

SOUSTER YOUTH ISSUE #6

ARTICLES, NEWS & INSPIRATION

Meet Bethan

A new
chapter

Drop-in
update

Kai's
story

DECEMBER 2023



Souster
Youth

Director's Letter

Welcome back to our newsletter. I've just landed back in the office after a period of sabbatical [see box]. I've reclaimed my desk, found my coffee cup and now I'm pleased to share this newsletter with you.

During my sabbatical, the dedicated work at Souster Youth did not skip a beat, thanks to the stellar efforts of our staff and volunteers. Special thanks go to Tim, who stepped in as Acting Director. Whilst I was away, Tim let loose with a crowbar in our building! Read about what he was doing and how that is helping us to dream about the future on page [4-5].

A **sabbatical** is a traditional time of rest, rooted in the ancient practice of the Sabbath, which signifies a time for rejuvenation. Historically, it originates from the ancient Hebrew practice of 'shmita', where every seven years, agricultural land was given rest. This concept was modernised when Harvard University in 1880, and subsequently other institutions, began offering sabbaticals to foster rest, recovery, and innovative thinking in their staff.

Our drop-in program has seen an exciting and significant expansion. Bex and her team are reaching new groups of young people all the time. Find out more on page [6-7].

We are also thrilled to introduce a new face to our team—meet Bethan on the opposite page. Her arrival marks a fresh addition to our passionate team.

During the past few days in the office, I've been listening to our amazing staff and volunteers. They've been telling me about young people finding a place to belong at our drop-in centre. I've heard other stories about how our team push through all kinds of challenges so that young people facing extreme hardship can find



hope on the other side of their difficulties. I'm already seeing the impact of local people making donations of money, time and skills in order to support our growing work. (Thanks to all of you!)

Stories like these mean I return to Souster Youth with great pride and enthusiasm - we're going to continue lifting up young people. I am excited to embark on the next leg of our journey with renewed energy and insight.

Thank you for your interest in our work, for being part of our story and for supporting the transformative work we do at Souster Youth.

Jason

Jason Royce leads the work of Souster Youth.

Meet Bethan



SY: Tell us about yourself.

My name is Bethan. I'm married to Tom and we have two children Chloe (11) and Joshua (8). I currently split my time working here at Souster Youth as the PA/Office Manager and also in the Bread Basket in Thrapston.

SY: So why Souster Youth?

I have been encouraged through what I have heard and see Souster Youth do in the community over the years and felt that I would like to get involved.

SY: What does your role involve?

It includes all the daily administrating and building jobs that occur here at Souster Youth.

SY: What's been your biggest highlight?

Meeting lots of new people and hearing what they do to make Souster Youth as successful as it is!

SY: Working with young people is like working in a bakery because...

You never know who is going to walk through the door and what they want from you.

SY: In a quiet moment we'd most likely find you...

Crocheting or knitting... or sorting out the Lego in the house!

SY: Three things you couldn't live without:

My husband and two children.

SY: Two things you wouldn't miss:

The mess my children leave behind, and carrots!

“ You never know who is going to walk through the door and what they will need from you. ”



A NEW CHAPTER

It's a season of change for Souster Youth and we're reimagining what things might look like in the future. Tim writes about his experiences as Acting Director, as well as his experiences physically transforming the upstairs space in the building. >>

>> Forevermore I will now be known as the person who ripped up the pews in a Methodist Chapel.

It was a difficult thing to do— removing a pew. Both the physical labour that was required with a crowbar in-hand, and the emotional wrench of removing an exquisite piece of furniture that had stood proudly for generations.

At times it felt like sacrilege. I wondered whether any of the people who had carved their names on the back row in the 1920s were still living. I reflected upon the prayers of the saints that had been offered for generations from these very seats. I listened in my mind to the beautiful sound of their song and chatter.

There was no doubt a touch of sadness to see the pews go to new homes around the area.

