

# Annual Review 2025/2026

## Overview

Looking back over 2025–2026, SSJI has continued to adapt and grow in response to the needs of young people across our communities. With 9 youth groups happening each week across Shelford, Sawston, and Duxford, alongside providing one-to-one support for up to 17 young people each week. Across all this work, our focus remains on creating consistent, welcoming spaces where young people feel supported, valued and heard. The work has been run by our dedicated team of youth workers: Kay McNealis, Tilly Akoto, Tina Woodstock and Zac Britton. Jack Newman supported our work for part of this year and recently we welcomed Jack Gilmore to the team. Jon Sanders, the Youth Development Team Lead at Romsey Mill provides operational oversight.



We've seen particularly strong engagement in Duxford this year, where we are now running two sessions on a Monday that continue to attract consistently high numbers each week. In Sawston, attendance has also been increasing showing encouraging signs of connection with local young people. This year we have started some new work with year 6's in the Sawston primary schools with one-to-one sessions and detached work now taking place in both Bellbird and Icknield, allowing us to do some early intervention work and provide support to a slightly younger cohort.

The one-to-one support we offer local young people in Sawston Village College, the primaries and in the community enables us to really invest in individuals and their needs and offer more focused support. Our minibus and football cage continue to play an important role in how we engage young people. They have supported the delivery of our 'Shred It Up' skate sessions, outreach work, and presence at local village events such as the Shelford Feast and Christmas Lights switch on. We also hosted our own mini-Christmas market, giving young people the chance to take part in planning and running stalls, helping them to build confidence and develop practical business skills.

Residential and trips continue to be a highlight, providing space for young people to step outside their normal routines, try something different, and grow in confidence and friendships. Alongside the trips, we also ran a joint residential with young people from another area, creating opportunities to meet new people and share new experiences. With support from the Serious Violence Duty Fund, we delivered targeted sessions for young people who may need additional support.

Our faith-based provision, Deeper, has also had a positive year. Through a weekly Wednesday group and attending various evening and day events run by Romsey Mill, we have created regular opportunities for young people to come together in a relaxed and open environment where they can explore questions around faith, share their thoughts, and learn more about Christianity in a way that feels relevant to them.

We are thankful, as always, for the ongoing support of our partners and funders. This makes our work possible and enables us to invest in the lives of young people across our local villages.

## Stories of hope

### Story 1: Jay

Following involvement in criminal activity in the community, Jay\* (aged 15) was attending school on a significantly reduced timetable within an alternative provision setting. Reports from school were consistently negative, highlighting ongoing concerns around behaviour, engagement and attitude to learning.

SSYI staff had a strong relationship with Jay through their attendance at youth group and regular one-to-one sessions over several years. These provided a safe space to reflect, set goals and begin to unpick some of the choices and influences that had led him to that point. Alongside this relational work, Jay engaged with us in a range of structured, practical opportunities designed to build both skills and self-belief.

Jay successfully completed an accredited cookery course, where he developed independence, patience and practical skills. He also undertook a first aid course, gaining another qualification and knowledge that increased his abilities. Beyond this, staff supported Jay to take part in positive community experiences, including visiting older residents for conversation and connection, and helping with practical tasks such as painting fences in the local area. These activities enabled Jay to experience being seen as a positive contributor to his community, rather than someone defined by past behaviour.

Over time, there has been a marked shift in Jay's attitude and outlook. He has now received three consecutive positive school reviews, a significant milestone given his previous record. School staff report improved engagement, better decision-making and a more mature approach to learning.

Importantly, Jay is now able to reflect honestly on his past behaviour, recognising that his previous choices were not supportive of his education or long-term goals. He speaks openly about wanting a different future for himself. School have also shared that Jay increasingly uses his own experiences to positively influence younger students, encouraging them to make better choices and take their education seriously, so they do not face the same barriers he encountered.

Jay's journey demonstrates the power of youth work, through consistent mentoring, informal education and positive relationship building. With the right support, clear boundaries and trusted adults who did not give up on him, he has begun to reframe his identity, from being defined by past mistakes to actively shaping a more positive future.

