

The Official FOCUS Charity News Magazine



Recent Achievements

The beginning of the new decade has helped us reflect on some of our key achievements over the past 12 months, and the difference we have made to so many young people's lives. Not only have we largely developed our projects throughout 2019, but we have been hugely fortunate to have benefited from the support of some incredible organisations.

■ NAMED CHARITY OF THE YEAR TWICE!

In February, we were delighted to attend the EEM (Efficiency Easy Midlands) Building Communities Awards at the Athena in Leicester. This black-tie event for the building industry generated a whopping £43,000 in charitable donations, which was split between Focus and Bullies Out as their Charities of the Year. We were blown away by the generosity of those that attended and look forward to being able to use those funds to support our work with young people.

In addition, we have been supported throughout the year by the KFC Foundation, who named us as their Charity of the Year for the East Midlands. Their support has made a big difference to us and has ensured that we have been able to fully fund all our projects during the year. We look forward to continuing to work with them in 2020.

We would also like to give particular thanks to the Leicester Family Justice Board, for nominating us as the beneficiaries of their annual raffle, and to the team at AGR Law, who are raising funds for us.

■ SHORTLISTED FOR A LEICS LIVE AWARD

Early this year, we were delighted to be shortlisted for a Leicestershire Live Award in the Not-for Profit category. The big prize was awarded to the brilliant Zinithya Trust, but we were proud to have made it to the final three.

■ WON CHARITY OF THE YEAR NICHE MAGAZINE

We managed one stage better in the Niche Magazine Awards, where we were voted Charity of the Year. This was a huge honour and testament to the incredible work of our staff and volunteers.

We are enormously grateful to all the organisations and people who have supported us throughout this amazing year.

HOT TOPIC What's going on with young people's mental health?

It's hard to pick up a newspaper, scroll through social media posts or watch a few hours of TV without hearing that young people's mental health is getting worse. Our experience at Focus, working with over 400 young people every year, is that there has undoubtedly been an increase in reports of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. This corresponds with reports that the number of referrals to CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services) has been doubling over the past couple of years.

In recent years, young people have been educated more in the language of mental health, and the taboo that it once had has been reduced. But is the need for support greater than in the past, or are they just talking about it more? It's impossible to answer that definitively, but there are a number of factors that are increasing the pressure on young people.

The advent of the smartphone and social media apps mean that issues such as bullying and peer pressure do not stop at the school gates – they can follow people wherever they go and at all times. Media portrayals of the perfect physique and lifestyle, and the material wealth we should aspire to are also impossible to escape. Add into this poor diet, a lack of accessible outdoor spaces, the rising cost of living, poverty and austerity, increasing educational pressures and a fear that the world is a more dangerous place, and it is no wonder that young people are struggling to cope.



What has Focus done to help?

At Focus, we believe that supporting young people, helping them to talk freely about mental health and addressing where they are coming from with compassion and understanding can help them to manage their emotions and feel comfortable enough to seek help in their darkest times. One way in which we have achieved this is through a 'mini-project', focussing on developing positive mental health attitudes and practical steps to achieve wellbeing.

Through an 8-week programme, young people have been able to identify their support network, open up in a safe and comfortable space about mental health related issues they are dealing with and gain peer-to-peer advice on coping methods. Whilst talking about mental health can be scary, this mini project has been an enjoyable experience for the young people. Healthy food is offered to encourage better diets, and activities in sessions have helped them to form personal 'mental health toolkits', with access to materials that can help manage their emotions and signpost them on where to get more support and guidance.

Young people have more power to change the world now than ever before. We remain concerned about the very real worsening of young people's mental health. But as our understanding of its causes and what we can do grows, so too does our optimism that we can help.

Our Projects

Everything we do is developed from the ideas, passions, needs and interests of young people in Leicester. Our current projects include:

Inspire

Inspire is a year-long personal development programme for adolescents aged 13-16. This project uses a range of activities, including residential experiences, community projects, mentoring and workshops, to help teenagers boost their social skills, confidence and aspirations for the future.

Leicestival

Leicestival is a vibrant and exciting project supporting people aged 13-25. This project gets young people involved with Leicester's incredible calendar of cultural festivals and events. This ranges from volunteering and supporting festival management and helping backstage, to setting up their own attractions and stalls.

Breathing Space

Breathing Space supports young people aged 13-25 to develop the strategies and confidence to overcome mental health issues. We do this through projects based on our own allotment and in other green spaces.

START

START is a project that uses mentoring, and environmental and adventure activities to tackle the issues faced by highly isolated young people, who are vulnerable to exploitation.



Meet Our Team Gavan Wilmot Director of Programme Development, Breathing Space



Gavan is our new Director of Programme Development, and a manager of Breathing Space. Stern but kind, relaxed, and well-liked by the young people we work with, he joined us as the Project Manager for Inspire in 2016, having years of youth and community work under his belt. I got the chance to talk with Gavan about his time with Focus and working with young people.

Gavan's passion for helping the community began in his early twenties, where he got the chance to work with

the homeless. This inspired him to ultimately move from Dublin to Leicester for a degree in Community Development.

