



SWRAC
Specialist Independent College

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026

WELCOME

Hello everyone,

It is safe to say that summer has arrived with a vengeance. Despite the heat, thriving ice lolly trade and investment in air conditioning, it has been another incredibly busy and exciting few months.

Sometimes, it's easy to focus entirely on the next challenge rather than pause and reflect on what has already been achieved. but there is an enormous amount to be proud of.

One of the highlights has undoubtedly been our recent trip to Gran Canaria. Opportunities like this give our learners a chance to develop confidence, independence and resilience in ways that simply cannot be replicated in a classroom. Travelling abroad, navigating unfamiliar environments, managing routines away from home and embracing new experiences all contribute to personal development in a way that stays with people long after the holiday photographs have been put away. Most importantly, everyone seemed to have an absolutely fantastic time.

Another memorable highlight was our visit to the Farnborough International Airshow. There were a few unexpected challenges along the way but what impressed me most was the way our students adapted, regrouped and made the most of the day.

We also saw some remarkable examples of innovation and technology. There was a parallel with what we try to achieve at SWRAC. New ideas, new opportunities and untapped potential often require people to look beyond what exists today and focus on what could be possible tomorrow. Our students remind us of that every day. Sometimes all that is needed is the right support, encouragement and belief for potential to become reality.

We continue to see increasing numbers of families and local authorities choosing SWRAC. Whilst growth has never been our primary objective, it is encouraging to know that more young people are benefiting from the support and opportunities we provide. That success belongs to our staff teams, whose enthusiasm, patience and dedication continue to amaze me.

Looking ahead, we are particularly excited about returning to the Dorset County Show, which has become something of a fixture in the SWRAC calendar. It is always a fantastic event and a wonderful opportunity to meet families, professionals, former students and supporters from across the region. We will also be attending the Southport Air Show for the first time. Given the fantastic welcome we have received since establishing our centre in the town, we are really looking forward to introducing ourselves to more people and sharing some of the amazing things our learners achieve.

Adrian Gunner

ADRIAN GUNNER
MANAGING DIRECTOR

NATALIE PYCROFT – ENGAGEMENT & SAFEGUARDING LEAD

We are absolutely delighted to welcome back Natalie Pycroft, who has recently returned to SWRAC as Engagement & Safeguarding Lead after previously helping the organisation grow during its early years.



During her time with us, she played a key role in expanding the provision and opening new centres before moving into local authority roles specialising in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Since then, she has managed SEND teams, worked extensively with SEND tribunals and case law, and trained local authority case officers in preparing young people for adulthood.

Returning to SWRAC felt like coming home, she said: "This is the best job I've ever had and coming back feels like returning to family. Adrian's passion for supporting young people with SEND and his commitment to doing the right thing has always been at the heart of the organisation, and that's something I really believe in."

In her new role, Natalie leads engagement across all centres nationwide, working closely with local authorities, families and centre managers to support new admissions. From discussing referrals and funding to helping identify the right provision for each student, Natalie oversees everything before a young person joins SWRAC, ensuring every transition is as smooth and successful as possible.

Alongside engagement, Natalie is also leading a number of exciting developments in safeguarding - more to come on that in the next update - as well as ongoing reviews of safeguarding procedures and risk assessments that will ensure SWRAC continues to provide the safest possible environment for every student.

As SWRAC continues to grow, Natalie is excited to help even more young people access the right support at the right time, while ensuring safeguarding remains at the heart of everything we do.



END OF YEAR CENTRE CELEBRATIONS

Students across all SWRAC centres have been celebrating another fantastic year at end of year celebration events and Proms - all filled with music, dancing, awards and plenty of memorable moments.



BOSCOMBE UPDATE

Rachel Taylor

It's been another exciting and successful few months at Boscombe, with student numbers continuing to grow across all programmes and preparations already underway for a busy September - when we welcome our first META students and another new tutor to the team.

The biggest celebration of the term was undoubtedly the Project SEARCH graduations. Following a hugely successful first year with Amazon, the three students have already secured paid employment there, with the company pulling out all the stops to celebrate their achievements.

Families, staff and invited guests came together to enjoy a fantastic graduation ceremony, complete with speeches, a video created by Job Coach Lisa, framed certificates, gift bags, refreshments and even a special appearance from the Amazon mascot.