\*The name of this young person has been changed



### **Story 2: Alex**

Alex\* (aged 14) is one of the young people who began attending Sawston Youth Group this year. At the time, Alex had been struggling with significant anxiety which had resulted in long periods of absence from school and difficulty attending new places or meeting unfamiliar people.

Alex first came along to youth group after encouragement from a family member who already attended. In the beginning, they found the environment quite overwhelming and would often sit quietly during activities without getting involved.

With time, patience and regular support from staff and volunteers, Alex slowly began to feel more at ease. Conversations with Kay, Tilly and a regular volunteer helped Alex talk about how they were feeling and explore ways to manage their anxiety. Week by week, Alex started to take small steps, joining in games, creative activities and group discussions, gradually building confidence.

One particularly positive moment was Alex's decision to help at the local Christmas Market alongside other young people from the group. Although they felt nervous at first, Alex chose to take part and played an active role helping to make hot drinks and chatting with members of the community.

Since joining the group, Alex has formed positive friendships and become a valued member of the youth group. Reflecting on their experience, Alex shared: "Youth group is a place where I feel safe and accepted. I can talk to the staff, and they've helped me learn ways to cope when I feel anxious, like grounding techniques. I've also made some new friends."

\*The name of this young person has been changed

### **Story 3: Dave\***

Dave (aged 19) has been involved with SSYI for the last 8 or so years, through attending various sessions that we have run, and over the last few years we have supported him through weekly one-to-one sessions funded by the local authority. Dave has often struggled to integrate into his peer group; he we have worked hard over the years to enable him to find community through our youth groups. He has additional needs and is very vulnerable, which unfortunately has meant he has been taken advantage of in the past and gotten involved with groups and people that haven't had his best interests at heart.

Unfortunately, at the end of last year due to circumstances outside his control, Dave had to move out of where he was living and for several months was bounced around various residential or supported living locations across the county, including spending a few weeks in a hotel which was entirely inappropriate for his needs. Throughout this he was supported by numerous different professionals, passed between teams in the local authority and left feeling hugely unsettled and overwhelmed.

During this time, we continued to meet with him every week, travelling to wherever he was currently staying and providing him with a much-needed sense of familiarity and stability whilst everything else around him was precarious. We advocated on his behalf and supported him to meet with and advocate for himself with other professionals and the local authority. We believe that the hour a week he had with us, with a familiar and safe trusted adult made a huge impact on his ability to cope with the chaos that he was experiencing.

Dave is now settled in new accommodation and feeling increasingly stable, we continue to meet with him and provide him with support, facilitating meetings with other professionals and providing him with an hour a week of respite, fun and genuine care.

\*The name of this young person has been changed



## Statistics | Engagement and Activities

Total number of young people regularly involved in SSYI activities	283
Gender of the young people	Female: 126. Male: 155 Transgender/Non-binary/Intersex: 2
Ethnicity of the young people	Asian/Asian British: 6; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: 6; Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups: 25; White British: 226; White Other: 20
Number of young people we engaged with through detached work	82 Community: Sawston, Shelford School: Sawston Village College, Bellbird Sawston, Icknield Sawston
Number of young people we supported through open access activities	251 Sawston Football; Duxford 6+7, 8+; Sawston 7+; Girls Group; Deeper, Shelford 6+7, 8+
Number of young people we supported through targeted group work	46 Shred It Up; Serious Violence Group; BLU
Number of young people we gave community based 1:1 support	6

## Statistics | Engagement and Activities

Number of young people we gave school based 1:1 support	26
Number of young people involved in community projects	49 19 Young leaders; Shelford Feast; Village Events; Christmas Tree Festival; Christmas Markets

