

SOUSTER YOUTH ISSUE #1

ARTICLES, NEWS & INSPIRATION

Meet Megan

What's school for?

353 miles to
change a heart

How you can help
us reach more
young people

SUMMER 2021



Director's Letter

It's good to be back in school this term and things are perhaps starting to feel a bit more 'normal!'

Whether it is supporting a year 11 with an eating disorder, or a year 8 student who was devastated to learn his dad didn't want any contact with him, our normal often involves being with young people in difficult situations.

As things open up again we're able to be present for the kinds of moments that get us out of bed in the morning; those moments where young people realise they're not alone and we get a chance to listen and offer real hope. It is our privilege.

We're also back into lessons, assemblies and groups where we help young people explore the big questions of life.

The content in these pages carries all of this; our hope to see transformation in young

people, our care when they are hurting and the power of asking the important questions.

There's no shortage of content to get your teeth into in this issue because we're exploring two very big questions, 'what's the point of school?' (page 4) and 'how can we start to engage, very practically, with the environmental crisis?' (page 8). Just a couple of small issues then!

Expert guides will lead us in exploring more. Of course there is much more to say on these themes, but we hope these articles get you thinking.

You'll also meet the latest member to join our team; there's an interview with Megan on the next page.

I hope you enjoy reading through.

Jason Royce leads the work of Souster Youth.



Meet Megan.



In March we welcomed **Megan Wild** to the Souster Youth team after her recent role overseeing an administration department in Northampton. Megan's previous company supplied medical equipment to frontline medical services across the UK and vaccine development organisations, including those developing vaccines for COVID-19.

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

MW: I saw the passion Souster Youth has to see a positive change in young people. There is so much need and opportunity to help, so I wanted to get involved.

SY: What will you be doing?

MW: I will be a welcoming first point of contact when people first make contact with us, particularly when they visit the Souster Youth Hub in Thrapston. My role is also to make sure the office is running smoothly and provide administrative support to Jason and the board of trustees. Its definitely a varied role, but that is something I'm looking forward to!

QUICK-FIRE ROUND

In a quiet moment you'll most likely find me.... Sleeping, I could fall asleep anywhere.

Last album or playlist I streamed... Chris Tomlin & Friends
I'm at my best when... There is food involved, I am very food driven.

Weirdest habit: I buy food I am craving but then I save it ready for the next time I'm craving it. Yes, really.

Cats or dogs? Cats!!

Starter & Main or Main & dessert? Starter & Main!!

Summer or winter? Summer!!

Toto or Queen? Toto!!

3 Things I couldn't live without: Lip balm, My cat (Shadow), Jono (my husband)

3 Things I wouldn't miss: Traffic, Hoovering, Coffee.

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

MW: There are so many amazing things, but for sure, the people I work with, how welcoming they have been and patient while I learn the ropes. The team are a strong, encouraging, hardworking team, and I am not just saying that because it's in the newsletter. The working environment is bliss!

Megan Wild

PA to the Director
Office Manager

How to get in touch:

e. megan@sousteryouth.org
t. 01832 735999

WHAT'S SCHOOL FOR?

When the government announced the roadmap for the lifting of lockdown restrictions beginning with the return of primary and secondary school students on March 8th, a barrage of questions followed from the media, parents, teachers, community leaders and academic think-tanks. Although parents were (mostly) breathing a small sigh of relief at the imminent end to home-schooling, people up-and-down the country were all asking the same questions: what now for our children? There were practical questions: Is this the right>>

>>time to return? Will they be safe? Shouldn't there be a phased return? How can schools be expected to implement an effective virus testing system in such a short space of time?

And there were academic questions: What now for our children's education? How will they ever catch up on the learning they have missed? With GCSEs and A-Levels cancelled for 2021, what data will teachers use to guide their assessments?

