



LIFE IN SCHOOL POST-PANDEMIC

I walked into a school this week wearing a mask. Every student was wearing a mask. Every teacher was wearing a mask. Painted arrows on the floor, sprayed on by the School Head over the summer holidays, guided me around a one-way system. There's hand gel in every room and teachers teach from a tape-marked zone just in front of the whiteboard. The effects of COVID-19 are felt keenly in every room and every interaction. Year groups exist in 'bubbles' and large groups are sent home for online tutoring at the slightest hint of an infection.

If you'd have described this situation to me this time last year I would have said it was impossible, but 12 months later it is a reality up and down the country. Weird. But reality all the same.

Schools and their teaching staff are doing brilliantly. They are doing their very best to make the situation feel as normal as possible. You might not know that if you read the opinions of journalists and commentators, but we're seeing encouraging things in schools on the ground. We are even hearing positive things about staff morale and student attendance.

But, despite all of the positives, the challenges are very real too.

In a nationwide survey by YoungMinds 80% reported that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse. This was often related to increased feelings of anxiety, isolation, a loss of coping mechanisms or a loss of motivation. 31% of those

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receiving support before lockdown were unable to access it even though they still needed it.

Over the coming months we'll learn a great deal more about the impact on young people. So far, what we're seeing is mirroring the national picture. Young people have already been sharing with our team about loneliness and isolation, greater anxiety and physical violence at home. We feel the urgency and are already working closely with schools to get their students the help they need.

Each school we work with is taking a slightly different approach to the government guidance and that means we need to be flexible in our own approach. Here are 3 things we are doing in up to 5 local schools each:

1. **School-wide lessons** to promote better psychological health.
2. Reactive **pastoral support for students** both online and in person.
3. Online events to offer **support for parents** in promoting psychological health at home.

On top of this we still have limited face to face youth work happening from our centre in Thrapston.

During these strange times we are so grateful for your interest in our work and any support you can give too.

Jason Royce is the Director of Souster Youth.

How you can support us

We're on a mission to transform the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of young people in east Northamptonshire. You can help us in this goal by supporting us financially, through direct giving either via our [website](#) or by [contacting us](#) for a giving form. You can also give whilst you shop, at no extra cost to yourself - we are signed up with Give as You Live and Amazon Smile.



When you shop at over 4,000 top stores including John Lewis & Partners, Expedia and Marks & Spencer via Give as you Live Online, they'll turn a percentage of your spend into free funds for us! Simply sign up, search for the retailer and start shopping. It's that simple!

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The Article:

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Anna Freij on the therapeutic work of Souster Youth

Meet Bobby

"It felt all tangled up in my mind but the mourning helped me to lay it all out and to look at it all and then it felt untangled" and "I was a bit sceptical to start with; now I've got hope. You show us practical solutions, and ask about what I have done, not just what I'm going to do"

That's how Bobby described how she felt after being part of one of our groups. Every term our Psychological health work supports struggling young people to face their challenges, and our team equip them with strategies that work.

It's so important that we keep reaching out to students like Bobby and they always tell us "there are more like me that need help", and it is certainly true. In 2019, the Centre for Mental Health reported that in an average classroom of 30 fifteen-year-old students:

- 3 could have a diagnosable mental health problem
- 1 could have experienced the death of a parent or sibling
- 6 could be self-harming

- around 7 could have experienced bullying
- 9 could be living in poverty
- 6 could have experienced severe maltreatment

Furthermore, and despite this level of need, school leaders tell us they "could not possibly afford to buy in [the] counselling services" that we provide. Thanks to our generous supporters we are able to meet some of this need, offering our work to three schools at no charge.

How we help

Using the very best thinking and research available to us we've developed an 8-10 hour course that can be delivered over an academic term, it gives young people space to talk and the skills to cope.

In writing our resources we have been careful to avoid common but fundamentally flawed assumptions about, and approaches to, psychological health. Approaches like 'building self-esteem' and fostering blind optimism simply either aren't supported by the weight of evidence or don't stand up to the ups and downs of daily life.

Our approach to helping young people with the challenges of life is based on facing the realities of life with honesty, courage and finding solid foundations for self-worth. We aim to help young people to see that psychological health includes feeling all emotions and knowing how to manage them.

The themes we cover are: feeling safe; hope; making meaning; mourning what needs to be mourned; facing reality; anxiety; anger; reality check; dealing with difficult situations; failure and confidence.

Our work gives young people strategies to cope and helps change their behaviour. One said:

'I got really angry, but then I thought, 'Breathe!' and I talked to my mum. My anger issues have calmed down. I don't hit people as much as I used to.'

More help is needed

National studies are indicating a sharp increase

in poor psychological health in the wake of the national COVID-19 pandemic and we are already working with our local schools to help meet the need. This term we are delivering psychological health lessons across 5 schools and offering fast response pastoral support on the ground in schools and online.

One school leader said:

"We are extremely fortunate to have the support of your organisation. I have never before been in a school lucky enough to have the support of such a professional and supportive team."

We are making a difference but we know young people need us to offer our work more widely. That's why, over the next 3 years, we plan to strengthen the team by recruiting and training staff and volunteers as well as increasing the number of schools we work in.

Anna Freij leads on psychological wellbeing for Souster Youth.



IN FOCUS:

SAME STORM, DIFFERENT BOATS

We were invited into Prince William School to help students reflect upon their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic through year group assemblies.

We invited the students to think about the way the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone; that we are all in the same storm. And yet, we are in different boats as we have been affected in different ways.

Each student received a small boat. The students reflected upon their individual journey, writing down things they were thankful for, things that have been difficult and also how they've adapted and changed.

"The world felt apocalyptic- it was terrifying the number of deaths from COVID-19. Life can be interrupted so quickly... it's not stable."
— Year 9 student

The students also heard the well-known story from the Christian tradition of Jesus calming the storm. They were invited to reflect upon what calms their storm and the support around them should they need it.

It was heart-wrenching to read stories of loss, frustration, anger and loneliness. For some students this has been a very difficult time.



Yet there were also many written stories of growth, thankfulness and appreciation, especially for quality time with their family.

"I learnt to be more grateful for everyday things."
— Year 10 student

And in placing their boats together, the students drew solace from the fact that they don't face this storm alone. We may be in different boats, but we will come through this time together.

Tim Sandford leads on formal education for Souster Youth.



The Diary: Coming up this term

OCTOBER

- 12 YMT Racial Justice (2)
- 15 The Way youth group

NOVEMBER

- 5 The Way youth group
- 9 YMT Racial Justice (3)
- 19 The Way youth group

DECEMBER

- 3 The Way youth group
- 7 Trust Board meeting
- 14 YMT Racial Justice (4)
- 17 The Way youth group

We are facing a time of unprecedented challenges and change. But here at Souster Youth we remain committed to supporting young people in our local communities.

The Souster Hub office remains open to phone calls and the answer phone is checked regularly. As usual you can email us any time.

Before you go...

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.

We see the incredible potential of young people, but many won't achieve that potential without the help they need right now. We would like to increase what we are doing locally to help 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.