

ISSUE 33 · DEC 2023

# SUMMERHILL NEWSLETTER

Giving Children Back Their Childhood



## introduction

BY ZOE READHEAD

Hello All,

It has been rather a long while since we did the last Newsletter. Sorry about that.

I suppose things have been pretty busy across the board for all of us as we recover from the pandemic and its aftermath....

Last summer End of Term we lost a large number of graduates – always such a sad time but one of great pride to see them ready for their next step and later to hear how they are settling into their new lives. It has meant a bit of a shock, as always, for some of the older ones who are still here to suddenly find themselves as the most senior in the school with so many responsibilities to fulfil in order to keep the community running smoothly. At the last Visitor's Day, I was asked why we do not offer A Level exams – I quoted this as the main reason: Just when all other children are preparing for their exams and life pretty well shuts down at home as they are doing home-work and revising, ours have a school to run with all the responsibilities that go along with it. They always fulfil this with great enthusiasm, skill and good spirit in spite of their own exam work.



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"children  
outside  
playing the  
way that only  
free children  
can play."

ZOE



The community seems very small right at the moment with only 50 pupils, many of those as day pupils, but it is, nonetheless, vibrant and busy. I am still bowled over every time I arrive at school whatever the weather to see so many children outside playing the way that only free children can play. Bikes, skates, skateboards, anything with wheels that can be pushed around with a passenger – or just running around in groups.... shrieks and laughter. It nourishes the soul to see – especially in such dark times of fighting and warring across the world.

I often feel that although there is nothing we can personally do to help the children in such dire circumstances, at least we can maintain this place of real freedom on behalf of children everywhere.

It has been nice to be able to welcome visitors again on our General Visiting days. Always well filled we try to keep them to around 40 at a time – otherwise we feel a bit outnumbered.

From my point of view, as one of the people who chats with them, it is nice to have so much genuine interest, unlike in some times past when there would be many sceptics in the group intent upon arguing the rights and wrongs of private education or disbelieving our system. I could never understand the point of visiting just for what seemed like a chance to pick a row. I gave up arguing long ago! It's fine if you don't like the idea of Summerhill, and, yes, I fully agree that Summerhill should not have to be an independent school – but there is not a government anywhere that would fund us as radical as we are. To be honest, if it were offered we would turn it down because it would only be a matter of time before there would be strings attached... However, a nice big government allowance for our bursaries would be much appreciated – or from anywhere else really. Where is my father's creation - the millionaire, Pyecraft, when we need him?

Already we are nearing the end of the Autumn term. We have done Halloween and Guy Fawkes. Both lovely social and historical occasions. Now there are mock exams going on so there is a bit of a serious feeling... but Christmas is on the way and we shall celebrate, as always, on End of Term Friday with a full English Traditional Christmas lunch complete with crackers and plum pudding, a tree, singing carols and Christmas songs followed by a visit from Father Christmas with presents for everybody.

It may be a bit early but I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and the very best for 2024!

Xxx Zoë



## Activities and Highlights

BY BASIL

During my year working at Summerhill I have witnessed and partaken in a plethora of wonderful activities, from film-making and snowball fights to debate clubs and even seal spotting on the beach! It has been truly inspiring to see children living such a rich and liberated existence as part of their education.



It is difficult to pick out a highlight but one of my great pleasures in life is food and here at Summerhill I have not been disappointed! During each term the children vote one another on to 'Bar Committee' which requires that they raise a certain amount of money for the midnight feast at end of term party. To do this they hold fantastic pop-up cafe events where students and staff alike can queue up to buy the special dish of the day and dine on a mouth watering array of international cuisines. It has been nothing short of impressive to see how these groups of mixed ages come together to prepare pizzas, sushi or ramen noodles from scratch and then run a busy kitchen as the orders come flying in. Even more heartwarming is when it inspires the younger generations to apply for their health and hygiene certificates so they can get in the kitchen as soon as they can to start whipping up their own grub! Once the money has been raised, the committee then buys in a bulk order of snacks and treats for the end of term party....in fact as I write this they will be preparing for the final feast of 2023. What culinary surprises lay in store for me tonight I wonder?

"pineapple belongs on pizza."