Richard Burton, Councillor for BCP, also attended to congratulate the interns. It was a wonderful celebration of everything the programme has achieved so far.

Other students have also secured paid employment with Beryl Bikes and The Collingwood Hotel as well as being shortlisted as finalists in the Dorset Apprenticeship Awards in the Supported Internship category.

Work experience opportunities continue to grow, with Prep for Work students completing a group placement at Slades Farm, alongside new placements at a care home in Broadstone.

We also welcomed the Army Infantry team, who delivered a day of team-building activities and introduced students to the wide range of career opportunities available within the military.

Outside the classroom, students enjoyed another fantastic Sports Day at Kings Park alongside THRIVE, taking part in everything from obstacle courses and tug of war to the ever-popular 'Soak the Teacher' challenge, with music, face painting and plenty of encouragement from parents and carers.

As part of Flexi Week, we spent an enjoyable morning at Golf Catcher. Through a range of group activities, staff worked together to strengthen relationships, share ideas and build on the teamwork that helps create the supportive environment our students experience every day. The morning was rounded off with a friendly yet slightly competitive game of dinosaur mini golf!

The centre itself has had the window transfers updated, which we think look very smart.

And of course, we all thoroughly enjoyed the Prom, particularly because our self-created music video was broadcast!





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DORCHESTER UPDATE

Lauren Morris-Bourne

There's plenty happening at Dorchester as the centre continues to grow.

One of the biggest changes is the addition of a new log cabin classroom, which is due to be completed in time for the autumn term. The extra space will support the continued growth of the THRIVE provision, which is expected to double in size by September, with a waiting list already in place.

The Supported Internship programme continues to go from strength to strength. A fantastic success story this term saw one student finish their placement at PGL Holiday Camps early after securing paid employment and accommodation with the company – a wonderful achievement and a testament to the progress they have made. Several more students are also on the verge of paid employment through their Supported Internships.

Looking ahead, SWRAC is preparing to launch an exciting new Supported Internship programme at RNAS Yeovilton, working in partnership with Somerset Council. Based at the Naval Air Station, interns will initially gain experience in hospitality, catering and retail, with opportunities to explore additional departments as the programme develops.

The Employer Engagement team has been introducing students heading for our Prepare for Work course to local employers to support the transition into work experience. This has also involved taking part in mock interviews with Magna Housing, careers events at Weymouth Pavilion, and presentations from Connect to Work, helping them develop confidence, interview skills and a greater understanding of local opportunities.

Like the Boscombe centre, we also had a visit from the Army Infantry team and our Prepare for Life students enjoyed a behind-the-scenes visit to Poundbury Fire Station, including the opportunity to try using a real fire hose.

THRIVE students have continued supporting community projects through ground maintenance work at a local village hall and Weymouth Cemetery, alongside regular volunteering at Radipole Café, weekly travel training and shopping trips, and litter picks on local beaches.

We also have new placements lined up at organisations including Nothe Fort, Longmead Community Farm, Happy Yard, Dorchester Town Council and the Alexandra Hotel.

A fun-filled transition day is also planned for new students starting in September to help them settle into the centre and meet current students.

THRIVE UPDATE

Rachel Rainsbury

Creativity, independence and student leadership have been at the heart of recent activities for THRIVE. From designing a brand new library to planning fundraising events and preparing for an exciting residential project, students have continued to take ownership of their learning while developing valuable life skills.

With student numbers expected to reach around 50 by September, the provision continues to grow organically.

Our Around the World Days have continued, with students most recently exploring Britain by enjoying traditional fish and chips, and Greece, sampling feta cheese and learning about Greek culture.

Another memorable experience saw students visit East Holton Driving Centre for Tea with a Pony, where small groups enjoyed tea, coffee and the opportunity to spend time with the ponies. Even those who weren't usually animal lovers came away smiling!

Project Week has seen students transform the former quiet room into a welcoming new THRIVE Library. Students designed the space themselves, sourced books from local charity shops and donations, and introduced a lending system using a personalised SWRAC library stamp.

The project has encouraged reading and responsibility, while Adrian's creative writing competition provided another opportunity to showcase students' talents.

THRIVE student Tommy was delighted (and so were we!) to see his story, *The Snow Cat*, turned into a published book.

