

SOUSTER YOUTH ISSUE #3

ARTICLES, NEWS & INSPIRATION

Our team is growing

A positive start

Meet a
volunteer

Sleep is your
superpower

OCTOBER 2022



THE LATEST NEWS FROM SOUSTER YOUTH

What you can look forward to reading in his edition...

Page 3

Director's Letter: Jason provides an introduction to this issue.

Page 4

Our team is growing: Souster Youth has hired a Drop-In Lead. Find out more about Bex.

Page 5

A positive start: Our very own Tim Sandford writes an article about back to school.

Page 8

Meet a volunteer: Meet Susie, sharing the many different ways she volunteers with Souster Youth.

Page 10

Sleep is your superpower: Why is sleep so important to young people & how can we make it better?

Director's Letter

As we approach half-term; we've already been helping students explore the Christian idea of grace in Religious Education lessons, tackling prejudice in PSHE lessons, and increasing the mental health of students through our GROW course.

We've also been excited to see over 50 youth workers sign up for our monthly training on what it takes to work effectively with young people. You can find out more at sousteryouth.org.

Almost miraculously, as the needs of young people continue to increase so does the number of those stepping out to meet those needs. What an honour it is to bring hope to young people alongside so many others!

Thanks for your interest in our work and young people! I hope you enjoy reading a bit more in what follows.

Coming up in this issue...

Tim writes about what we're doing to welcome year 7 students to a local school. Get in touch if you'd like to see something similar happen in a school near you next year. Find out all about our 'Welcome Tent' on [page 5](#).

Getting good sleep is a key pillar of good mental health and well-being. A lack of sleep is a significant factor in good mental health and too many young people don't get enough. We give them accurate information about getting a great night's sleep. As we've tried to 'practise

what we preach', we've learned a lot about sleep. Now we're trying to not only get more of it but increase the quality too! You'll find our latest sleep information and top tips (good for adults and young people!) in the article I wrote on [page 10](#).

Susie is one of our many amazing volunteers. She writes about how volunteering for Souster Youth has impacted her and what she's learning about the needs of young people on [page 8](#).

There are loads of ways you can get involved with our work; have you considered becoming part of the Souster Youth family? You can help us reach more young people on [pages 9 and 14](#).

Do stay in touch,

Jason Royce leads the work of Souster Youth.



Our Team is growing



Meet Bex

In September we welcomed Bex Hunter to the Souster Youth team. She re-enters the workplace having spent the best part of the last 8 years bringing up her children. Prior to this Bex worked for Youth For Christ and Junction 42 in the North East, as part of their Reflect prisons team, running creative groups and education courses as well as Alpha and discipleship groups..

SY: Bex, welcome to Souster Youth! Why did you apply for this job?

BH: I love working with young people so I had started volunteering for Souster Youth and loved the ethos, so when the job became available I really wanted to be a part of the work.

SY: What will you be doing?

BH: I will be setting up the drop-in for young people to attend at our building where they can spend time with friends, play games, get to know our team and generally hang out in a safe space.

QUICK-FIRE ROUND

In a quiet moment you'll most likely find me.... Watching a box set or listening to music

I'm my best when... I'm in a room full of people

What motivates you to work hard? I like to see things done well - I'm a bit of a perfectionist!

Favourite season: Autumn! I love seeing the leaves change colour and wearing cozy jumpers and snuggling up in blankets

3 things you couldn't live without? My 3 children

3 things you wouldn't miss? Drizzle, lukewarm coffee & spiders!

Who is your favourite author? I have a few, but I'm currently reading a book by Pete Greig, which I absolutely love!

Weirdest Habit? I'm a bit of an over-checker, especially when it comes to locking doors.

What are you most looking forward to? Getting the drop in up and running and seeing the building full of young people

SY: You've been here just over a month, what is the best thing about working for Souster Youth so far?

BH: I have received a really warm welcome from everyone and it's been really easy to settle in and feel part of the team.

Bex Hunter

Drop-in Lead

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A positive start



I often tell students the story about a friend of mine who had the very worst start to secondary school. Not long into their year 7 career they were in the lunch hall collecting their dinner when they unexpectedly tripped, spilling the contents of their tray down themselves in a moment of total disaster. There they sat on the floor, custard dripping from their hair, as hundreds of voices around them erupted into laughter.

Many of us will probably only remember fragments from our early school experiences. I remember making clay pots with a particular kindly primary school teacher, Mrs Oliver, the sort of amazing person that made you feel terrifically safe and wonderfully excited all at the same time. I remember finding out partway through delivering a homework presentation to my year 9 geography class that my flies were undone (yes, it was pointed out to me quite loudly!). I remember being so angry with a boy in year 6 that I deliberately stamped upon his leg during a football match at break time (and I remember the telling off I got for it afterwards!).