OFFICIAL OUTCOME OF THE SUMMERHILL DEBATE CLUB



# REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

BY GILES

Now that we have a qualified climbing instructor on the staff, a number of kids enjoyed an introduction to indoor rock climbing this term. Over a couple of different visits we've taken those who expressed an interest to the climbing wall at Stowmarket, where we gave an introduction to climbing equipment, covered some basic belaying skills and gave everyone the chance to take on some graded climbs.



The end result was some excellent efforts, some very impressive routes climbed for beginner climbers as well as plenty of tired arms and aching muscles the next day! We hope to offer further climbing development opportunities next term.





# HALLOWEEN

## Halloween

BY JOAN

Halloween is always something to look forward to as the days become shorter and outside activities are less appealing. Many kids returned to school with items of costume safely stashed in their luggage, while others haunted the art room, patiently creating their Samhain disguises. On the night, the weather was uncharacteristically kind and a happy group of face-painted, imaginatively attired young people set off downtown.

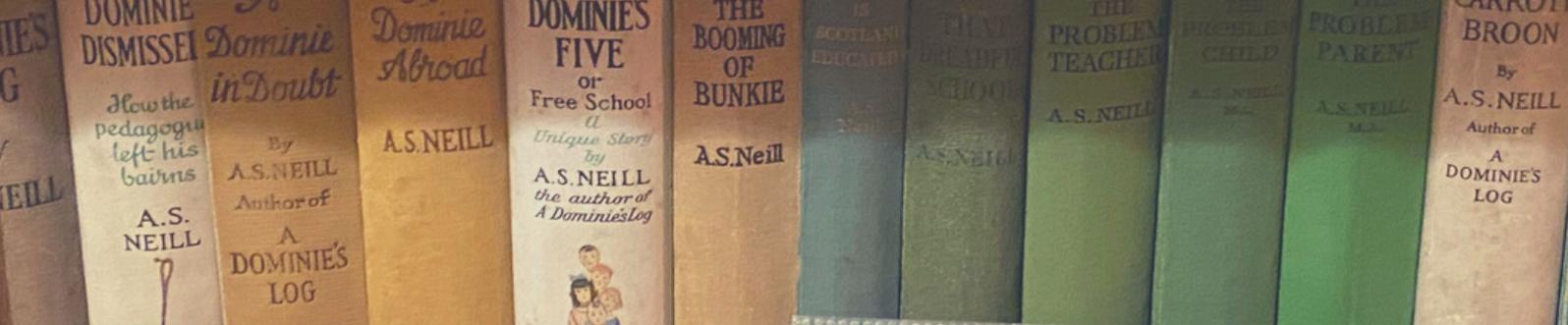


By the time they returned, they had amassed an impressive collection of goodies and were in high spirits. They spent the next while tramping around the school grounds to various spooky venues (hosted by Summerhill staff) before moving into the lounge for music and dancing. What better way to spend a chilly autumn evening?



**"What better way to spend a chilly autumn evening?"**

JOAN



"So many  
leads to  
follow and  
dots to join  
up."

STEVEN



## The A.S.Neill Summerhill Archive

BY STEVEN

Our exciting project continues with great energy and commitment, just as we are beginning to recognise how 'archive rich' we are.

Since I last wrote about our intention to create an on-site Summerhill archive, things have moved on at a terrific speed. With the support of Zoe and the family, I have been able to give dedicated time to the project during my working week.

We have now set aside a specific room onsite to house our ever-growing number of finds. This has allowed us to begin the long process of collating and listing the documents, articles and photographs related to Summerhill's past, which were once stored in several different places around the school.

Zoë continues to have a very specific role in the process because she brings her knowledge, and that of her parents, to assist with the identification of context and the subtle nuances. She recognises many of the situations shown in the photos and the names and connections mentioned in letters. Her presence in the process is invaluable.

Henry has also been integrally involved in contacting past Summerhillians. Between us with have visited and interviewed:

Ishbel McWhirter

Richard Marcus

Gail Critchlow

Nona Shand

Hugh Harris (Hugh visited us)

all of whom were at the school between 1939-1951. Not surprisingly we have learnt so much about the running of the school, particularly about the time when the school was evacuated to Ffestiniog, North Wales. Sharp minds and a great devotion to all that makes Summerhill a life-changing experience, have generated some wonderful oral history recordings.



"...the definitive collection for all who are interested in Neill and Summerhills history."