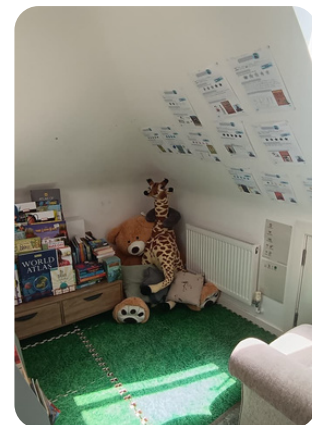
Developing independence has remained a key focus too, and a new Job Initiative Reward Chart is already proving a huge success, rewarding students who complete their daily responsibilities without being prompted. From reward time and hot chocolate to beach trips and bowling, the initiative is helping them become more confident, self-motivated and independent.

Coming up, Winton and Dorchester THRIVE students will join forces for Project Week, learning bushcraft and camping skills together, before hosting the THRIVE Festival at Merley House on 19th August in aid of Lewis-Manning Hospice Care.

The students have been working very hard on the planning and will be helping to run stalls, games and raffles. We have a guest appearance from Harry Redknapp, a bouncy castle, BBQ, tombola and lots more. Tickets are £3 for entry, and we would love to see you there!

In September, THRIVE+ students will also take part in a unique transition residential in Weymouth, where newly appointed THRIVE+ Representatives will lead activities, support incoming students and continue developing the independence and leadership skills that have become such a defining feature of the programme.

Staff will also complete Sign Along and Makaton training over the summer, ensuring they are well prepared to support the needs of new students joining THRIVE in September.



19TH AUGUST 2026

THRIVE

Festival

ENTRY £3
INCLUDES ENTRY INTO STAR PRIZE RAFFLE
AND A FREE DRINK ON ARRIVAL

GUEST APPERANCE
HARRY REDKNAP

CRAFT STALLS TOMBOLA FOOTBALL WITH POOLE TOWN FC
TEA ND CAKE DJ AND LIVE MUSIC STALLS AND GAMES

DOORS OPEN AT 11:00AM - 2:00PM
MERLEY HOUSE, MERLEY

A TRIP TO REMEMBER – SWRAC LEARNERS TAKE ON GRAN CANARIA

Charlotte Clarke and Sherie Bajinka

For 28 SWRAC students, a recent trip to Gran Canaria was far more than a holiday. It was an opportunity to develop independence, build confidence and experience life away from home in a completely new environment.

For many, it was their first time travelling abroad, their first flight, and the first time they had spent an extended period away from their families.

The fully funded trips saw students from Bootle, Southport and Widnes travel in one group, and Boscombe, Dorchester and Winton students travel in a second group for an unforgettable ten-day residential.



With just a few weeks' notice to make the trip a reality, Sherie and Charlotte travelled to Gran Canaria beforehand to carry out a recce, checking the accommodation, planning activities and ensuring everything would run smoothly.

Behind the scenes, staff worked tirelessly organising flights, transport, passports and funding, while also supporting students and families through every stage of the process.

Interest in the trip far exceeded the places available. Almost 50 students applied, but only 28 places were available. Choosing who would go was one of the hardest decisions staff had to make.

"We knew how much it meant to everyone," explained Charlotte. "There were students who desperately wanted to come, and for some it even became extra motivation to work harder throughout the year. We really hope we'll be able to offer more opportunities like this in the future."



For many students, the challenge began long before they boarded the plane. Some had never travelled independently, while others had never even visited an airport.

To help prepare them, staff organised airport familiarisation visits, allowing students to experience check-in procedures, security and the airport environment before travelling. Even with that preparation, there were still plenty of nerves on departure day.

Some students were worried about carrying their passports, navigating security or boarding the aircraft for the first time. Staff made sure those who needed reassurance were supported every step of the way, sitting alongside first-time flyers and helping everyone settle into the journey.

Those nerves quickly disappeared. "The biggest surprise for us was just how well everyone coped," said Charlotte. "You naturally worry about who might find it difficult or become overwhelmed, but they were all incredibly brave. They looked after one another, adapted to new situations and really exceeded our expectations."

Once in Gran Canaria, students quickly settled into life at the villa. Rather than simply enjoying a holiday, everyone played an active role in making the residential a success. They travelled together in hired minibuses, completed supermarket shopping, unpacked groceries, planned meals and worked together to prepare breakfast and dinner.