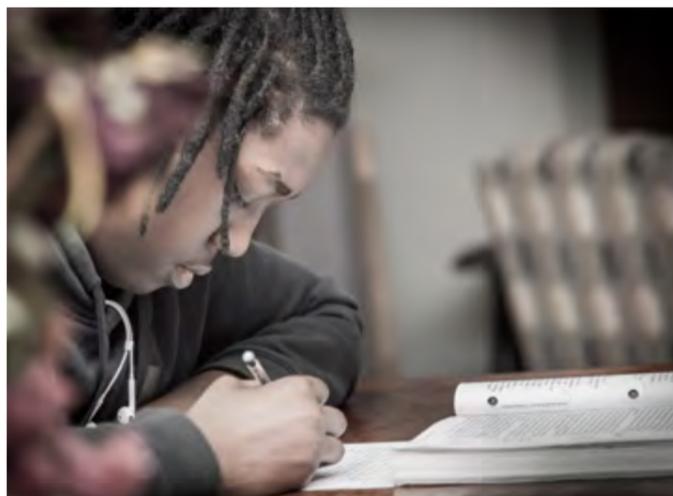
It's a reality that whilst some students thrived when learning from home, many students struggled for a variety of reasons; a lack of motivation, poor access to technology, a loss of routine and structure, little peer support, a lack of access to expert help, and a chaotic home environment, to name a few.

One question that is being considered is whether students can be helped to catch up on the learning they have missed. In this fast paced and ever-changing situation it is difficult to predict which possibilities will turn into policy, yet at the time of writing summer schools, shorter holidays and longer school hours are all suggestions on the table.

However we must remember that the students themselves have been experiencing the greatest disruptive event in a generation. These 11-18 year olds are not immune from the anxiety and sense of loss that we have all been feeling. Far from it, in many ways they have felt the pain of lockdown most keenly, as they have not yet developed the sophisticated coping mechanisms that mature adults take for granted, and they have been deprived of the time with peers that is so foundational at this stage of their development.

"Students have been experiencing the greatest disruptive event in a generation"





Little surprise then that youth researchers and practitioners are beginning to talk about the mental health pandemic amidst the pandemic. In a survey of more than 2,000 young people with a history of mental health needs last year, 80% agreed the coronavirus had made their mental health worse¹. This statistic sits within the context that before the pandemic began, five secondary school students out of a class of 30 had a probable diagnosable mental disorder².

And many school leaders are all too aware of these statistics. So whilst the external questions may be around the academic learning that students have missed, the internal thoughts of members of staff often turn to Charlotte who feels too anxious to come to school, Sam whose angry behaviour masks the underlying insecurity, hurt and grief that he feels inside, and to Gabriella who began self-harming when she lost her grandmother.

A false dichotomy

But do we really have to choose between emotional health or academic achievement?

There's good reason to think that we don't. Schools, of course, are primarily a place of

“Schools provide so much more than lessons”

education, but they are also so much more than that. They are also a body of people, with a shared purpose and journey. And as one ancient writer describes it: *“When one member of the body suffers, all members suffer with them; if one member is honoured, all members rejoice with them.”* The culture of a school (or any organisation for that matter) shines most brightly at these times when their core values are put to the test.

Schools are not purposed to be “exam factories”. The responsibility they bear is to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. They should also make

good provision for the personal, social and health education of students³.

And research⁴ suggests that when a whole-school approach to wider learning and the emotional health of students is put into place, not only does the emotional health of students improve, but also their academic achievement along with it, for the two are inextricably linked.

A recovery curriculum

So what does this look like in practice?

Schools all across the country are putting into a place a recovery curriculum that takes into account both the academic needs of students and their mental and emotional needs. Many schools are taking a layered approach, respecting the differentiated needs of the school community.

There's no quick fix. Some students have lost loved ones to the coronavirus and are grieving. All students have lost something — structures, routines, family income, the freedom to socialise, learning opportunities, rites of passage (trips, sports days, school productions), a sense of safety.

Here at Souster Youth we have been journeying

with young people throughout this pandemic. Before lockdown we were there in schools, supporting young people. During lockdown we moved our support online, reaching out to young people at their point of need. And now that students have returned to school we are there once again, for the Charlotte, the Sam and the Gabriella, and also for the tired but committed school staff trying to find their way through.

Tim Sandford leads on formal education for Souster Youth.

References:

- ¹YoungMinds Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs (2020).
- ²NHS Digital: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England (2020).
- ³Department for Education: The National Curriculum (2014).
- ⁴Public Health England: The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment: A briefing for head teachers, governors and staff in education settings (2014).

353 miles to change a heart.



My 7 year old twins are early risers.