"Virtually all the courses in England are 'Youth and Community Development', and really dominated by youth-work," he told me. "Youth-work really took over."

Since then, he has been working to help Leicester's young people, which he loves. Describing his time working with Focus, Gavan said, *"I've done a bit of everything, and I like the kind of stuff we do. I think it's really constructive, and young people get a lot out of it."*

He considers our forte being volunteering and personal development programmes and praised the "great team" he works with.

"There's a great comradery, [...] a great atmosphere."

When I asked Gavan about working with young people, he expressed how much he loves Leicester's diversity, but stated the importance of

understanding where each young person is coming from because of it. *"Not everyone has the same experiences and the same start in life – we have to accept that – and it has an impact. Sometimes rudeness or boisterousness is just how they're brought up."*

He believes that caring for and appreciating young people, and letting them learn from mistakes, is important in helping them grow. Young people can become anything, but it takes hard work and encouragement from those around them.

"Believe in them," he advised, ***"And believe in their potential."***

Gavan became the Director of Programme Development at the beginning of this year. This new role aims to support other project managers to develop their projects, and garner support from businesses to kickstart new projects.

"It's very much about supporting," he told me. *"There're projects to develop, there're the managers to develop. It's about [asking] 'what can we do to make this better?'"*

He hopes to get a new project started this year and get more young people involved with our current ones. He'd also love to change how Focus runs in the background, finding ways to make data management quicker and more efficient.

Gavan still manages Breathing Space and is preparing for the Grand Opening of the project's 'Wooden Spoon' allotment. He says the biggest challenge will be getting it ready and looking "mint" in time but hopes that it will be *"ready to do loads more work for the community."*

As final thoughts, Gavan said that he had encouraged others to *"get involved with Focus."*

"We are a brilliant organisation; we do brilliant work with young people. If you've read this, and you want to help young people, give us a call."



Project Highlights 'Some Like It Lit' Leicestival's Comedy Festival Night

'Some Like it Lit' started as an idea with Leicestival's young people. The goal: to put on an evening of live sketches and stand-up comedy to an audience in a local theatre, as part of the biggest Comedy Festival in Europe. The group took to it immediately, with nineteen young people committed to weekly rehearsals from early January 2020 right up to the week of the show.

With the help and expertise of Leicester based Comedian, Rob Gee, the young people started to gain more confidence in expressing their individual sense of humour and come out of their shells. In addition, BBC Radio Leicester invited young people to promote the show live on air. This was all very new to some, who had never been part of anything like this before. It wasn't an easy journey, but the experience helped the group to create unique bonds with each other, lifting their self-esteem and feeling a sense of belonging.

Overall, 'Some Like It Lit' managed to sell 82 tickets leading up to the night and was an unforgettable memory and experience for everyone involved.

What's New: Coronavirus Update

Following the Government's current advice on minimising the impact of the Coronavirus, we have taken the decision to close our office and have arranged for our staff to work from home.

However, we remain committed to providing support to young people. We have taken our services online, with regular video calls, group chats and online activities to ensure we can maintain contact and be there when we are needed.

Our staff have been creative in maintaining as positive a message as we can to our beneficiaries. Some of the on-line activities we have run include:

- Live cooking sessions
- Online fitness classes
- Sharing ideas on helping vulnerable and self-isolating neighbours
- Shared positive news stories

On top of this, we have agreed to meet any young people in crisis face-to-face, provided this meets social distancing guidance.

These are unprecedented times, and for vulnerable young people, they can be very frightening. The negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on everyone's mental health is yet to be understood, so we are determined to do all we can to help lessen the impact, and we will continue to reach out to offer our support.



Our New Website

We are very excited to announce the launch of our newly designed website.

Visit us at www.focus-charity.co.uk

After several months of hard work and dedication, we are delighted to officially announce the launch of our new site. We wanted to make the new website faster, easier to navigate, and more user-friendly! As a young people's charity, it's important that our website reflects the vibrancy of our organisation whilst providing both participants and stakeholders with the information they need.

We would like to say a big thank you to Steve at Caged Fish for the website redesign. Check it out at www.focus-charity.co.uk





Volunteering at Focus Abdiquani Haji Volunteer at Leicestival

We met Abdiquani for the first time at De Montfort University's "PAVE in 2017" event. He came across as cool, calm and collected, great at listening to others and a positive contrast to some of our more energetic volunteers. We convinced him to attend our "Introduction to Volunteering" training event at Focus in November that year, and he was impressed enough to officially join us in early 2018.

Since then, Abdiquani has been volunteering with our Leicestival project, all while undertaking his studies at DMU. He is amazingly reliable, having assisted with nearly all our weekly sessions, and motivated the young people at St. Georges Day Festival, Bring the Paint, the Christmas lights switch on and many more.

Abdiquani wanted to share some thoughts on his experience as a volunteer.

"What I love about volunteering at Focus is the fun environment, where you're able to push yourself to try new things but knowing there is always someone to catch you if you fall."

"I have learnt a lot [...] like dealing with young people in certain situations, [and the] planning that goes into sessions and festivals. I have seen an improvement in my leadership skills, communication skills, teamwork skills and confidence."