Students also took responsibility for washing up, tidying communal areas and even using the washing machine, developing valuable life skills that many had never practised away from home before.



Cooking became one of the highlights of the trip. During a Master Chef-style challenge, students prepared local dishes together before sitting down to enjoy meals they had helped create.

Evenings spent chatting around the dining table or relaxing by the villa pool became some of the group's favourite memories, strengthening friendships between students from different centres.

The days were filled with adventure. Students explored the breathtaking Maspalomas Sand Dunes, travelled by boat taxi, visited beaches and local towns, and watched spectacular sunsets from the mountains.



A day at Sioux City proved to be one of the biggest highlights, while a visit to a banana plantation gave students the opportunity to experience a different kind of workplace and learn about local industry. Although the manual work wasn't everyone's favourite activity, it encouraged them to step outside their comfort zones and try something completely different.



Staff watched students who had arrived feeling anxious become increasingly independent as the days passed. They saw friendships blossom, students encouraging one another through new experiences, and young people discovering they were capable of much more than they had imagined.



Sherie reflected: "Watching students confidently manage their passports, travel through airports, shop together, cook meals and support each other made us incredibly proud.

"They achieved things that many of them never thought they could do before the trip."

"Firstly, I was dead chuffed to be chosen to go as this was my very first time abroad without my family.

The best things about the holiday for me were the villa with the pool, watching the sunset over the mountains and the trip to Sioux City.

I also really enjoyed cooking and preparing food together every evening - I definitely ate well while I was away!

One thing that still makes me laugh is when Jodie jumped into the pool in her pyjamas!"

HARRY - SWRAC STUDENT

Parents felt the impact too. The feedback received afterwards was overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the residential as a life-changing opportunity.

Families spoke about the confidence their children returned home with and how much they had grown in just ten days.



While the memories of sunsets, swimming pools and sightseeing will last for years to come, the biggest success wasn't the destination itself.

It was seeing them return home with greater independence, new friendships and the confidence to take on challenges they might once have believed were beyond them.

This remarkable residential has shown exactly what's possible when students are given the chance to step outside their comfort zone - with the right support beside them.

BOOTLE UPDATE

Claire Kennedy

With around 40 students currently attending Bootle, the team is already looking ahead to welcoming approximately 60 learners in September.

A major development has been the launch of Project SEARCH with ASDA, creating exciting new Supported Internship opportunities. Students will rotate through a variety of departments with the support of an on-site tutor and job coach, giving them valuable workplace experience while developing the skills and confidence needed for future employment.

Existing work experience opportunities also continue to grow, with one student recently beginning a placement at The Entertainer after expressing an interest in working in a toy shop – a fantastic example of the team working hard to find opportunities that match their ambitions.

Health and wellbeing has also taken centre stage, with a new walking group that heads out twice a week for lunchtime walks along the canal and through the local park, while the former library has been transformed into a fully equipped fitness suite.

Featuring a treadmill, rowing machine, exercise bike, cross trainer, walking pad, weights and yoga mats, the new space is already being used as part of Health and Wellbeing lessons, as well as providing learners with a place to exercise throughout the day.

Meanwhile, the library has been relocated to a quieter, more comfortable space, where the centre's newly launched Book Club brings together students and staff to share recommendations and discuss their latest reads.

Outside the classroom, students have enjoyed another fantastic Sports Day, taking part in traditional races, football, rounders and obstacle courses before celebrating everyone's achievements with an awards ceremony, certificates and medals.

There have been plenty of independent achievements to celebrate too. One student achieved a significant milestone by successfully travelling independently on public transport after two years of dedicated travel training, while another secured a work experience placement perfectly matched to their career aspirations.

Students also once again supported The Very Group's Pop-Up Shop, helping set up, price and run the store for staff, gaining valuable retail and customer service experience.

The term concluded with a fantastic celebration event, bringing together current and former students to recognise achievements, present awards and enjoy an afternoon of food, music and dancing.



SOUTHPORT UPDATE

Tracie

Firstly, I am delighted to have been appointed as the new Centre Manager at Southport.

