

Summerhill News

A.S. Neill's Summerhill School; a co-educational boarding school in Suffolk, England, is the original alternative 'free' school. Founded in 1921, it continues to be an influential model for progressive, democratic education around the world.



Welcome to this, our second e-newsletter.

Kate and I have been living in Suffolk for six months now. Time has flown by and so far we've very happy with our modest cottage in the countryside. Thankfully, Freddie has really enjoyed us being here to and has come home at every opportunity which has made the weekends all the more fun.

The garden is coming along a treat. Areas are being cleared, the polytunnel frame is up, veg patches are marked out and paths are appearing. As I write this a new day is dawning as the sun rises above the distant hedgerows.... oh what a blissful life, and all thanks to Summerhill.

Enough chuntering I hear you say, what about our newsletter. Firstly, thank you to all of you who provided wonderful feedback following the first edition. Many of you asked whether you could pay for your copy – the answer is yes. Please make a donation via the shop section of the school website.

In this edition you'll read about educational workshops run by Zoë, Leonard and Eran and the exploits of Marius, an ex pupil with a heart of gold. Not forgetting of course, Robina Hearle and Nathan Clutterbuck both of whom are raising funds for the trust.

Enjoy, Steve Fawdry, Ed'

STOP PRESS

Later this year the BBC will be making a children's drama based on Summerhill's court case against the government. The two part programme will be shown during the prime time CBBC slot on late Sunday afternoon this autumn. "This is great news and the publicity will really help to spread the word about Summerhill", said Zoë. "The kids are very excited at the prospect of being extras and from what I understand, they will also be auditioned for the leading roles too". During the last few months, a script writer has visited the school to get a feel for the place and to meet the kids. Filming will commence at the start of the summer holidays at school.

Summerhill helps train Teachers and Children

In January this year, representatives from Summerhill travelled south to Mile End, London, to run a training for teachers and children on 'Active Citizenship and Democracy in Primary Schools'.

"With Summerhill being the oldest school in the world based on children's rights, participation and democracy, this was a great opportunity for us to share our experience with others", said Zoë Neill Readhead, Principal of Summerhill.

Zoë, Neill's daughter, along with Leonard Turton, teacher at Summerhill with experience of running democratic state schools in Canada, together with Eran Cohen, Summerhill pupil, ran workshops for 8 primary schools from the borough of Tower Hamlets.

The sessions included exploring what would make the perfect school linked to a national review of Primary Education, how to run a democratic classroom, restorative justice and what can be learnt from Summerhill School.

As a result of the excellent feedback received from the schools, the A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust, a charity whose patron is Tim Brighouse, has donated £250 to support a day coach trip to the school, for school council link teachers accompanied by two or three students.

Video clips and activities based on the training day will be uploaded onto the global footprints and webquests under the Citizen Power section of Channel 4's website.

Summerhill School on Channel 4 website



Sign the Petition

Michael Newman (ex teacher, Trustee and all round good bloke) has set up a petition on the Prime Ministers website regarding OFSTED failing to amend or remove the 1999 inspection report. Please spend a moment to visit the site and sign the petition outlined overleaf, as well as promote it to any relevant people and organisations.

"We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to ensure that OFSTED are fully accountable and that when their reports are found inaccurate they are withdrawn or re-written. Summerhill School was inspected in 1999, its Ofsted report threatened it with closure. After winning its appeal in the Royal Courts of Justice, receiving a 16 page adjudication heavily criticising the Ofsted report, and then gaining a positive review inspection (unpublished), the 1999 report is still published and used in assessing the school. <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Summerhill/>

All Roads Lead Down Town by Marius

It was quite early on a warm and sunny afternoon when Danny, Ian and Ywan turned up in my hut. "Will you take us down town?", asked Danny, with an unusually sweet voice.

"Of course I will", I said, putting the amazing adventure book I was reading on the table, and as we were walking towards the small town that I loved so much, I felt as if I had never been happier in my entire life.

After about an hour of a thorough sweet shop survey (it was me who insisted on going to the 'little shop' too) we were back at school. As soon as the kids were gone I opened my book and plunged again into those fascinating science fiction stories.

There was a head craning over my book. "Can you take me down town?", asked little William in an irresistible manner. As the space ships weren't attacking yet, and it was still quite nice outside, I said: "Yes, why not", and off we went. The girl workers at Solar smiled at me again as we went through the tills, and in no time we were back at school.

Wayne was waiting for me impatiently. "Can you take me downtown?", he shouted at me as soon as I was in hearing range. I glanced at my open book through the window, sighed seeing the black clouds coming from the East, and hand in hand we walked down town. At Solar I ignored the people's suspicious looks, and there we were, on our way back to school (when we passed by the Baker Bros shop I drew Wayne's attention to a fascinating blackbird that was hovering above the other side of the street).