Yet I also knew the fact that the pews were extremely uncomfortable. For several years now we have regularly hosted training events for local youth workers and volunteers in the space. However good the speaker might be, after half an hour of sitting down you'd invariably start to hear the sound of everyone doing a bit of a shuffle about (even with our added cushions!). When we put out some chairs for November's training we immediately felt the difference in comfort.

Speaking of uncomfortable— that's what change is, isn't it?

I've yet to meet someone who is completely at ease with change. In his book *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* William Bridges puts forward three main stages of transition. The first stage is described as *Ending, Losing, and Letting Go*. There's almost a sense of grief to this stage, as we let go of what has been. Even though it is some time since the Methodist

Chapel has been used as a traditional place of worship, there's still a sense of loss involved in transforming the space. A part of us wants to keep things forever as they were; picturesque and frozen in time.

Yet times of change are also opportunities for growth. I'm fond of the analogy of the hermit crab for how we grow and respond to change¹.

Have you ever thought about how a hermit crab grows? After all, they wear a hard, inflexible exterior shell for protection from predators—how could they ever get bigger?

What happens is that as they grow, the shell they are wearing begins to feel uncomfortable. That's the stimulus for the hermit crab to seek out a different shell; one which is more roomy. Then comes the moment when they discard the old shell and put on the new one.

The motivation for change is that the hermit crab feels uncomfortable. And perhaps the same is true with us. However great what is being promised to us might sound, we tend to stick with the age-old wisdom of "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" more often than not. That's why another contemporary model of change starts with a stage known as "Unfreeze". It involves preparing to accept that change is necessary. We need to feel that change is worth it. Or as John P. Kotter puts it: we need to establish a sense of urgency.

Souster Youth is entering such a season of change now; with our physical spaces but also much more than that. Some time ago now Jason asked if I would be willing to take on the role of Acting Director whilst he took a three month sabbatical. Having been at the helm for seven years, this was a time of learning and reflection for Jason; a time to reimagine Souster Youth's future in light of our journey so far.

His were pretty big shoes to fill and I got things wrong more than once during my time leading the team. Fortunately I was very well supported. And I also felt that room for growth. Like the hermit crab I was wearing a new shell.

As for the upstairs space, it was later that same week that it was filled with young people playing



a game of glow in the dark bowling (pictured above). Already the space was being repurposed and filled with the sounds of laughter and joy. Sat amongst this incredible space with such a rich history, something prompted one of the young people to turn toward me and begin a conversation about the possible existence of a Creator. He pondered where we had all come from, and whether Science alone could really explain it all?

We talked together and I was reminded that these sorts of conversations are exactly why this building exists. Though the inside of the building is beginning to look a bit different, the word Church has always referred to the people, not the building (or the furniture). And we seek to continue the mission to the next generation in the same Spirit as those who have gone before.

I wonder what will happen in this space over the next 100 years?



Tim Sandford is the Schoolswork Lead for Souster Youth.

¹I am indebted to Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski for this analogy.

Our after-school drop-in has been open now for almost a whole year. We caught up with **Bex** to find out how everything was going one year on. >>



Drop-in Update

>> **Well, what a year it has been!** This time last year we were in the early stages of setting up and planning for our drop-in that opened in January. It has been an absolute joy to see the way this project has developed and to have the opportunity to get to know so many young people in our community!

We are now regularly seeing anywhere up to 30 young people attend the drop-in on any given day. Some days we organise tournaments of table tennis or pool or on the Wii. Each week we pose a question to the young people and give them the opportunity for small group discussion on a range of different topics. Through this we have been able to get to know the young people on a deeper level by hearing their individual thoughts and feelings.

“ Thank you for telling us about this place. It's the best!

Some nights young people bring along their homework and we create a space for them to do that, as well as helping them by printing and providing resources and materials. Other times we will all just play games and chat and paint each other's nails. We've also now started to run music and songwriting workshops to help some of our musical young people develop their skills. Each session is so varied, and the relationships that are being built here are so strong and positive.