Number of young people involved in youth voice projects	19 Skatepark Design Project
Number of trips/residentials	21 trips Trampoline Park x4; The Gauntlet Auto Project; Adrenaline Alley, Aqua Park x4; Mini Golf x2; Golf x2; Botanic Gardens; Bowling; The Warehouse Skatepark; Adventure Island 2 Night Residential in Essex; 2 Night Residential in Suffolk; 3 Night Residential in Gloucestershire
Number of young people we supported in more than one context	132
Number of young people we supported in a time of crisis	32
Number of hours of face-to-face delivery	1102 hours

## Statistics | Mechanisms of Change

"The youth workers make me feel welcome"	100%
"The youth workers care about me"	100%
"The youth workers give me the support I need"	95%
"The youth workers listen to me"	100%
"The youth workers trust me"	100%
"The youth workers respect me and my background"	100%
"I enjoy my time with SSYI"	100%
"I feel I can talk to one of the Youth workers if I have a problem"	98.3%
"I feel part of a community at SSYI"	98.3%
"I have a say in what activities take place at SSYI"	91.7%



## Excerpts from Young People's Focus Groups

**Q1: Thinking about the activities you've been a part of with us, what's been your highlight of the past year? Why was that your highlight?**

- Skating trip we did, that was jokes. I liked going out somewhere instead of just staying in one place and meeting new people
- I haven't been for ages, but I like that I can come and go whenever I want and just pick up the conversation where we left it, staff actually listen and remember what I say
- I liked helping at the village thing, like setting stuff up. Felt like we were actually doing something important
- Just being here really, like you can come in whatever mood and it's alright
- I liked the art sessions and making the stuff to sell at the market and the violence stuff was fun to learn about too and I got a first aid certificate

**Q2: Have you developed or grown in any way through the help you've received from us? What about Practically, emotionally, with skills, relationships etc?**

- Yeah, I feel I am more confident, I have one to one sessions and it helps me and taught me new techniques like grounding etc
- I only go to school to see SSYI and I only tell them about my problems because I don't like any of my teachers and I hate all social workers as I just don't trust them
- SSYI has helped me communicate with the school around some issues I've had and helped me get the right support even though I don't always think I need it
- I'm better at talking to people now, I used to just not bother but it's easier here
- I've got more confidence I think, like I'll actually try stuff instead of just saying no
- I don't get as angry as I used to, I can calm down a bit more

**Q3: How did we help you with these or with other things?**

- Tracy taught me cooking pancakes
- Just talking to us properly, not like teachers do and being there if something's going on,
- Showing us things we can do, like activities and stuff we wouldn't normally try
- It's just more relaxed here, so it's easier to open up
- You give us space but still check in, which helps
- Talking things through instead of just telling us off
- Letting us be creative and not judging it

**Any Final Comments?**

It's great but I wish it was open more often; More going out places, that's always the best bit; Longer sessions as sometimes it goes too quick; Thank you for youth group; Thank you for being a thing

## Community Connections, Partners and Enablers

<b>Partner Organisations</b>	Romsey Mill; Local Parish Councils (Great Shelford, Little Shelford, Stapleford, Sawston and Duxford); District & County Councils; Police & Crime Commissioner; Cambridge City FC; Sawston Village College; The Local Primary Schools; Tesco, Co-op John Huntingdon Charity; Local Churches (St Andrews Stapleford, St Mary's Great Shelford, Great Shelford Free Church and All Saints Little Shelford); YouthINC Cambridgeshire South Care Partnership
<b>Number of Volunteers</b>	11