It was already dark when I sneaked back to my room through the football field and indulged in reading that incredible action story again. The space ships attack was in full swing when I heard Erick and Mia calling my name. I listened to the falling rain drops as I put on my coat. This time we went to the Chinese. As we passed by Solar I pulled my coat over my head and changed my walking style.

It was after most of the kids bedtimes when we came back to school, so I felt quite safe when I joined the intergalactic battle again. Suddenly James and Charlie were standing next to me, on their faces the most miserable expression I had seen in years. An unbelievable hunger was reflected in their eyes.

The cats and dogs that were constantly raining out-side my hut couldn't have been a good enough excuse to starve the poor guys, so I put on my coat, scarf, hat, gloves and boots,

and the lady at the Chinese was more than happy to see me again.

Carriages bedtime was expected soon, and most shops in Leiston were closed by the time we were back. But the paranoid attitude I started to develop made me lock my hut and turn out all the lights. I crawled under my quilt and went on reading my book using matches as a light source.

The knocks on my door were hardly louder than the pouring rain. I opened up to let Jonas, Jody and Nemo in. Their eyes showed extreme despair.

"No, I am not taking you down town!", I said cruelly, "and everything is closed anyway". "The Greek isn't!", said the three of them with a note of hope. I couldn't believe it when I put on all my gear again. I grabbed my umbrella from the closet, and down town we went. As we were walking along the High Street I was filled with an explicable hatred towards that small and peaceful town.

I spent the rest of that night on a big tree behind the hockey field. I didn't mind being cold or wet. I was safe at last. Written by Marius, a 'new' teacher at Summerhill in 1988. Extracted from the Friends of Summerhill Journal, issue 2.

MARATHON MAN



Marathon man and ex Summerhillian of 13 years, 23 year old Nathan Clutterbuck will be running the Flora London Marathon on 22nd April in aid of Shelter and The Summerhill Trust.

Nathan, currently a third year Graphic Design student at Ravensbourne College believes that homelessness is a very good cause. "I used to give to Shelter on a monthly basis. I realise, like most people should I suppose, that I have a great deal more than the homeless, and at the same time so much less. Running gives me a break from my studies, but more importantly from life. It feels like an achievement that gives me an edge in other aspects of my existence, and I don't mean for achievements sake, I'm proud to help make a difference and I intend to continue to do so", said Nathan.

Nathan's been training since January now, and he's confident that he'll run the distance in around 4 hours. He has to raise a minimum of £1,500 for Shelter but he hopes to raise more. So, if you should be out walking the dog on London's Southbank between midnight and 2am keep a look out for this tired yet determined young man, and hand him a fiver.

If you would like to sponsor Nathan in aid of Shelter please visit www.justgiving.co.uk/nathanclutterbuck. Alternatively, if you'd like to donate towards the Trust, please send a cheque made out to A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust, to Hill Farm, Theberton, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4TD. Please remember that every little makes a difference, thank you.

Registered charity 263710
www.shelter.org.uk

Shelter

Essences of Summerhill



Those of you who have ever been to, or visited Summerhill School and its grounds, will have experienced the most amazing atmosphere. You feel that you want to relax and be who YOU are – it's definitely a healing environment. To this end, for three consecutive years when I have stayed at the

summer half-term camp in the grounds, I have made three vibrational essences.

Essences are the vibratory signature of a place, person or flower etc, and they are imprinted in water and then preserved in brandy. This is how the Bach flower Essences were made.

Hence, I have for sale three essences (1) Summerhill, (2) Now (for when we desperately need to slow down. When events are out of control and out of perspective. For expanded awareness and consciousness. Helping us to deal with the ever speeding up world) and (3) Tranquility. They cost £5.50 of which £3.00 goes to the Summerhil Trust. A cheque for £18 has just been received from the lovely Robina, thank you, Ed.

For further info contact Robina Hearle 01473738905 or see website www.rosecottagefloweressences.co.uk.

The Good Childhood Enquiry

The Good Childhood Inquiry, launched by The Children's Society is the UK's first independent national inquiry into childhood. The inquiry is seeking to open an inclusive debate on what makes for a good childhood today that will shape future policy and inspire all our relationships with children.

The inquiry is prompted by concerns that childhood has changed beyond recognition and that despite a wealth of reforms, we have failed to resolve some of the key issues that affect children. Although there have been many improvements in children's lives such as the reduction in child mortality and childhood diseases, new questions about childhood have arisen. Research into well-being shows that despite the fact that the UK is wealthier than ever before, children are experiencing higher rates of mental illness, drug use and alcohol use. The research puts the UK near the bottom of a list of 25 countries, above only the Slovak Republic and the Baltic States. The UK is bottom of the table for relationships with peers and risky behaviour.