STEVEN

Henry and I have also visited the Mulberry Tree Centre, the current repository of the Albert Lamb and Jonathan Croall Archive collections. By working closely with their archivist Gareth Beynon, we have viewed the materials and agreed that now we have established a home archive, the materials should be stored at Summerhill. Albert and Jonathan have both given their agreement, so we await the sign off by a trustee of the Mulberry Tree Centre and then it will all become part of the Summerhill Archive. An enormous move forward in establishing our archive as the definitive collection for all who are interested in Neill and Summerhill's history.

Following up on a lead, which came to light during the preparations for the Summerhill Art Exhibition in London, last summer, we have also been granted copies of correspondence between Neill, Lucy Francis (Summerhill Teacher of the younger age group) Robin Bond (Summerhill Art Teacher) and Paul Wengraf (the owner of the Arcade Gallery where the 1944 Exhibition of Summerhill Student's Artwork was displayed) housed in the archive at the University of Dundee.

I have recently re-established contact with Professor Hori, in Japan. He is assisting with locating photographs taken during visits to Summerhill during the 1980s and 1990s, and Andrew who is based in Scotland and writing about the early connection between Summerhill and the Aitkenheads and the establishment of the Kilquhanity School.

Having carried out a little detective work on one of our older photos, of Neill as a teacher in Scotland. I have managed to confirm that the photo was taken while Neill was teaching at Newport School. The local archivist, Mairi @Newport Archive has been wonderfully helpful in offering further information about Neill's time in the area. We are now doing a bit of a double act, carrying out some research on Harry Wilsher, Neill's headteacher and mentor at Newport School.

Through the generosity and interest of John @ West Hoathley Archive we now have a greater knowledge of the work of Lucy Francis and Kingsmuir School. Lucy established two schools in succession, initially in Castle Headingham, Essex and the other in West Hoathley, Sussex. Lucy's schools were founded as 'outpost of Summerhill' during the 1940s through to the 1960s.





"Seriously consider what you could add to our archive."

STEVEN

With the greater awareness of the A. S. Neill Summerhill Archive we have become the custodians of more and more permanent contributions. We have, over the last year, received donations to the Summerhill Archive from:

- Debby Hemmings - correspondence between her father Ray and Neill; End of Term letters from Neill to the parents and Ray's collection of Neill books
- Richard Marcus - letters from Neill; newspaper articles about Summerhill from the 1940s and photos of his time at Summerhill.
- The Corkhill Family – 5 photo albums, documenting George and Angharad, and Mervyn's time at Summerhill.
- Paul Wilson - articles and letter response from Neill to Paul's father and copies of jazz music performed at Summerhill
- Ishbel McWhirter – information about her art exhibitions and access to ephemera for copying

So where next?

I am currently busy sorting from Neill and Ena's correspondence, which amounts to a lot of hours.

Transcribe the recordings of interviews with past Summerhillians.

More visits to past Summerhillians. Do feel that you can volunteer to be part of this project.

Await the arrival of the archives from the Mulberry Tree Centre so that we can begin the process of cataloguing our growing archive.

Continue to collate the range of materials available about the broad spectrum of links about Summerhill's history. I have reached Volume 10!

What can you do to help?

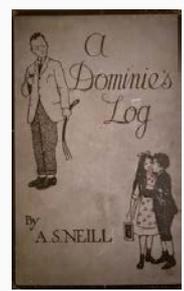
Seriously consider what you could add to our archive.

Have you any photos, letters, memories, or other ephemera that you would be prepared to donate, either in their original form or photocopied.

Please make contact through the School Office, I would love to hear from you, and celebrate your reminiscences of dear Summerhill.

Kind Regards,  
Stephen  
Summerhill Archive

[office@summerhillschool.co.uk](mailto:office@summerhillschool.co.uk)





"Step inside  
and witness  
our young  
minds at  
work."

ANDRESA

# CLASS 2 CHRONICLES

BY ANDRESA

Welcome to the Class 2 Chronicles!