I don't think it's any surprise that many of our most vivid memories are coupled with strong emotions; whether emotions of happiness, sadness, fear or anger. Indeed it's an often quoted maxim that "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Numerous studies have reported that memory and learning are strongly affected by emotional moods¹. It was Anaïs Nin who commented that: "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

That's one of the reasons it was a privilege to be setting up a gazebo tent once more in a local secondary school just the second week into the term, welcoming year 7s with a variety of activities and games. Over the course of the week we spoke to more than 50 students at break time.

One of the activities we prepared for students was a giant snakes and ladders mat where they themselves were the counters! The spaces included questions to help the students talk

about their experiences of secondary school so far; questions like what's your favourite subject? how much homework have you got so far? what are you looking forward to?

Moments of transition and change are key formative experiences for young people.

It's likely that the early experiences of life at secondary school may contribute a disproportionate amount to how a student interprets their journey and frames their expectations.

Due to confirmation bias we interpret our experiences through the lens of what we were expecting. To put it bluntly: if you have a good first few weeks at secondary school, you're much more likely to notice the positive things about the transition and cope with the difficult changes more easily².

Sadly many of the young people that we work with through our Grow Intervention have already experienced very difficult moments in life by the time they get to secondary school. Research tells us of the significant impact that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can have upon a young person's health, wellbeing and general development³. Even though a friendly face and a game of snakes and ladders at break time may seem like a very small thing in comparison to such mountainous obstacles, I've learnt not to underestimate the value of the little things.

So it was a privilege to show my first lost year 7 of the year around a local secondary school as they arrived to me at the end of break time in tears. Not only would they be late to lesson but they would be arriving without the necessary change of kit for the lesson. They had lost their P.E. bag and feared the worst. I was able to reassure them that teachers are understanding for new students; these things happen and they would most likely not face a detention. We quickly traipsed around the most likely places;

“Where before there had been laughter, now there was only care and kindness from fellow students.”



their form room, their previous lesson, reception, Lost and Found. As we walked they shared with me that they had been having a tough time at home.

They liked this new school but they were not sleeping well. We finally found the bag (at the snack stop of course!) and made it to the lesson as other students were just coming out from getting changed. The teacher was very understanding and the student relieved. Things were not so bad after all.

And what of my friend who tripped over in the lunch hall? I've only told you half the story. What happened next is a year 9 student rose from their seat, walked over to my friend and offered to buy them a new lunch and sit with them. They reassured my friend that this would all be forgotten tomorrow. The whole atmosphere in the room changed and where before there had been laughter, now there was only care and kindness from fellow students.

It was one of the defining moments of my friend's school career and a powerful reminder of the value of courage and kindness. Here at Souster Youth we want to create more and more moments like that, giving students positive memories of secondary school that foster hope for the next day and live long in the memory.

Tim Sandford, Schools worker for Souster Youth.

¹See for example: Phelps, E.A. (2004) Human emotion and memory: interactions of the amygdala and hippocampal complex.

²Evangeliou et al. (2008) What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School?

³See for example: Boullier, M. and Blair, M. (2018) Adverse childhood experiences.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: SUSIE

We caught up with Susie, one of our Souster Youth volunteers, to find out what motivates her to volunteer with Souster Youth.

I joined Souster Youth as a volunteer in October 2021 after seeing their stall at the Charter fair. I started by observing an 'Ultimate Questions' Year 9 lesson that Tim was leading. I was impressed by the mature and thought-provoking participation of the students. Next, I supported a lunchtime well-being group for students facing exam pressure. This helped me develop relationships with a small group of students who told me that they appreciate a safe space to talk about school and home-life issues.

I wanted to do more, so I took the opportunity to participate in the Grow courses, firstly with Jason and then with Anna. I continue to be moved by the need amongst the young people in our area, yet encouraged by the support and help these courses provide. It's been incredibly encouraging to watch students as they find new ways of coping and as their resilience increases. Although some of them may



not be quite ready, those who are ready to commit to the process have been positively impacted by the Grow course.

It can be hard to measure the success of work with students—sometimes it feels like one step forward and two back. But I've seen real changes. I've seen the blessing of observing group members form strong friendship bonds with each other and have the realisation they are not alone in their struggles. The provision of an intentional, safe environment in many cases leads to a level of trust which allows young people to open up about difficult moments in their past experiences and present realities. In some cases, there has also been a gaining of confidence to reach out for help at home. For others, it's been a deepening of relationships with family and friend support structures which

is a clear sign of success. I've been humbled by their courage.

