

## Queen's Award for Voluntary Service Interview: SO & LS

In June 2016 Just Drop-In was awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The charity's longest serving volunteer and one of the more recent recruits talk about why they do what they do.

**Steve Oliver**, 57, is married with children and works as a Project Manager in the aerospace sector. He's been involved with Just Drop-In since 1999 when the idea of supporting young people was being born. He's a Trustee and leads on HR and Personnel.

**Lauren Stout**, 29, is married and works as a primary school teacher. She got involved in 2015 and volunteers at one of the Foundation sessions, an early help and friendship group for 12-16 year olds.



### 1. How did you first find out about Just Drop-In?

**STEVE:** I was doing youth work at a church group and the chance came about to be a representative [on a Millenium project]. I jumped at it.

**LAUREN:** I was doing a counselling course at [Macclesfield] college and two other students were volunteering [at Just Drop-In]. They talked about it in such a positive way that I decided to find out how I could be involved.

### 2. Why do you volunteer?

**STEVE:** I care passionately about helping young people fulfil their potential and succeed in life - whatever succeeding may look like. I've had some dark times myself in my youth and so I know what it's like feeling lost. If I can help to make a little bit of difference then it's worth it.

**LAUREN:** I work with younger children and this was a chance be with an older age group. I get a lot out of having conversations with young people and seeing the progress that a lot of them have made over the 2 years I've been here. I get a bit of escapism out of it – it's really different to my day job and it's a welcome change. I really enjoy building solid relationships with some of them.

3. *What do the young people get out of having volunteers (rather than professionals) to be with?*

**LAUREN:** People may have been through similar situations and can relate to them a bit more. It's less formal and they may feel more relaxed to talk - less judgment and more laid back.

**STEVE:** There's no red tape to access our services like there may be somewhere else. I think there could be less stigma and intimidation here. Plus over the years we have developed a really good reputation and there are a lot of word of mouth recommendations.

4. *What's surprised you during your volunteering?*

**LAUREN:** There is one particular young person who has surprised me. When he started I would never ever have imagined him to step foot in a room with other people, let alone be in the position he is now where he is looking at going to university, completing his A Levels. Just wow! He's a completely different person from when he was coming [to Just Drop-In] once or twice a week to get support.

**STEVE:** A couple of things: the first is about the absence of love that young people have had to endure, when you hear some have never had a meal around a table – just the absence of care and attention from family. The other is how unfit some young people are. We did a walk up White Nancy a few years back and in terms of young people looking after themselves it was surprising. Some had never been to places like [Macclesfield] Forest or White Nancy even though they've lived in Macclesfield all their lives.

5. *What has been your most memorable moment while volunteering?*

**LAUREN:** A trip to Manchester we took two young people on - it didn't go to plan but it was such a brilliant day! Also the one-to-one work I have done with a particular young person in MyPad [developing skills for healthy and independent living]. I've also met some great people and made good friends.

**STEVE:** At the Annual General Meeting in 2015 we showed a video with clips of volunteers and young people. I found it absolutely tear jerking. It was a real privilege to feel part of an organisation that had that level of impact.

6. *What advice would you give to anyone thinking of volunteering?*

**LAUREN:** It's really worthwhile. I sometimes think "have I got time?", but I make time and I love being here. The volunteers get as much out of it as the young people do, otherwise we wouldn't come back!

**STEVE:** Don't hesitate – do it. The people here are absolutely amazing - staff, volunteers, young people - there are no egos at Just Drop-In.