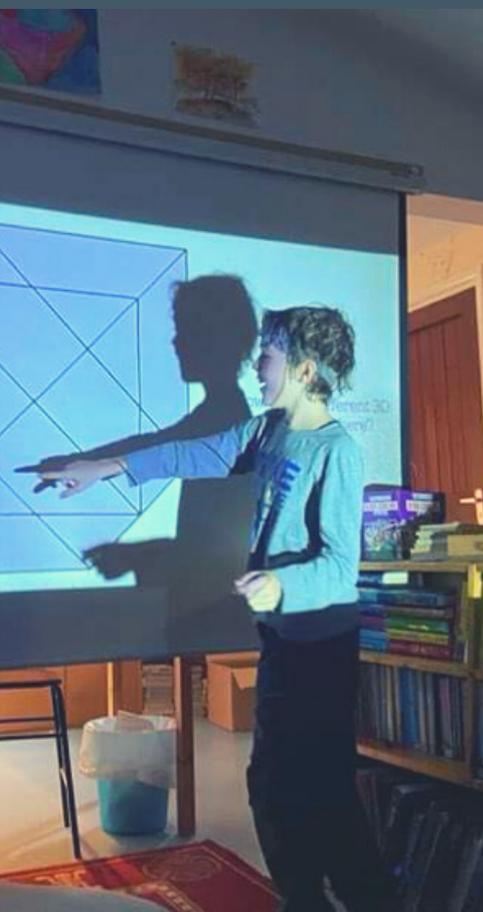
Dive into the vibrant world of Class 2, where creativity knows no bounds, energy is contagious, and engagement is the name of the game! Currently hosting 40% of Summerhill's students, Class 2 is a hub of exploration and excitement.

**Creative Buzz:** Step inside and witness our young minds at work—kids leading their own projects, from Lego masterpieces to imaginative flip-books and captivating book-writing ventures, and everything you can and cannot imagine in between. The room hums with discussions on deep and light-hearted topics, all complemented by our teacher-facilitated sessions, fondly known as lessons.

**Scientific Investigations:** Science in Class 2 means hands-on adventures. This term, we dived into chemical reactions and matter, as well as weather, climate, and water cycling. Our students not only grasp scientific concepts but also cultivate a questioning attitude towards the world. A recent field trip to the Ministry of Science Show was such a hit that we plan to repeat it for a different group next term!

**Theatrical Enchantment:** After the great success of the BFG play last term, our enthusiastic students couldn't wait to dive into a new production, and guess what? Their wishes came true! This term, we've delved into an exciting new script, assigned roles, brainstormed scenery ideas, and even begun working on scene layouts. Rehearsals are set to kick off next term with a bigger cast. Trust us; you won't want to miss the magic we're brewing for next Summer Half-term!

The Class 2 experience is full of diversity and opportunity. Our menu of activities and time and space for self-initiated projects ensure that everyone can pursue their unique interests. Only those who step through our doors truly understand the magic that happens within. Stay tuned for more adventures and discoveries in the upcoming newsletters!





**Literacy Adventures:** Literacy is the heartbeat of our classroom, integrated into every lesson and project. This term, we delved into current events through several activities. During our News Club, we watched and discussed weekly news presented by the FYI News Show from Sky Kids. "Breaking News" sessions had students reading, deducing, and analysing news reports, while a Journalist Training School set the stage for the potential launch of our very own Summerhill newspaper! For those less inclined toward news, our General English sessions provided a space to develop language skills across all curriculum components. And our Book Clubs continue to be a popular choice, igniting a passion for reading.

"Literacy is the heartbeat of our classroom"

ANDRESA



**Numeracy Explorations:** Numbers, Ratio and Proportional Reasoning, Geometry, Algebra, Probability, and Data Science—our numeracy curriculum covers it all. And our mathematicians keep on improving their thinking skills as well as developing mathematical language. They even communicate with a person in Saudi Arabia who lives in a cloister, with no internet, no dictionary and no art skills. Ask your child about that! Students can engage in as much or as little as they want. The term's highlight? Our Inspirational Maths course, celebrating struggles and mistakes, fostering a growth mindset, and breaking down the myth of the "maths-person"





# "You've heard about inspectors interviewing students right?"

CAT AND LISA



## Junior Journalists in Action: Changing the game

BY CATARINA AND LISA

You've heard about inspectors interviewing students, right? But have you ever heard of students interviewing inspectors? We interviewed Mrs. Maxine Shaw, Mr. James Kazi and Mr. Steve Fox and here is what we found out.

How long have you been an inspector?

Steve: 20 years

James: 16 years for the IB, 10 years for the ISI

Maxine: "Oh, gosh! 20 years"

What do you need to do to become an inspector?

You need to want to be an inspector, fill out an application form, and then train for 2 days. Every year, there is further training to learn what is new.

What is your favourite part about being an inspector?