"I feel like I have had a positive impact on young people, but they've also had an impact on me. There have been many instances where we had a task to do like presenting in front of the group, which I was not fond about. I remember one young person saying they're scared of standing in front of the group and presenting. I told them I am scared too, [but] we could do it together and that we would look more scared if we did not present than if we did. We stood up in front of the group and presented together."



Where Our Money Comes From

Everything we do for young people is free to them and so we rely on grants, donations, sponsorship and in-kind support from a range of individuals and organisations to fund our work. Without their generous support, none of it would be possible.

Every donation, no matter how large or small, enables us to provide our vital services for young people and we are always interested in talking to anyone who would like to work with us to achieve our goals.

In 2020, our major funders are the National Lottery Fund, Michael Bishop Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, KFC Foundation, Home Office, EEM, Wooden Spoon Charity, and Openwork Foundation.

From every £1 that we raise, 84p goes directly to support young people. We use the other 16p to keep the lights on, pay our bills and raise another £1.

Black Tie Spectacular

We'd like to invite you to our Black Tie Spectacular in October. A great reason to get your team together, and celebrate with us. Sparkle all evening in 1920s inspired dress, and enjoy a three course meal, fabulous entertainment, music, awards and dancing – all in support of Focus.

BLACK TIE SPECTACULAR

A Glamorous evening of glitz and sparkle inspired by the Roaring 20s. Including a three course meal, fabulous entertainment, music, awards and dancing - and as always, a whole lot of heart from the FOCUS family.

Kindly sponsored by:

Friday 16th October
Leicester Tigers

6:30 Reception drinks
7:30 seated for Dinner

£550 per table of 10
£60 per person

Early bird ticket available till 31st May
Dress code: Black Tie

DESIGN + PRINT
Soar Valley Press



Corporate Supporter Spotlight Soar Valley Press

Soar Valley Press first came into contact with FOCUS 2 to 3 years ago. Considering FOCUS Charity are over 30 years old, it could be considered as being a little late to the show. Or, it could prove how FOCUS have moved forwards within the corporate world in the last couple of years and we are proud to say that we have been at their side throughout this transition.

FOCUS do wonderful work with the youth within the city. They have had a huge impact on so many young peoples lives throughout the community projects they run. Showing love and appreciation to these young people creates powerful and life changing opportunities.

But this can only be done by the support and funding they receive from those also in the community, the business community in particular. It's the business community that can have the biggest impact on a charity like FOCUS, however big or small the contribution.

As printers, we are regularly asked to support charities. We want to make a difference to the charities we support and have fun at the same time. The SVP Golf Day is always a favourite with our customers and a great opportunity to raise money for FOCUS.

My favourite fundraiser for FOCUS is the Football Predictions Game that has run throughout the Premier League season (currently on hold though... like everything else!). There are 57 people who are predicting the results of 5 premier league matches each week. It is only £2 a week to enter so pop me an email if you want to be involved once everything kicks off again.

Dave Goodman


dave@soarvalleypress.co.uk
0116 478 0863 / 07540 687 880

The Breathing Space `Wooden Spoon Allotment' Grand Opening

Focus has been making the final preparation this year's official opening of the 'Wooden Spoon Allotment' at the Rowllatts Hill Allotment Society, which we hired in 2018. Our allotment was created to help improve the mental health of young people in the city by getting them outdoors, and planting and harvesting fresh food.

Wooden Spoon, the children's charity of Rugby football, provided a funding grant to start building the site's initial infrastructure, such as planting beds and the cabin we use as a learning zone. Through some of our partners we gained the fabulous opportunity earlier this year to work with construction companies Engie and MBP, along with some of their smaller partners, to build the rest of the site. We are honoured to be included in these companies' wider project, with the University of Leicester, of volunteering to aid the completion of major construction tasks throughout Leicester. Their volunteers have accelerated our progress in getting this amazing space ready for the opening.

The opening was planned for April 8th, but in light of the crisis regarding the coronavirus pandemic, this has been rearranged for Wednesday August 12th 12-2pm. This will be a great community asset for groups and projects from across the city.








RSVP by Wednesday 5th August
2020 via email or phone;
gavan.wilmot@focus-charity.co.uk
07742067430 / 0116 251 0369

You're cordially invited to the

Wooden Spoon Allotment Grand Opening

Date: Wednesday 12th August 2020
Time: 12pm – 2pm
Venue: Rowllatts Hill Allotment Society
Blakenhall Road
Leicester
LE5 4LD

Thank You!

FOCUS Charity would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people for their input in the producing this newsletter: Jerusha Barnett-Cameron for editing, journalism and copywriting; Soar Valley Press for the design and for providing the 'Corporate Supporter Spotlight' article; Abdiqani Haji for 'Volunteer Spotlight' interview; and all of our wonderfully dedicated staff, who've written articles and contributed to the production of this newsletter.

Want to support us or get involved?

Tel: 0116 251 0369

Email: admin@focus-charity.co.uk

Address:

73 Church Gate, Leicester LE1 3AN

Edited by Jerusha Barnett-Cameron

For any queries, email editor@focus-charity.co.uk

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