Having originally joined the team as a tutor delivering the Prepare for Work programme, and then progressing to the role of Senior Tutor, I am extremely passionate about strengthening the provision and ensuring our students are equipped with the skills and confidence needed for their next steps.

The centre itself has undergone some major improvements - the upstairs classrooms have been transformed into one large, bright learning space, giving students more room to learn together as numbers continue to grow.

Work is also underway on a brand new, larger kitchen, which will support Prep for Life students as they continue developing their independence and everyday living skills.

Supported Internships continue to expand too, with Southport playing a key role in the new Project SEARCH programme with ASDA Aintree.

The team is also delighted to be involved in an exciting archaeology project in partnership with National Museums Liverpool. Students are exploring coastal erosion and local history through fieldwork, filming and presentations, giving them the opportunity to contribute to a real community project while developing valuable communication and teamwork skills.

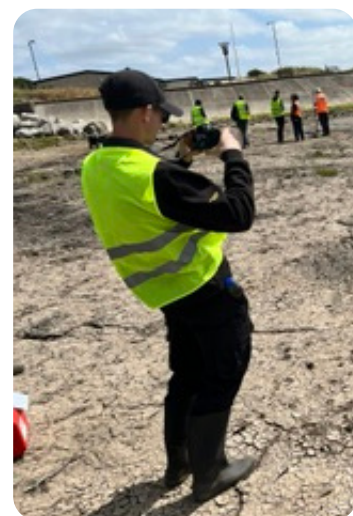
Health and Wellbeing activities have continued to provide students with opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. Recent visits to the local synagogue have helped students explore different faiths and cultures, promoting understanding, respect and inclusion.

Trips to local parks and crazy golf have encouraged physical activity, social interaction and positive mental wellbeing while giving students the chance to build friendships and develop confidence in community settings.

Recently, students took part in a practical First Aid workshop, where they learned essential life-saving skills and how to respond in emergency situations.

As part of the session, students were taught how to recognise the signs of a person becoming unwell and how to spot the symptoms of a loss of consciousness. They learned how to look for changes in responsiveness, breathing and awareness, and discussed the appropriate steps to take while waiting for medical assistance.

We have also introduced exciting new work experience opportunities with the Four Seasons Health Care Group. Students are gaining hands-on experience across hospitality, gardening, animal care and customer service, allowing them to explore a range of career pathways and identify their individual strengths and interests.



WIDNES UPDATE

Jen Orr

Widnes continues to grow at an incredible pace, with exciting new programmes, additional staff and increasing student numbers all set for September.

A brand new classroom has been created for the new Prepare for Work programme, while Shannon, previously an LSA, will step into the role of tutor, supported by three new members of staff joining the growing team.

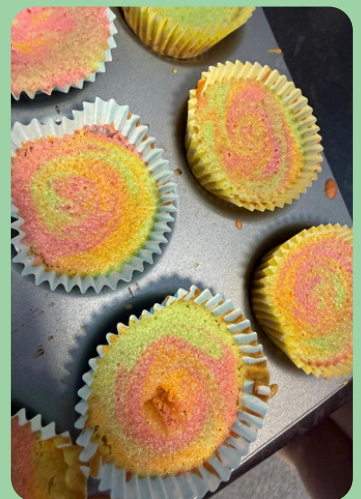
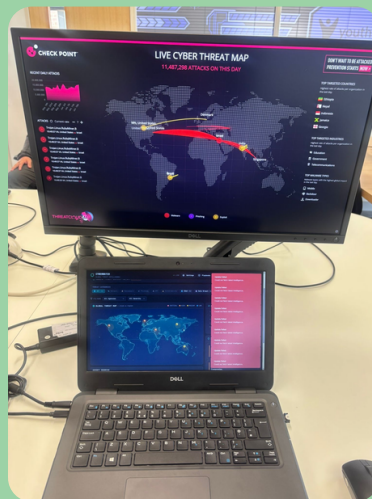
Students have enjoyed a fantastic range of activities this term, combining practical learning with community engagement. To mark World Ocean Day, Prep for Life students completed an ocean-themed escape room before visiting Crosby Beach for a litter pick, helping to protect the local coastline while learning more about environmental sustainability.

The centre also celebrated Earth Day, with students planting sunflower and poppy seeds as part of discussions around biodiversity and caring for the environment.