All three of them said they really enjoy visiting other schools, seeing different ways of doing things, and meeting interesting people. They said they learn a lot from it, and Maxine said she brings a lot back to her own school, including different teaching styles. She also said that she was very impressed by our meeting.

Do you always know the other inspectors?

Usually no. Maxine said that in all the time she's been inspecting schools (20 years!), she has only met a person she had worked before with once. That's a lot of inspectors out there!

What do you do apart from being an inspector?

Steve: "That is my only job."

James: "I teach English."

Maxine: "I'm the headteacher of a school in Surrey called Danes Hill."

Tell us about an interesting experience you had at a school you visited.

Maxine: When I had a gap year, before I started teaching, I travelled around the world. I went to Fiji and decided to visit a school there. It was a lovely school on one of the islands. Children all arrived at the school walking or by boat. When I got in, however, children were studying for British 11+ exams. That was so sad! There was so much more those children could be doing!



# " a journey of self-discovery as a parent"

REVIEW



## The Role of the Adult

### IN FACILITATING A HAPPY AND FULFILLED CHILDHOOD

After two hugely successful course rounds this year, the A.S.Neill Summerhill CIC will be delivering again this Winter the Role of the Adult certified CPD course!

If you are interested in...

- seizing a truly unique opportunity to develop your resourcefulness and capacity to free children’s emotions and break down barriers restricting their development;
- engaging in an impactful reflection of your practice, focusing on healthy relationships, social-emotional well-being and a happy, fulfilled childhood
- exploring further than ever before A.S.Neill’s and Summerhill’s philosophy;
- accessing resources of world leading educational and psychology research and practice;
- working in a highly interactive and inspiring environment from the comfort of your own space;
- connecting and collaborating with a diverse group of like-minded practitioners from all around the world; and
- earning a 50+ hour CPD certificate on all the above, then...

Don’t miss out on this awesome opportunity to learn directly from the Summerhill community!

**THE ROLE OF THE ADULT**  
IN FACILITATING A HAPPY AND FULFILLED CHILDHOOD

A.S.Neill Summerhill CIC

150.00 OFF IF YOU BOOK YOUR TICKET BEFORE 1st January

50+ HOUR ONLINE CPD COURSE ON A.S.NEILL'S AND SUMMERHILL SCHOOL'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES FOR PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN.

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CONCESSIONARY RATES AVAILABLE

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asneillsummerhillcic@gmail.com



"wow what a game-changer"

REVIEW



## The Role of the Adult

IN FACILITATING A HAPPY AND FULFILLED CHILDHOOD

Reviews from this Autumn's course:

**\*\*Enhancing Parent-Child Connection\*\*** - "Finished the Summerhill online course and wow, what a game-changer! It's deepened my understanding of child-led learning and strengthened my connection with my kids. Highly recommend it to all parents!"

"This course has given me an opportunity to see how broad and fun learning can be, regardless of age. It has given me valuable and liberating teaching and learning tools, as well as confidence to expand my practice as a teacher and a homeschooling mother, conditioned by formal schooling and teacher training. Henry and Anie are super cool leaders who make the whole course very engaging and enjoyable. I am looking forward to another course!"

"Completing Summerhill's online course has been a journey of self-discovery as a parent. I've learned so much about respecting children's autonomy and am excited to nurture my child's individuality."

 **BOOK NOW** 

FOR CONCESSIONARY RATES PLEASE APPLY THROUGH OUR WEBSITE.

FOR GROUP BOOKINGS GET IN TOUCH AT:

OFFICE@ASNEILLSUMMERHILLCIC.CO.UK

[HTTPS://WWW.ASNEILLSUMMERHILLCIC.CO.UK/ONLINE-COURSE-ROLE-OF-THE-ADULT/](https://www.asneillssummerhillcic.co.uk/online-course-role-of-the-adult/)

# Interview with Nico Gonzalez

SUMMERHILL LEAVER AUTUMN '23

How long have you been at Summerhill?

For 7 years, I started when I was 10 years old, in 2016 summer term

Why did you come to Summerhill?

Simply because I liked it. I came a few times to visit my siblings (Jaime & Ale), and I had such a good time, so I wanted to come for longer.

How did it feel when you first started at Summerhill?

Very excited about moving in with my siblings, and also happy about the freedom I had. I was also a little confused at times, as I didn't speak the language. Although this didn't last for long as I got the basics fairly quick.