I would also like to mention the culture I have found within the Souster Youth team. I have found a sense of belonging and develop authentic relationships. Here, even difficult conversations can be discussed sensitively and in a safe environment with consideration for the mental and spiritual needs of the team. I've been incredibly thankful for the wealth of experience amongst the team and feel blessed to be able to learn from them whilst having the opportunity to love and support the young people they serve.

**Could you
volunteer
some time
to impact
a young
persons life?**

If you are interested in volunteering with Souster Youth you can get in touch with Tim or complete a volunteer application form here: www.sousteryouth.org.

Tim Sandford
Schoolsworker

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SLEEP IS YOUR SUPER POWER

Lots of us don't get enough sleep and not getting enough sleep can be a badge of honour showing how hard we work, or party! When we wake up we reach for the caffeine and a sugary breakfast. Later, we repeat the cycle for that much-needed boost to get us through what remains of our day.

The universities of Cambridge & Fudan, China surveyed 500,000 people aged between 38 and 73. They found that, as we get older, 7 hours of sleep may be enough for us to perform at our peak (May 2022).

According to sleep expert Matthew Walker, adults should aim for 8 hours sleep per night.

The average UK adult gets around 6 hours sleep per night, but 1-in-2 of us are surviving on even less than that. Sleep scientist David Dinges says "You can't maintain good mental function on less than six hours sleep per night."

Young people and sleep

Young people need more sleep than adults. During adolescence brains and bodies develop at a fast pace and sleep plays a crucial role. How much sleep do they need? Estimates we've found range from 9-12 hours, but always more than 8 hours of sleep per night.

At Souster Youth we talk about sleep to anyone who will listen! We run workshops and lessons about good sleep habits. The topic of sleep is also a recurring theme in our work with those struggling with their mental health. We meet young people and parents who know that they need more sleep. But they lack information about the importance of sleep and strategies to get more. We know that sleep is a key factor in good mental health and many young people aren't getting enough of it.

In our self-reported survey in one school, young people said they were getting 6 hours sleep per night.

"We know that sleep is a key factor in good mental health and many young people aren't getting enough of it!"

“There are no biological functions that do not benefit by a good nights sleep.”

Adolescents sleep later

Teenage bodies release the sleep chemical melatonin later in the day than in adults. They also sleep in later, that's because their body clock switches sleep chemicals off later too. This is something to bear in mind the next time your teenager sleeps in later than you think they should!

So here are a few of our favourite benefits of sleep and our top tips on best sleeping practise.

Why is sleep so important?

Getting enough sleep each night helps our:

- **Mental Health:** Sleep helps us regulate our emotions and cope with the demands of each day. Sleep helps us exercise self-control, make decisions and cope with stress.
- **Physical Health:** Sleep helps you gain less weight from what you eat, and to digest food. It also helps you fight diseases. It also helps support heart health, blood pressure and a healthy gut.

- **Brain Health:** sleep helps focus during the day, as well as learning and remembering more. Research also shows that sleep helps to reduce anxiety. It can also help us read the emotions of others, thus easing social interactions. Matthew Walker says “There are no biological functions that do not benefit by a good nights sleep.”

Sleep problems

If you, or someone you love is struggling with sleep at the moment, let us offer some words of reassurance. First, most negative effects of sleep deprivation come about through long-term sleep problems. Second, most phases of poor sleep do pass. Third, any statistics about the effects of poor sleep show likelihoods not certainties. Fourth, sleep is only one factor among many in supporting our health. Nutrition, exercise and socialising are also significant in health and wellbeing. There are lots of things you can do to improve sleep!



GETTING PRACTICAL

These things can help you get a good night's sleep, but you won't be able to do them all at once. Pick a few new things to try and build up from there. What could you try first?

Top tips

Bedtime Routine: design a routine that suits you.

- Pick some things from our sleep helps below (make sure your screens are off and your room is dark!)
- Add in some of your own ideas
- Plan it out in an order that works for you
- Decide when you'll start (see The Wind Down below)
- Set a reminder

Bedroom: you will sleep best in a room that is: cool, quiet, dark and safe

The Wind Down...

Think about how much sleep you want to get, and then work out what time you'd need to:

- Set your alarm for
- Start winding down (about 1 hour before)
- Turn off lights (about 15 mins before)
- Be asleep by...