Lord Layard said: "Childhood is under great scrutiny by politicians, the media, and the public in general. Much of the debate is conducted in an atmosphere critical to children without addressing the question of why children themselves are unhappy. We need to take a fresh look at the world around us and ask ourselves what we need to do to create a good childhood and use that as our starting point."

Bob Reitemeier, Chief Executive of The Children's Society said: "There's no doubt that the childhood experienced by today's children is different from that of previous generations. We need to find out why our increased wealth has not resulted in greater well-being for our children. The inquiry will ask these questions so that we can create a new vision of childhood for the 21st century and shape policy for years to come. But in order to do this, we need to see through the eyes of children and learn from their experience, their hopes and their fears. The Church has a key role to play by encouraging young people to give evidence and by asking its members to contribute."

The Good Childhood Inquiry will report final findings in autumn 2008 and will incorporate the views of children and young people.

Steiner School may join State Academy ranks

The first state-funded Steiner school may open in September as part of the government's academies programme.

A feasibility study into brining a fee-paying school in Herefordshire into the state system is nearing completion and will be put before ministers soon.

The Department for Education and Skills is considering whether to pay most of a £10m building programme at the school as well as meeting the cost of the 330 pupils' education.

Organisers of the project say they have been guaranteed that the distinctive curriculum and ethos of the Steiner system will be maintained although they have had to agree that children will sit national curriculum tests in the core subjects of maths, science and English at 11 and 14!!

Ministers had originally hoped the Steiner movement could fund an academy in the inner-cities but there were difficulties in finding suitable sites so the one chosen, the Hereford Waldorf school, is partly housed in the former village school in Much Dewchurch.

The Steiner school was founded in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919 for the children of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory workers. The schools, of which there are 27 in Britain and Ireland, take a holistic attitude towards education, combining skills such as arts, crafts and music with more academic subjects. But formal learning such as the teaching of reading begins relatively late. I wonder if Neill ever met Steiner, Ed? Article courtesy of South West News Service.



Images of Summerhill

The Summerhill Band

We have just heard (literally this minute as I print these off) that at the end of June, a small Summerhill Posse will be travelling to Greece to take part in the School Waves Festival. The Festival, a blend of extreme sports and music gives aspiring musicians an opportunity to play to large crowds as well as be featured on a DVD which will be produced afterwards.

Organised by a group called Schooligans, the event will attract 20,000 young people from all over Europe. At present, many of the bands are still waiting to hear whether they're good enough to play live but Henry, confident that the crew are up to the job had already packed his Raybans when the news came through. Those invited have their accommodation and flights paid for. The Summerhill band comprises Henry, Thijs, Anna Ramm, Tobee Paik, Sing Yeh and Yupo Chan and they will get a 20 minute slot on stage. We wish you luck guys, Ed.

The A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust

Briefly, the A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust was created for two purposes. The first is to raise funds for assisted places so that a wider range of pupils can benefit from being at Summerhill. Over the years the school has unofficially managed to help a number of children, but this has been at the expense of other important things.

The second aim of the Trust is to promote the extensive writings and work of A. S. Neill and the present day practices of Summerhill School. There is an on-going need to promote Summerhill's international and historical importance on the world education stage. We are currently looking at offering trainings at Summerhill for teachers and others to learn from the 'Summerhill experience'.

During the last 3 months I have undertaken a number of tasks on behalf of the Trust (that's me in the picture).



Earlier this year, whilst researching potential funders, I discovered a rare Educational Trust which makes donations to Trusts like ours. To my amazement I found that the annual deadline was the following day and so I urgently completed the application and

emailed it off. We await the outcome. I have also identified another Trust and will be applying to them soon.

At the end of March I met up with John Woolley, retired Bank Manager and J.P. living in Aldeburgh who had kindly offered to examine the Trust accounts. Through John's voluntary efforts, the trust will save over £1,000 in auditing fees so a big thank you to John.

Thanks is also due to Phil Parker, Principal of the European College of Holistic Medicine who donated £500 to the Trust. This came as a complete surprise and is as a result of work I have completed for Phil.

"Nobody connected with children can claim to know the true nature of childhood if they have not heard about A.S. Neill's Summerhill School

You may love the idea, or hate it but if you have your own children, have taught children, or have ever been a child one thing is for sure, you will never view childhood or education in the same way again . . ."

Zoë Neill Readhead

Caption Competition



The best caption received by 1st May will win the mystery prize.
