

SOUSTER YOUTH ISSUE #4

ARTICLES, NEWS & INSPIRATION

Meet Julia

Drop-in
is OPEN!

A learning
partnership

We're
changing
lives

Cooking
up a
friendship

FEBRUARY 2023



Director's Letter

As I write this I can hear the joyful sounds of our new drop-in centre. There are fun conversations, and a more serious one about whether it would be better to be the smartest person in the world or the richest person in the world. I can see two students chatting for the first time over a couple of fizzy drinks. And there's a game of Connect Four that has become rather competitive to a cry of "winner takes all!"

Drop-in at Souster Youth is officially open and it's great to see a growing band of Souster team and volunteers breaking new ground. We're reaching young people we weren't reaching before and, whilst it's early days, they're finding a safe place to talk, build new friendships and have fun.

We're also glad that our friends from CHAT Youth Counselling have two weekly drop-in sessions in our building. Our base is serving young people in new ways.

It's great to see the Souster Hub being used as it was always meant to be; a home for young people. But there's much more work that needs to be done so that we can truly welcome young people and provide a space that shows them how much we value them and how amazing each one is.

I hope you're ready to dive into the next few pages. Here's what you'll find;

- Just over the page you can meet one of our brilliant volunteers, Julia. We couldn't do even half of our work without our volunteers!
- On page 4 you can read more about our drop-in and Bex's vision for the future.
- We love schools! Turn to page 7 and read Tim's thoughts on the important role our schools play.



- On page 11 you can hear from Anna about the impact we're making on young people's mental health.
- We finish up with food. Find out, on page 12 how we're learning about friendship whilst filling our bellies with the finest cuisine...last time out Chicken Teriyaki stir fry!

I hope you enjoy reading, now I'm off for a quick game of table tennis!

Jason Royce leads the work of Souster Youth.

Meet Julia.



SY: Tell us about yourself.

My name is Julia and I am a member of Nene Valley Vineyard in Raunds. I have been a schoolteacher for most of my life and have recently retired. I have three grown up children and two grandchildren. I like to keep fit and enjoy gardening.

SY: So why Souster Youth?

Souster Youth have such a wealth of expertise and experience in helping young people that I feel it is an honour to partner with them. I am learning so much.

SY: What do you enjoy about volunteering?

I just love spending time with young people and hopefully helping them with their problems, of which some have many, and showing them the love Jesus has for them.

SY: What's been one challenging thing?

I have recently been observing and starting to assist with the Grow Course groups. When the young people share their life stories it can be heartbreaking.

SY: What's been your biggest highlight?

My highlight was taking part in the "GSUS Live" workshops at Manor School last year when all students in years 7, 8 and 9 received an interactive lesson on faith. It was really powerful and the lunch time club that came out of that week is still growing.

“I would thoroughly recommend anyone who has a heart for young people to join in with what Souster are doing.”

Could you be a volunteer?

Visit sousteryouth.org for more information or call us on 01832 735999.

In October's issue we introduced **Bex Hunter** who joined the Souster team to launch our Drop-in work with young people. A few months on, we caught up with Bex to hear how it's been going so far. >>

>>Through Souster's work in schools we have been able to make a real impact in the lives of young people. But the problems that young people face don't end at the school gates and so it is important that our support doesn't either.

We wanted to know what young people thought about the provision in their local area so we surveyed 268 young people from Thrapston and beyond. Whilst they were relatively happy with the quality of what was provided (e.g. the skatepark) they wanted more variety. They wanted more things available for them to do. We asked them whether they would want to attend a drop-in in their area and **206 of them** were interested in coming!

And so we launched our after school drop-in about a month ago now. This brand new provision has already gathered a core group of young people who attend regularly and who are inviting their friends along. There is also a fantastic bunch of volunteers joining us on this journey, including two of our young people who have stepped up to become our very first **young leaders!**

The reason we are doing this is because we know that drop-in spaces like this can make a massive difference to young people. In an educational setting it can be hard for young people to open up, and our work in schools is always restricted by the time pressures of the school day. In an informal setting like a

drop-in young people can talk freely in their own time. Sometimes having a hot chocolate or a bunch of Uno cards in your hand makes things easier too.

Youthscape recently carried out some research exploring **"the impact of open-access community projects, with an after school drop-in at the centre"**¹. Do you know what they found out? Young people value places like these because they are **"safe and positive spaces to be"**, because they can get **"support from youth workers"** and because they help them **"grow in confidence and social skills"**.