It was a beautiful misty morning in late summer. At 6:15am they had their wellies on and they were ready to start the day. I wandered behind them sleepily, they led. It's always interesting when children lead. They went first to the plum tree. A few had ripened nicely so we all picked one. The soft velvety skin felt cold and fresh, covered in morning dew. Succulent and sweet, the juice dripped off our chins. Next we pinched lavender between our thumbs and forefingers, releasing the intoxicating fragrance. They sniffed deeply, getting as much into their nostrils as possible... and then they were on to the next thing. A big black slug. Slow, slimy and disgusting. Or so I thought. My daughter crouched down and stared in amazement as it stretched out in all its glory, tentacles fully raised, sliding across the path to its daytime cover.

When it comes to environmental issues, how do we help young people move from knowing the right answers, to living it out in practice in their everyday life?

Tearfund and Youthscape recently surveyed 630 young Christians from the UK, asking what they thought about climate, the church and their faith. The results were stark, but maybe not all that surprising...

9 out of 10 young people are concerned about the climate crisis, but only 1 out of 10 think their churches are doing enough about it.

This got me thinking: How many of these young people that ticked the box saying that they care for the environment have ever had a real opportunity to show how much they care? And do they care?

There is a big difference between knowing which box to tick and actually doing something about it. I genuinely think young people do care, often passionately, but they are rarely given opportunities and responsibilities to live this out.

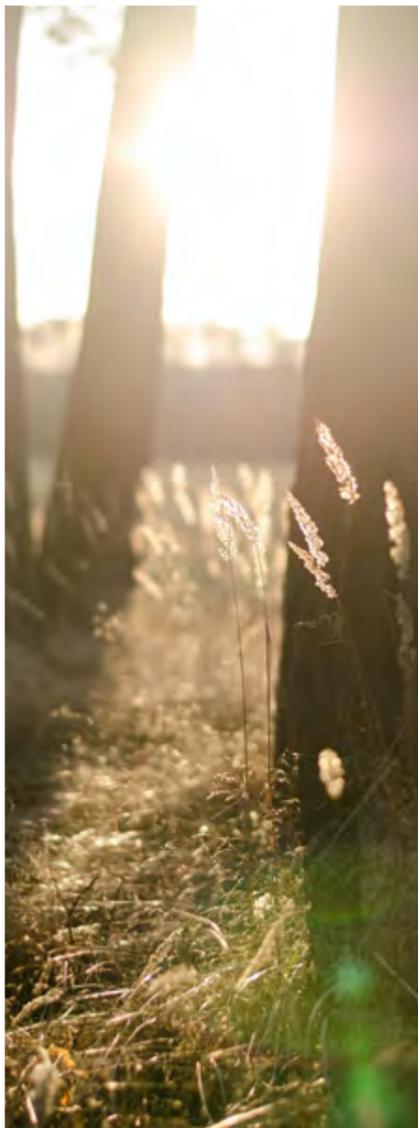
So, where do we start? Let's start with slugs. The word

slug sounds like it feels – slow, slimy and disgusting. When was the last time you heard that word said without being accompanied by other words such as “ugh” or “disgusting” or “I just trod on a”? When was the last time you heard someone say a slug was breathtakingly beautiful?

When was the last time you were thankful for slugs? If you're like me... never.

“9 out of 10 young people are concerned about the climate crisis, but only 1 in 10 think their churches are doing enough about it.”





"Can I touch the slug, dad?"
 "No."
 "Why?"

"Errr, well, umm [no reason at all]... Yes, but be gentle!"
 I watched as Emily gently ran her finger down its back and marvelled at the sticky texture. We watched as it recoiled to protect itself. Beautiful. Glistening. Designed.

They kept walking. I followed. What else would we notice? The next door neighbour's cat had a tiny feather caught in its whiskers. We could hear the rumble of a distant aeroplane and the screeching sound of a juvenile buzzard calling for its mum. The fluffy thistle seeds felt so soft between our fingers. Next were the cobwebs, glistening in the morning dew. My son has a visual impairment, so I bent the tall cow parsley over towards him so he could see really close. Beautiful strings of minuscule diamonds illuminated by the rising sun. A terrifying net trapping loads of tiny meals. Breathtaking artistry that I walk past every day.

If I lived right next door to the National Gallery, it would seem crazy never even to pop inside to at least take a quick look – yet we do that every day with the natural world. We walk straight past.

"If I lived right next door to the National Gallery, it would seem crazy never even to pop inside to at least take a quick look – yet we do that every day with the natural world. We walk straight past."

I've been thinking about how all of this helps me to engage with the Climate Crisis.