How much POC (pocket money) do you get and what do you spend it on? £15, I mostly spend it on wood and metal, for my projects in the woodwork and metalwork.

When you leave Summerhill what would you miss the most?

Definitely the woodwork and metalwork workshop. Also my friends and the community.

Favourite meal at Summerhill?

Ramen soup on Fridays, made by Teresa :)

What would you say was your biggest achievement, or greatest pleasure at Summerhill? Becoming a confident chairmen in the meetings. This is a powerful skill that will be very useful in life.

Is there anything you feel you have added or given to Summerhill?

A fairly big half pipe :) As well as all my love to the place & community.

What would you be doing next, when you leave?

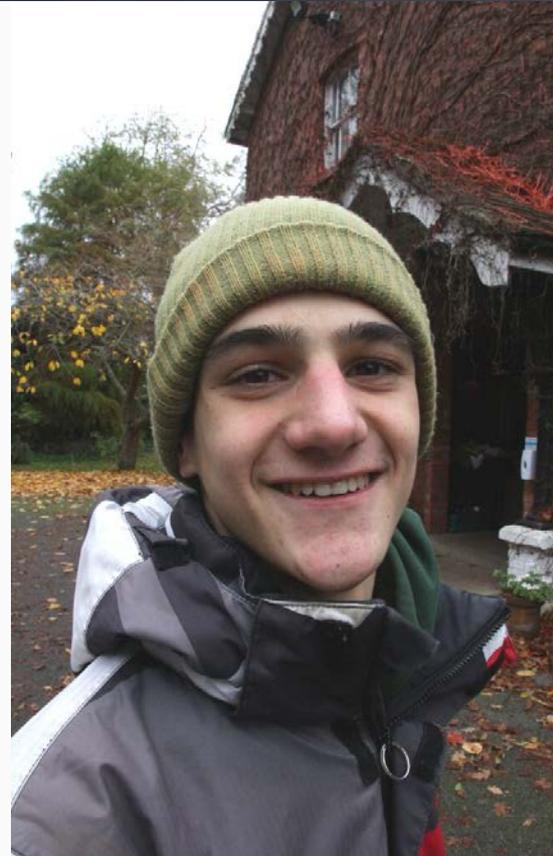
I'm going to be moving back to Spain (this Christmas), to start my blacksmithing and knife making business. I will be making knives to put out for sale, as well as working on custom commissions.

If you are interested in the crafts of metalwork and woodwork, please check my social media or contact details below:

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/work.nico>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083532662305>

Email: [work.nico.ng@gmail.com](mailto:work.nico.ng@gmail.com)



# The A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust

The A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust is a registered charity whose purpose is to promote the educational philosophy, ideas, life and writings of A.S.Neill, and to provide bursaries or other forms of financial assistance to school pupils. The Trust also works to promote the re - publication and translation of existing books, new books, overseas visits by school staff to give talks, school visitor days at Summerhill as well as Summerhill pupils visiting other schools to run workshops on children's rights and democracy. Each year the trustees consider several applications for bursaries towards school fees. Because our funds are limited, we can currently award bursaries only to current pupils. Parents should contact the school office for information on how to apply for a bursary from the A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust.

A very big thank you to all our donors who have so generously supported the spirit of Summerhill. Your donations help kids remain at the School who would otherwise have to leave, and provide extracurricular activities that would be beyond the School's ability to provide.

If you'd like to make a difference to a child's life, you too can make a donation to the Trust. Whether it is a one off or regular donation, we will spend it wisely.

£25 means a child can join their friends on a school trip.

£50 will pay for two extra-curricular lessons.

£100 will pay for travel costs incurred by the External Affairs Committee during their promotion of Summerhill & the ideas/philosophies of A.S.Neill.

£1,000 will provide assistance over two terms for parents who are struggling to pay their child's school fees.

A regular donation made by standing order will become an important part of our 'bread and butter'.

To make a gift or regular donation, or for more information about the A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust, please contact the School office on 01728 830540 or email: [office@summerhillschool.co.uk](mailto:office@summerhillschool.co.uk).

You can also write to The A.S.Neill Summerhill Trust, c/o Summerhill School, Westward Ho, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY.

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Summerhill School

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[www.summerhillschool.co.uk](http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk)





Wishing you a Happy Holiday and a Joyful New Year

FROM EVERYONE HERE AT . . .



See  
You  
in  
2024!