That's everything I want our drop-in to be, a space where **all** young people feel safe and supported, and that through being a part of this community they would grow and thrive, becoming who they are meant to be.



Bex Hunter is our Drop-in Lead.

The Drop-in is open for 11-18s every Friday after school from 3.45pm until 6.00pm at The Souster Hub on Market Road, Thrapston. It's FREE to attend. **Term-time only.**

¹ Youthscape Centre of Research: 'Feels Like Home', November 2021.





It's been a turbulent time for education in this country. **Tim Sandford** shares some thoughts about why he sees a lot of good in the work that schools do. >>

A Learning Partnership

>> **I'm going to come out and say it: I am pro-school.**

Now relax: this isn't an editorial opinion on whether teachers should or shouldn't strike. I'm sure you already have an opinion on that and I'm sure it's the right one. Probably.

No, stepping back from all of that, I just want to reaffirm the good that schools do. Overall, I mean, in the big picture of things: aren't you glad that we have great schools in this country?

And I want to start with Socrates.

Socrates and the School Curriculum

It was the Greek philosopher Socrates who is accredited as saying: "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance."

Socrates' big idea was this: human choice is motivated by a desire for happiness. The better we know ourselves, the better we can make decisions that lead to our happiness and the happiness of others. Education, as Socrates saw it, wasn't merely a process by which we learn skills that grant us employment— education was everything! It was the very heart of life, the process of discovering the universe and most importantly our own place within it. For Socrates the whole of life was a classroom, the learning never stopped.

Fast forward 2,500 years and in this country we have the National Curriculum.

It wasn't written by Socrates, but there are some parallels.

It states that:

Every state-funded school must offer a curriculum which:

- promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society
- prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experience of later life

The National Curriculum aims to "introduce pupils to the best that has been thought and said, and help engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement."

Isn't that an incredible aim? (How I wish I'd appreciated this when I was trying to get out of doing my year 9 geography homework).

Schools get things wrong

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying by any means that schools can do no wrong. There are many times schools don't live up to that laudible aim.

The chances are that if you're reading this you care deeply about the education of young people. Perhaps you're involved in education yourself or perhaps you know a young person that is.



Maybe you've known a young person who has been bullied at school and let down by a pastoral system that is struggling to cope. Or maybe a young person has told you about the difficulties of learning from a non-specialist teacher whilst a member of staff is off sick. Perhaps you even remember yourself the giddy excitement of having a supply teacher and the chaos that ensued; *God bless them.*

Within education some things are clearly not working. In 2022, more children were unhappy with school than any other aspect of life¹. For some young people, school is a really difficult experience and we are not doing enough to make things work for them.

Trust in institutions is low

Yet we must also recognise that we're living in a cultural moment when trust in institutions is particularly low. And not without reason! Looking back over the past few years there have been scandals in the government, the Church, the police and the media; to name but a few. What impact does all of this have upon how society sees an institution like the education system?

I remember the first time I witnessed a parent lying

“Schools help engender an appreciation of human creativity

to get their child out of trouble. I reflected upon the mixed up values that were being displayed. The parent and the child alike saw the school as the enemy. Rather than seeing being in trouble as a learning opportunity, the parent saw this as a way to reassert their bond of friendship with their child. Lying to the school was a way of saying: "It's okay, I've got your back, we're in this together."

Working together

The school is never the enemy. At a fundamental level there is a shared goal between the school, the home and the child. Everyone wants the child to flourish. I've been into many schools over the past 18 years and I've never met a single staff

member that's not true for.

An ancient writer wrote these words: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: if one of them falls down, the other can help them up."²

At their best that's what we see schools doing; day in, day out. When young people fall, they are helped up and given another chance to try again. I've lost count of the number of times I've seen a poster on the classroom wall that reads: "Mistakes are a part of learning."

Last year we got to work with a group of students who had already reached their last chance saloon. They had burned through report card after report card, disrupting lessons and displaying (at times) some shocking behaviour.

We took them away to a forest to get them away from the classroom routine. They earned a qualification in survival skills. But more than that, they re-engaged with the learning process. They returned to school and their behaviour improved.

Do you know who accompanied them on that residential trip? It was the very same staff members who had been marking their report cards, giving them warnings, trying to spark a change. They were there because they wanted to see a change

in these young people. And they were willing to sleep on a forest floor under a shelter they made themselves to communicate that.