We have seen some lovely moments of kindness between our young people such as young people offering to buy each other things from the tuck shop when they don't have money, or older young people helping younger ones with their homework, young people working together on art projects and involving each other in games even when they don't know each other that well.

One beautiful example of the community we have

here happened the other week where one young person didn't have any money for the tuck shop and another young person, without prompting, took some money straight out of his wallet and bought the other young person what they wanted. It meant a lot to the young person to be shown kindness in this way.

Research has proven the benefit of this type of open access youth work. The Youthscape Centre for Research produced a report¹ about the impact of relational youth work. They found that it gave young people a safe and positive place to be, supportive relationships, chances to have fun and opportunities for personal growth. As one young person put it: **"Before, I was always getting in trouble, hanging around with people I shouldn't have been. Ever since I went [to the drop-in] I stopped hanging out with them."**

We feel lucky to be able to provide this in Thrapston and have seen the fruit of this, as young people who find themselves getting into trouble at school have found a place to belong and feel accepted here. We have young people asking our youth leaders for advice and help in their life situations. We have parents telling us how much they value the supportive role we play in their young peoples lives.

One young person recently said to me: **"This is like home."** Another said **"Thank you for telling us about this place. It's the best!"**

That's what success looks like to me: Young people who have found in us a home away from home, a place they can be themselves, and they know that we truly care for them and they can come to us with their struggles.

Here's to another fantastic year!



Bex Hunter is our Drop-in Lead.

¹The Youthscape Centre for Research (2021): *Feels like Home: Young People's Experience of Relational Hubs.*



“DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MY DAD?”

Each term we support the social and emotional wellbeing of young people in schools. The Grow Intervention helps young people to open up and find coping strategies for the challenges that they face in life. **Anna Freij** shares about the impact upon one young person this term. >>

>> **The first words that came out from his mouth were: "Do you know about my dad?"** Kai* had been referred to see us because he was struggling with severe anxiety. He was also having bad nightmares.

He had experienced a very difficult start to life. Since an early age, Kai's father had a history of addictive behaviours and violence, which had eventually led to trouble with the police. Kai had witnessed all of this and it had profoundly affected his childhood and his psychological health.

We meet many young people like Kai. The psychological and emotional hurts that they carry are deep and complex. Because of their adverse childhood experiences, some young people go on to struggle with issues such as anger, self-harm, low-mood or anxiety. Every young person is different. And sometimes the wounds lay hidden for some time, only to emerge during adolescence.

We asked Kai what he hoped to change during his time with us. Most of all he wanted to *heal*. He wanted to process all that had happened to him; the hurt, the grief, the anger. He wanted to think about his future relationship with his dad. He wanted to work through what sort of relationship he wanted to have, if they were to maintain a relationship at all.

We helped Kai explore what he wanted from his relationship with his father: he was desperate for his *love*. We suggested he think about whether his father was capable of giving love, and that if he sometimes was and sometimes wasn't, whether or not the impact of his unpredictability on him was a price Kai was willing to pay.

Kai decided that he needed to be more honest with his dad about how he felt. We taught him a model for communicating assertively in a conflict situation, which he said meant he felt equipped to speak to his father.

Kai felt like he wasn't good enough because his father didn't want anything to do with him. We helped Kai to see that this was due to his father and not him, and to show more compassion towards himself.

At the end of our time with Kai we asked him how he had found it. **"It was full of realisations,"** he said. **"I've come to accept where my relationship with my dad is. Talking about my emotions has really helped. Before the group, I bottled it up. Now I'm more comfortable to talk. I'm a more calm and happy person."**



Anna Freij is our
Psychological Health Lead.

QUOTES FROM THIS TERM

"I feel I'm being angry less and I've started thinking more in a good way. I'm trying to change. My friends have noticed that I'm nicer."