The crucial COP26 Climate Talks are coming to Glasgow later this year. From 1st – 12th November 2021, the UK will host COP26 – the 26th UN Climate Change conference of parties.

If we wait for the media to tell us what to believe and when to believe it, with our minds scrolling briefly with the words under our thumb, then our hearts will not really connect at all and our actions will remain unchanged.

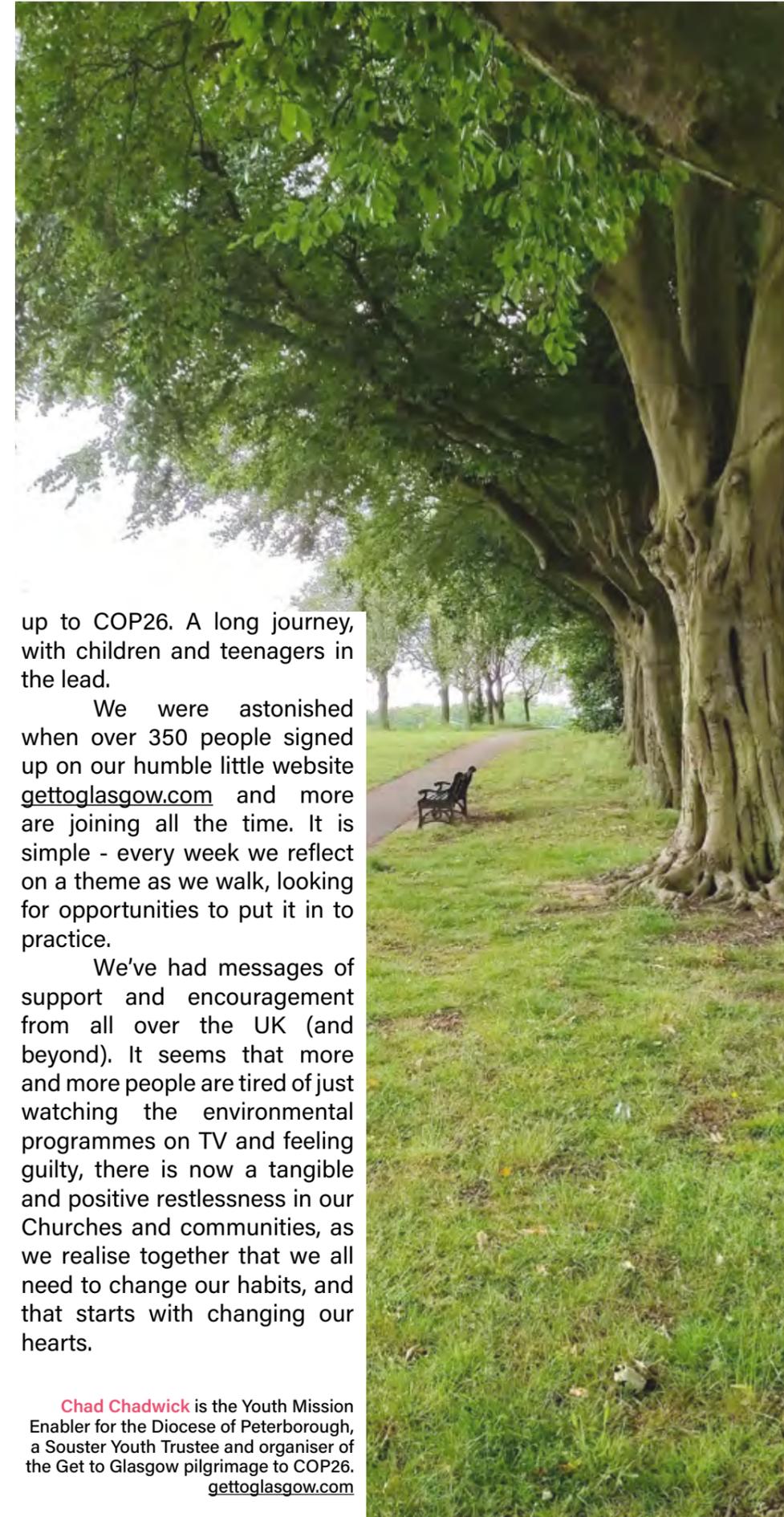
So I began to wonder what might happen if we enabled children and young people to lead us on a long pilgrimage, an opportunity to slowly have a change in our hearts. We texted a few people and invited them to work out the distance from their front door to Glasgow (it is 353 miles for us), encouraging them to join us in walking the equivalent distance in the months leading