A Learning Partnership

All of this is why I quite like the phrase **a learning partnership**— representing the partnership between home, the school and the young person.

It's like being tethered together in a three-legged race. If only one partner makes the effort, you're not going to win. But if you're pulling together in the same direction, you can really build up some speed!

Perhaps this article has reminded you to thank a school staff member who has made a difference to you or a young person you know, or to give some positive feedback about something you appreciated.

You should do it— it will make their day.



Tim Sandford is the Schoolswork Lead for Souster Youth.

¹ *The Good Childhood Report 2022.*

² *The Bible. Ecclesiastes 4:9.*

WE'RE CHANGING LIVES

It's been a while since we updated you about the impact of our Grow Course groups. They've been phenomenal! **Anna Freij** has an update on what's been happening and how Souster Youth is making a difference in the lives of young people. >>

>>The bell rings and in come six young faces. They're keener through the door than last week, now that they are familiar with what to expect at a Grow group. They enter with all the chitter chatter of the week so far; except Zak, who comes in last. He is quiet and tentative. He sinks down into his seat. He's had a bad week and he wonders if anyone from the group will notice. Then a Souster Youth volunteer asks him how he's feeling today..

We have had the wonderful privilege of running intervention groups like these in local schools for a total of 21 consecutive school terms now, including throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

During that time we've seen some incredible impact, as young people bravely invite us and each other into their difficulties and sorrows, and then put into action coping strategies that transform their social and emotional wellbeing.

We measure the impact of our Grow Intervention using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is the industry standard measurement tool for wellbeing. Our most recent group of students had a massive 48% improvement in their WEMWBS scores. To put that in context: an increase of as little as 5-10% can be enough to lift a young person out of crisis.

We also interview each student when they have finished their time with the group. They are encouraged to reflect back upon the group process and give us some feedback upon how they found it. Opposite is some of the feedback they've given us about their experience. Confidential details have been removed to protect anonymity.



Anna Freij is our Psychological Health Lead.

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

"Whenever I feel anxious or overwhelmed, I think about this group and use what we've done."

"At the start of the year, I got bullied and my confidence dropped. It helped to get feelings out and express them to others. [Before] I couldn't tell anyone anything because I didn't trust anyone. Now I can, so it's not stuck inside and thinking about it all the time."

"I'm doing a lot better. There's been a significant change in how I feel and how I approach stuff. My anger has calmed."

"I thought it might help a bit, but I didn't believe I could possibly come as far as I have."

"The group helped me understand what caused my feelings. I'm using better strategies to calm me down and help my anxiety. My parents have said I seem more energetic and happier at home."

"I've been struggling in the dark. It's helped me express. It's felt so good to open the jar and let out what's been bottled up so long."

"I feel like there is **hope**."



COOKING UP A FRIENDSHIP

Young people from The Way after-school group have been brushing up on their culinary skills as they explore together what the main ingredients of a successful friendship are. Each week the young people learn how to cook a meal for themselves and explore a different aspect of relationships including communication, authenticity and trust. (There's no back-up plan. If the young people don't cook something edible... no one eats!)

Recent studies have found that loneliness is on the rise amongst young people¹, and this was the case even before the CV-19 pandemic hit². What's more: **this generation spends significantly less time with their peers face-to-face compared with previous generations³.**

All of this means that there's a pressing need to develop the social skills that enable strong, healthy relationships. And that's what this course is all about.



One of our volunteers said: "I was so impressed with the way that the young people threw themselves into the challenge of making a meal together and talked honestly about their friendships."

Thanks to Thrapston Primary School for the use of their kitchen space that enabled this course to take place.

¹ Co-op Foundation, *A Friend in Need* (2022)

² Ibbetson, C., *YouGov Poll* (2019)

³ Twenge, J., *iGen* (2017).

The Way youth group meets on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at the Souster Hub on Market Road from 4pm-6pm. It's FREE to attend and includes a meal. We explore what the Christian faith has to say to us today. **Term-time only.**



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 6 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.

Support us as you shop!

You can also support our work as you shop, and at no extra cost to yourself. We are signed up with Give as You Live.



Give as you Live®
Online

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!



sousteryouth.org

The Souster Youth Trust, The Souster Youth Hub, 30 Market Road, Thrapston, Northants, NN14 4JU. A Registered Charity (England and Wales: 1162368)