Sleep Disturbers:

These things will not help you sleep well

- Screens and bright light
- Large meals
- Working late
- Big meals close to bed time
- Arguments
- Caffeine or alcohol

Sleep Helpers:

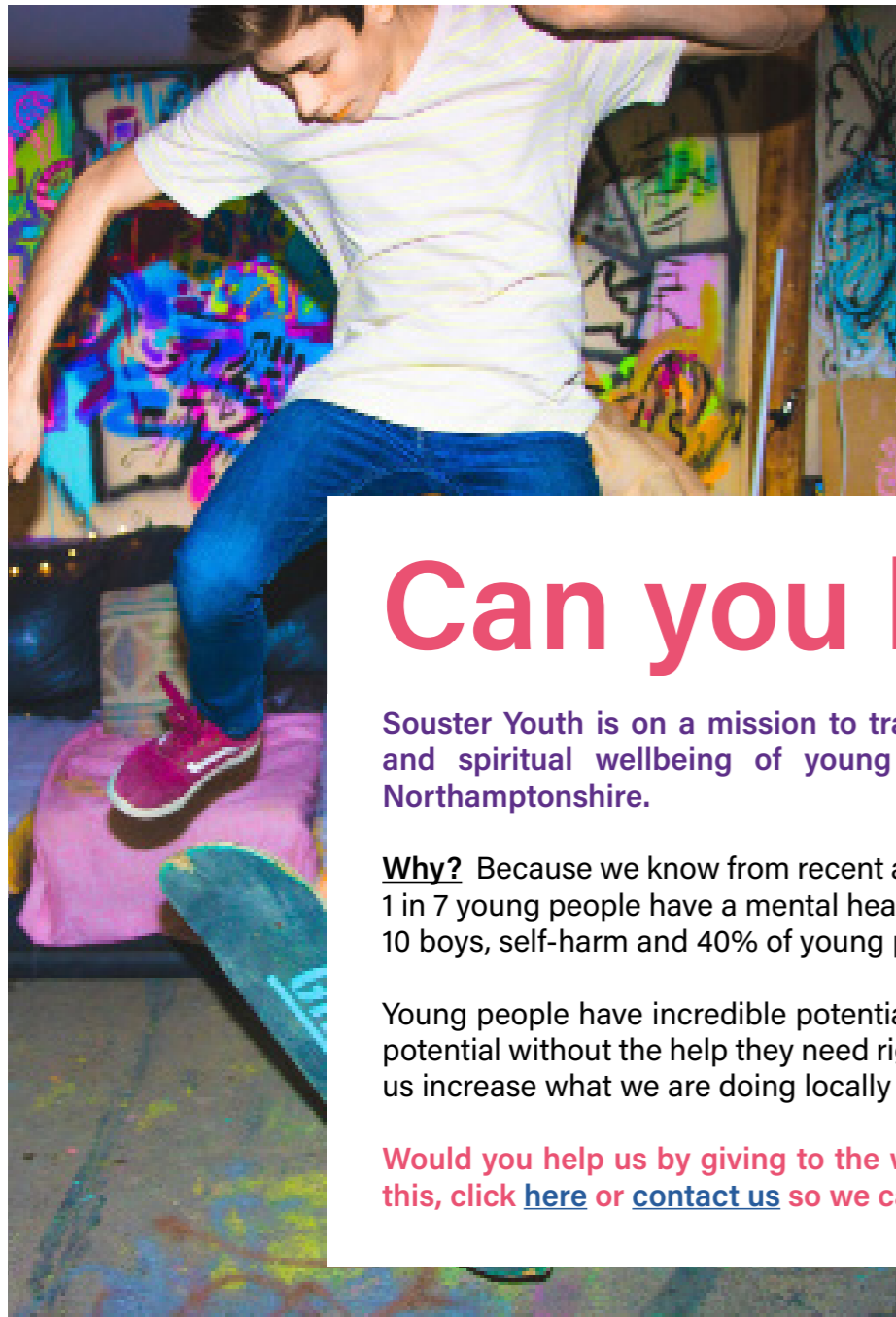
These things are good for sleep

- screen off (an hour before bed)
- Read a book
- Stretching
- A light snack
- Getting things organised for the next day
- Tidying your room
- A hot shower or bath
- Milky or herbal drinks
- Comfortable clothing

Find out more:

- The Awesome Power of Sleep, Nicola Morgan
- Why We Sleep, Matthew Walker
- <https://teensleephub.org.uk/resources/>

Jason Royce leads the work of Souster Youth.



Can you help us?

Souster Youth is on a mission to transform the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of young people aged 11-19 in east Northamptonshire.

Why? Because we know from recent academic studies that in the UK 1 in 7 young people have a mental health disorder; 1 in 5 girls, and 1 in 10 boys, self-harm and 40% of young people often feel lonely.

Young people have incredible potential, but many won't achieve that potential without the help they need right now. Your support can help us increase what we are doing locally for young people.

Would you help us by giving to the work of Souster Youth? To do this, click [here](#) or [contact us](#) so we can send you a giving form.

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