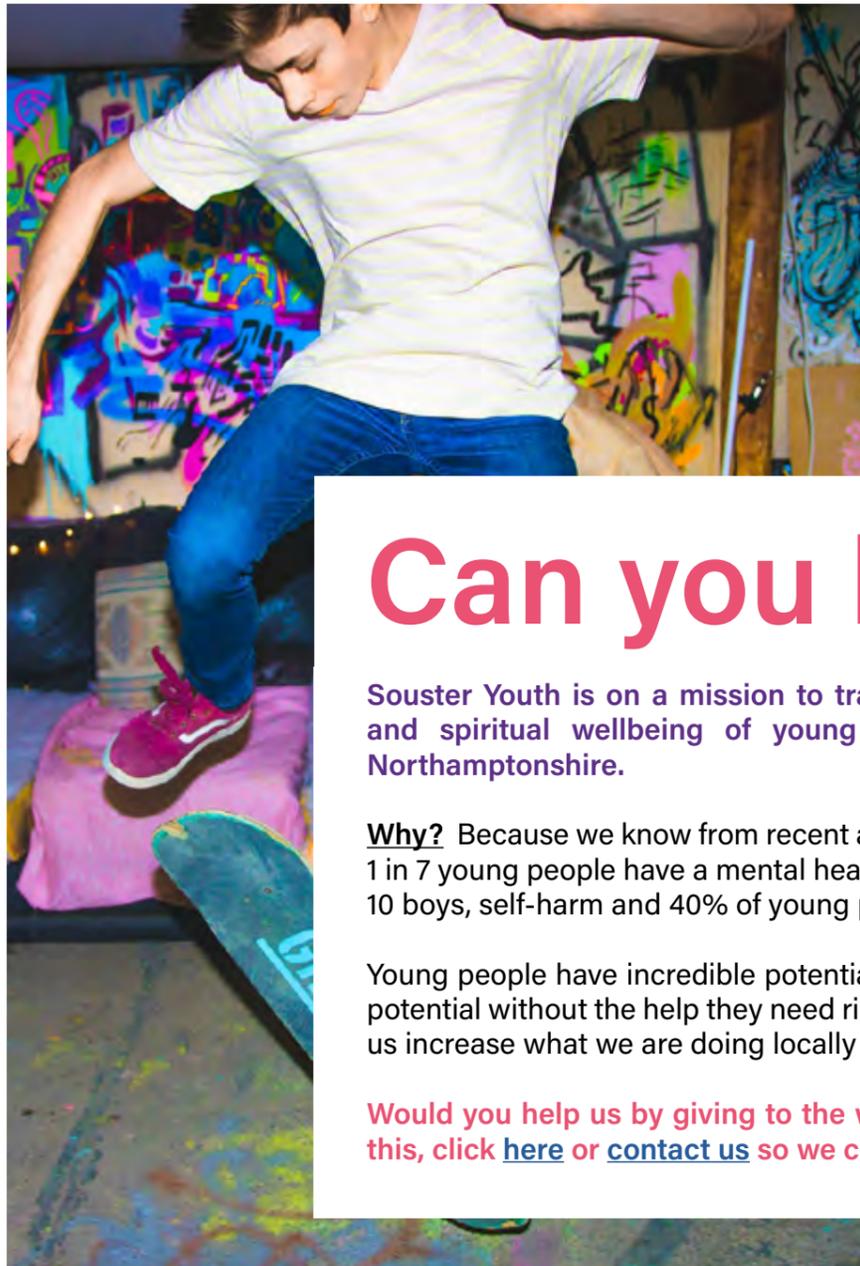
up to COP26. A long journey, with children and teenagers in the lead.

We were astonished when over 350 people signed up on our humble little website gettoglasgow.com and more are joining all the time. It is simple - every week we reflect on a theme as we walk, looking for opportunities to put it in to practice.

We've had messages of support and encouragement from all over the UK (and beyond). It seems that more and more people are tired of just watching the environmental programmes on TV and feeling guilty, there is now a tangible and positive restlessness in our Churches and communities, as we realise together that we all need to change our habits, and that starts with changing our hearts.

Chad Chadwick is the Youth Mission Enabler for the Diocese of Peterborough, a Souster Youth Trustee and organiser of the Get to Glasgow pilgrimage to COP26. gettoglasgow.com





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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