's Jungschar Basic Course, spending a week learning how to become responsible and confident youth leaders.

At ABÖJ, our focus is not primarily on programs but on people. Our training courses are marked by openness, honesty, and a genuine desire to strengthen young leaders.

Participants learn practical skills such as leading groups, resolving conflicts, organizing children's meetings, and planning camps. At the same time, they reflect on deeper questions: How do I treat others with respect? How can I live out my faith authentically? How do I create a safe and welcoming environment for children?

Many participants come from local groups or have previously attended one of our regional camps. Having experienced the value of Christian community themselves, they now want to pass it on to others. During the courses, they are challenged, encouraged, and often discover abilities they never knew they had.

One participant, Manuel S., shared: "What I remember most are the practical experiences. Planning and leading the outdoor game and serving as the leader of the day were highlights for me. I also enjoyed organizing the final evening and worship service together with the team."



The impact of our work becomes most visible in our local groups. Across Austria, around 30 groups meet regularly, providing children and teenagers with a place where lasting friendships can grow. Dedicated volunteers invest their time week after week, preparing engaging activities, sharing biblical truths, listening, and walking alongside young people in everyday life.

A special highlight each year is our summer camps. Away from daily routines, children and young people spend several days together, laughing, playing, singing, exploring nature, and discovering more about faith. These camps often become defining moments where friendships deepen, faith becomes personal, and new perspectives emerge. At the same time, young leaders grow in responsibility and experience how God works through them.

In a time when many young people struggle with pressure, loneliness, and uncertainty, these communities provide a place of belonging and hope. Questions are welcomed, doubts can be expressed, and faith is presented not as pressure but as an invitation to discover trust, purpose, and hope.



Staff of the Working Group of Bible-Oriented Austrian Youth (ABÖJ) F.L.T.R: Rudolf Hächler, Sarah Weinwurm, Timotheus Specht

ABÖJ connects local groups into a wider network where leaders are trained, encouraged, and supported. They learn from one another, share experiences, and develop new ideas together. Over the decades, this has grown into a vibrant movement led largely by young people themselves.

“We invest in young people so that they learn to accompany and encourage others. That is where the strength of our ministry lies: what they receive, they pass on, changing lives step by step.”

Rudolf Hächler

What inspires me most is the multiplication effect. Those trained today will guide and mentor others tomorrow. Children become leaders, who in turn invest in the next generation. Increasingly, we meet young people whose parents once participated in ABÖJ programs themselves – a powerful testimony to the lasting impact of this ministry.



Austria at a glance

Population

Austria is home to approximately 9 million people and has a long tradition of welcoming people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Religious Background

Roman Catholic: 48%
Orthodox Churches: 5%
Protestant: 3%
Evangelical: 1%
Muslim: 9%
No religious affiliation: 34%

Main Challenges

Children and young people face increasing psychological pressure, loneliness, uncertainty about the future, and social inequality.

ABÖJ History

The first Jungschar groups were established in the early 1980s. Regional camps and training courses began in 1987, and the association was officially founded in 1992.

Key Focus Areas

Leader training, sustainable youth leadership development, networking of local groups, and regional camps and events.

This reflects Paul's encouragement in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

Of course, serving as a volunteer leader comes with challenges. Many balance their responsibilities alongside school, university, or work. Yet this is where the strength of community becomes visible: people support one another, encourage one another, and grow together.



Good morning – after a night in a self-built (Berlin) bivouac, by participants of the advanced course



Together everything is much easier – Construction of a rope swing in the basic course

What begins in our groups, camps, and training courses reaches far into the future. Wherever young people learn to take responsibility, strengthen others, and live out their faith, hope takes root and continues to grow.

We Keep Running – Charityrun 2026: A Record with Heart

With radiant faces and tired legs, but above all with grateful hearts, we look back on Charityrun 2026. 40 runners completed an incredible 298 laps together – a new record for Youngstars International!

Together with 231 donors from multiple countries, we raised over EUR 20,951. For this we thank God with all our hearts, and every single person who ran with us – in spirit or in support!

Together we are strong. That is Youngstars.
"Let us not grow weary of doing good."



When Hearts Align, Methods Follow

The strength of a network is to give freedom about the “how” while being united about the “why”.