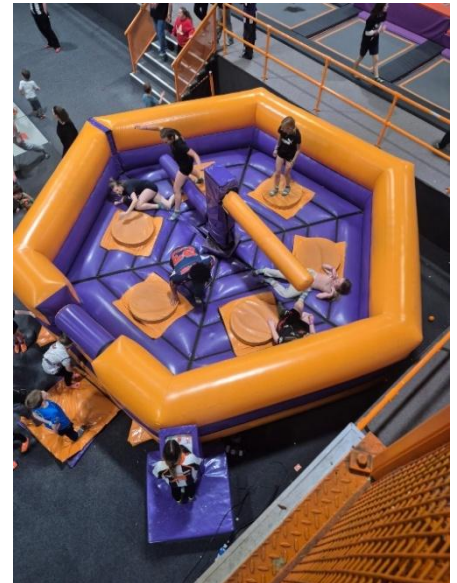
## Third Party Quotes

“SSYI provide valuable support to our pupils, on a 1-1 and group basis, in and out of school. Pupils respond well to the workers and engagement rates are high. SSYI youth workers are approachable, they take a child-centred approach to their work, are flexible and work closely with school staff to provide the most appropriate support. We are grateful for their outreach work at lunchtimes where they engage some of our more hard to reach pupils with ease. Pupils also speak highly of their experiences with SSYI outside of school, including residential trips and youth clubs that they attend.”

**Martha Gregg - Director of Safeguarding, Welfare & Pastoral Support – Sawston Village College**

“Attending SSYI has been beneficial for both of my children. They love going, finding it fun. Both are neurodiverse, including having social communications issues. Going to SSYI has helped build confidence in one of them to widen their social circle. While in the other, it has helped them to learn how to interact positively with others in a less structured environment.”

**Parent**



## Statistics | Outcomes

Young people expressing an improvement in confidence	93.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in their ability to overcome challenges	88.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in their ability to get on with others	95%
Young people expressing an improvement in their wellbeing	96.7%
Young people expressing an improvement in their skills	90%
Young people expressing an improvement in making positive choices and decisions	98.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in feeling safe in their community	98.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in their ability to have a positive impact on others in their community	93.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in hope for the future	83.3%
Young people expressing an improvement in their ability to manage their emotions	91.6%
Rating of SSYI sessions out of 10	9.42



## Quotes From Young People

- "it's a nice community to socialise in especially as a lot of my friends are as I'm home schooled"
- "I love SSYI - my sisters come here and told me I should come and said it would be good fun and it is, the staff are fun to talk to and it's not like school, they don't tell us off and they join in with games and stuff"
- "I like we don't get judged at SSYI. Since I have been coming to SSYI Kay has helped me in 1-1 sessions and I am slowly getting more confident and I talk to Tilly and Tina"
- "It's a good safe place to meet up and is a great way to connect with other schools as some of us go to different places. Kay organises some great activities recently I've loved just dance parties"
- "It's massively improved my confidence and social skills, staff are friendly and kind"
- "I feel so safe at SSYI. Kay, Tina and Kev have been really accepting of who I am and made me feel comfortable"
- "I like everything about youth group -it gets me out the house away from troubles - Kay listens to me and helps me talk to school about my feelings and we get to do fun activities like cooking and crafts and trampoline park"

## Young Leader Story

### Story 4: Sam\*

Sam (aged 14) had been struggling with school and family challenges and was at risk of permanent exclusion due to difficulties managing emotions and behaviour, particularly issues such as anger and lashing out. They were on a behaviour plan at school which was proving unsuccessful.

Through regular contact with SSYI staff at Detached sessions in school and at Duxford Youth Group, Sam had begun to build positive, trusting relationships. Off the back of this, Sam approached staff to ask about helping in youth group. Kay, Tina and Tilly supported Sam, encouraging them to take on more responsibilities such as helping to run the kitchen and contributing ideas for session activities.

Since becoming a Young Leader, Sam has shown noticeable growth in self-awareness and decision making. In Sam's own words, "Being a Young Leader at Duxford Youth Group has helped me focus and think about my choices. It's a safe place where if I make a mistake, I'm not judged, and staff help me learn. I like helping the younger kids and playing football with them."

Sams parents say "We've seen massive growth in Sam's confidence, and they are now starting to take responsibility for their choices and will often say that they need to set a good example to the younger ones. They come home after group happy and excited. Thank you all at SSYI for your support."

\*The name of this young person has been changed



## Thank you for taking the time to read this year's report

For more information about the work that we do, to find out about volunteer opportunities or to support us financially head to [www.ssyi.club](http://www.ssyi.club) or scan the QR Code below