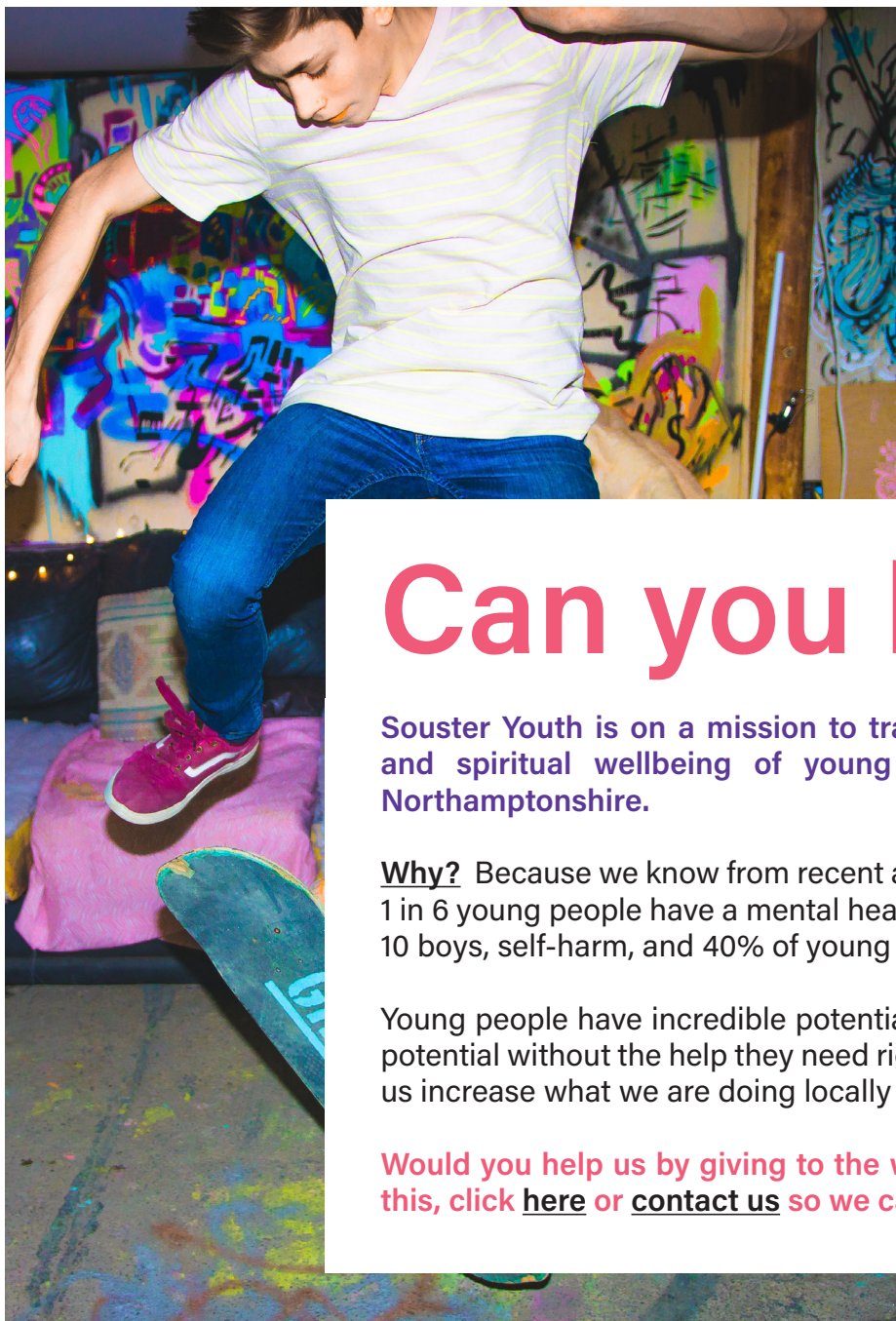
"I feel calmer, knowing there's someone I can talk to, someone to listen. It's taken a weight off my shoulders."

"Now I know how to deal with things. I get less angry and stressed as I've learnt to talk to other people."

"I've grown in confidence."

"I'm happier and I've started letting more people into my life."

*Name changed to protect anonymity.



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.



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