Cosmin Tamas, Managing Director Youngstars International

On the border of Moldova and Romania, in a small village near the Prut River, 34 participants from the Bălți region gathered to prepare for ten summer camps that would soon begin. They arrived with schedules, activities, and ideas already in mind, eager to start preparing.

I entered the training facing two challenges. First, I was introducing a new camp training curriculum that I had only partially tested. Second, I was leading the training alone. While neither challenge was entirely new, the experience reminded me of the value of teamwork. The lessons themselves went well, but during breaks I found myself preparing for the next session, thinking ahead, and wishing for a teammate who could help carry the load and see what was coming next.

As we explored the foundations, structure, and purpose of camp ministry through experiential learning, it became clear that these leaders were already doing many things well. Whenever I asked, “How do you do this?” they had an answer. But when I changed the question to “Why do you do it?” the room became quiet. The most common response was simple: “Because that’s how we’ve always done it.”



Team building activity as a preparation for building up a team for camp

Later, a camp coordinator confirmed what I had noticed: “Many people have taught us how to run camps, but no one has challenged us to think about why we do them.”

That conversation revealed the true value of belonging to a network. A healthy network does not demand identical programs or methods. It provides the freedom to adapt the “how” to local culture and context while remaining united around a shared “why.”

By the end of the training, we all reached the same conclusion: summer camps are not the goal. They are the highlights of the year. The real engine of ministry is the local club that serves young people throughout the year. When our hearts are aligned around that purpose, our methods become tools not the mission itself.



Plenary session about phases development of a camp

Events

July

07/02 – 07/05 | Radicais no Brasil

Camp, Bahia

07/02 – 07/04 | Youngstars Ukraine

Youngstars techniques camp

07/03 – 07/12 | Micii Exploratori RO

Camp teenagers

07/04 – 07/11 | Youngstars Int.

Kids camp Romania

07/04 – 07/10 | Youngstars Polska

Basic training

07/06 – 07/11 | Radicais no Brasil

Kids camp, São Paulo

07/11 – 09/05 | ABÖJ Austria

Div. Youngstars camps

07/11 – 07/18 | BESJ Switzerland

Leaders training

07/13 – 07/18 | SIP Bulgaria

Kids camp (Childrens home and underprivileged)

07/13 – 07/18 | Radicais no Brasil

Teenager camp, Sao Paulo

07/18 – 07/24 | BESJ Switzerland

Pioneer and ropes techniques training

07/19 – 07/26 | SIP Bulgaria

BT/LST training

07/20 – 07/25 | Radicais no Brasil

Teenager camp, Sao Paulo

07/21 – 08/01 | Youngstars Italy

Daycamp

07/25 – 08/01 | BESJ Switzerland

Basic training

07/27 – 08/01 | Radicais no Brasil

Teenager camp, Indaiatuba

August

08/01 – 08/08 | Youngstars Int.

Teen Street Event, Germany

08/01 – 08/09 | Micii Exploratori RO

BT and GLT

08/02 – 08/08 | SIP Bulgaria

Teenager camp

08/07 – 08/09 | Radicais no Brasil

Introductory training, São Paulo

08/09 – 08/15 | SIP Bulgaria

Kids camp

08/09 – 08/15 | Youngstars Ukraine

Leadership training

08/12 – 08/16 | Perlas del Caribe CU

Kids camp

08/22 – 08/29 | Youngstars Int.

International instructor training

08/28 – 08/30 | BESJ Switzerland

Module: canoe for leaders with SLRG river

08/28 | BESJ Switzerland

Floorball: referee training

08/29 – 09/05 | BESJ Switzerland

Teamleaders training

September

09/01 – 09/04 | Micii Exploratori RO

Camp youth

09/05 – 09/06 | BESJ Switzerland

Module: Outdoor for all leaders

09/05 – 09/11 | Radicais no Brasil

Basic training, Nordeste

09/11 – 09/12 | Youngstars Ukraine

Hiking with teenagers

09/11 – 09/13 | Perlas del Caribe CU

Introductory training

09/19 | BESJ Switzerland

Module teensleaders

09/19 | BESJ Switzerland

Module “ant” leaders: Child-developmental psychology

09/19 – 09/26 | Youngstars Int.

Kids camp Cuba

09/25 – 09/27 | Micii Exploratori RO

Prayer & Fasting weekend

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