Pride Month was marked by exploring its history and baking colourful rainbow cupcakes together, while a visit to the Cyber Security Event at Daresbury introduced students to staying safe online, creating strong passwords and the exciting career opportunities available within the cyber sector.

Health and wellbeing has remained a key focus throughout the term. Students enjoyed Sports Day in the sunshine before cooling off with ice creams, while a new Thursday Youth Club is proving a popular addition, with baking and arts and crafts among the favourite activities.

Students have begun volunteering at Frank Street Community Garden, and will soon be visiting Hutchinson Engineering to explore careers in manufacturing, and start new work experience opportunities with Screwfix.



SWRAC CAREERS UPDATE

Daniel Kerley

Preparing students for life beyond SWRAC is about far more than helping them find a job. Our Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) programme has continued to equip students with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills they need to make informed decisions about their future.

This year saw the successful introduction of our new Careers Education Curriculum across every SWRAC centre, giving students even more opportunities to explore career pathways, develop employability skills and prepare for adulthood.

From understanding different industries to practising workplace communication, the curriculum is designed to ensure every student is equipped with skills that will remain valuable throughout their lives.

A particular focus this year has been building confidence. Every student has taken part in activities such as mock interviews and professional telephone calls, helping them develop the communication skills needed to speak with employers, arrange interviews and present themselves confidently in the workplace.

Alongside this, students have explored emerging topics including Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital technologies and the transferable skills that employers increasingly value, such as adaptability, resilience, teamwork and problem-solving.

These classroom sessions have been complemented by a wide range of employer encounters, careers events, workplace visits and higher education experiences across both Dorset and Merseyside. Whether meeting employers, visiting colleges and universities or exploring different industries, students have continued to broaden their understanding of the opportunities available to them after SWRAC.

This commitment to high-quality careers education has again been recognised externally. We are delighted to have achieved 100% of the Gatsby Benchmarks for good careers guidance and were proud to receive recognition from BCP Council for this achievement. We also successfully completed our Matrix Accreditation assessment, recognising the high standard of careers information, advice and guidance available across the organisation.

Perhaps the greatest measure of success, however, is where our students go next. This year, students have progressed into employment, Supported Internships, apprenticeships, vocational college courses and further education in subjects including mechanics, landscaping and animal care.

We are especially proud that two learners will be progressing onto Access to Higher Education courses, continuing their educational journey towards university-level study.

None of this would be possible without the continued support of our employer partners, colleges, training providers and, of course, our families, who work alongside us to help every student achieve their ambitions.

Together, we remain committed to ensuring every young person leaves us with the confidence, skills and experiences they need to take their next step towards a successful and fulfilling future.



TURLIN MOOR YOUTH CLUB

As the evenings have become lighter, the Turlin Moor Youth Club has been making the most of the warm weather with water balloon battles, water pistol games and messy activities like slime.

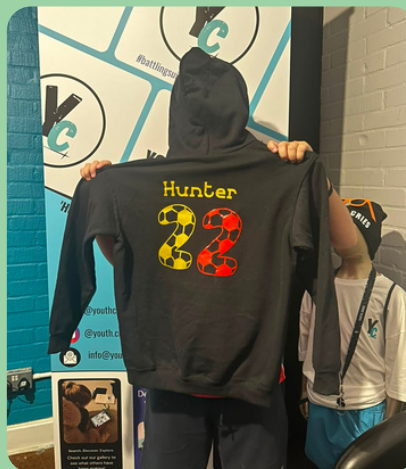
One of the biggest successes this term has been the introduction of Youth Cries, a creative initiative led by Rachel from Winton, which has quickly become a favourite with the older group.

The workshops give young people the opportunity to design and create their own personalised items, including T-shirts, water bottles, caps and other merchandise, while learning different printing techniques.

More importantly, the sessions provide a safe and supportive environment where young people can talk openly about issues such as bullying, family life and mental wellbeing, helping to build confidence, creativity and self-esteem.

As numbers continue to grow, the team is considering slightly earlier sessions for younger members to better suit local families.

During the summer holidays, we are also hoping to organise a trip to Brownsea Island, an Activity Week packed with outdoor fun, a football day and another Community Day - keep an eye on our Facebook page for more information - <http://facebook.com/p/Turlin-Moor-Youth-Centre-61564403682636/>



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