



Welcome to our Spring Newsletter, outside in the landscape we see more hints of new life; the pure white bell flowers of snowdrops appear from the ground and the green leaf blades of other bulbs start to nose their way up. The ends of the twigs begin to change colour as the buds start to fill out, giving the bare trees a coloured haze at their edges. And the bird song becomes fuller, more active and tuneful as the birds prepare for mating and nesting.

We recently had 3 goat kids born on the farm. They were born earlier than Ed had intended, but still it is wonderful for all at Sunfield to experience this small clutch of new life. The barn has been filled with the murmur of enchanted children and staff over the last days visiting the new-borns.

## Festivals at Sunfield RMT

In bringing awareness to the present moment in Nature, we experience more deeply the special experiences only available at that time of year - in Spring awakening and new growth; in summer flowering and ripening, in Autumn, gathering and dying and back and in deep winter, stillness, bareness and a dearth of life. These transitions bring security and meaning to the year for us. Humans have marked these yearly transitions throughout history by organising festivals, which celebrate both the quality of that time of year and its connection to a spiritual or religious idea, located in place, culture and tradition. As society has become increasingly secular, less tied to place and less land based generally, so too has the meaning of the festivals become less distinct for us. For most of us, the festivals today are more about gathering with our family and loved ones, about eating, drinking and giving gifts.

At Sunfield we are trying to develop the experience of seasonality, of time passing for our children and young people to help them better orientate in the world. Crafting through the seasons using seasonally available materials that come out of the place; participating in sowing, growing and eating fresh seasonal vegetables and fruit; experiencing animal activity through the year (to name but a few) all help to locate in time and in place and to feel more secure in time passing.

We support the awareness of these yearly transitions for our young people by marking it with consciously created festivals. These recognise the qualities of the time of the year, connect to important cultural and spiritual motifs and bring the community of Sunfield warmly together. We have found that pacing a festival, to build the space up over a period of days with the young people, culminating with the festival itself works well so that our learners feel immersed in the picture we are trying to bring to awareness.



We recently celebrated Candlemas. The Festival of Candlemas falls on the 2nd February. After the darkest time of the year there is now a promise of Spring and return of the Light, days are getting longer. The potent symbol of candlelight is at the centre of the festival; to warm the Earth and encourage that which has been lying dormant and sleeping during winter to sprout and grow.

In our build up to the Candlemas festival, the Sunfield community built a soil mound from gathered mole hills as representation of the Earth. Into this we poured several Earth candles - literally a wick and beeswax poured into hollows in the ground. The young people helped make felted snowdrops, as representations of new growth, and each class made a St Brigid's cross, a traditional symbol of protection that is renewed each Candlemas. On our Candlemas festival day itself we walked a 'dark to light' path through the woods and into the open meadow representing the journey from dark (winter) to light (summer)

that we begin at this time of year. We all carried little quiet bells to 'awaken nature' as we walked and on the field, we met our soil mound with all the Earth candles alight. Here we had a verse and a song and then had hot chocolate and cake. The Earth mound with multiple flaming candles at the centre of our festival, gave a fascinating and beautiful picture of the light of new life awakening in the Earth.

As we learn more as a community at Sunfield about how we help our young people to engage in place and seasonality; festivals become important gateways to the present moment as its experienced, as markers of change through the year and as ways of connecting to wider spiritual and cultural traditions and ideas about Nature and human beings place on Earth.

### **Growth at Sunfield RMT**

We are delighted to share that Sunfield has this year been granted CQC registration to open our own adult provision within the heart of the Sunfield grounds. The home is small and is limited to accommodate 3 young adults who have an EHCP and are transitioning from Sunfield. An experienced CQC Registered Manager has been recruited along with a staff team. The home is designed to follow a "RISE" programme and will work in partnership with our successful education adult programme "Gateway" for young adults from 19 -25 years of age. The focus for the team will be to continue and extend the progress that the young people have achieved during their time at Sunfield so far.

The RISE programme will offer a transitional stepping stone, allowing young adults to be supported stepping into adulthood and having a high level of support and nurture as they do so. The focus will be to provide opportunities for individual growth of the self and experiences with the wider world. A tailored programme of daily living will be followed and alongside this, young adults will develop their independence and confidence, with the support network of the continuation of education, therapies and the qualities of care to support the continuation of need.

### **Staff Training and Holistic Support and Care at Sunfield-New Developments**

At Sunfield we are committed to providing our staff team with the skills and knowledge in order that they can support the needs of our children and young people. Our two-week Induction includes training in Safeguarding, ASC, Attachment, human phasic development, positive behaviour management and a journey through our unique fields of practice and method of PSTE (practical skills therapeutic education). From day one our colleagues are invited to experience these fields which include orientation in the unique location which is Sunfield, engage in clay work and experience our land and outdoor curriculum. This helps our new colleagues walk alongside and experience something of what the children and young people experience, and give them a glimpse of what Sunfield affords in terms of drawing upon a curriculum from place which supports the learning and

well-being of the children and young people. As part of their experience of the land our new colleagues Marie -Claire and Raynor (below) got to experience feeding one of our new arrivals in Sunfield as part of their training in the land and outdoor curriculum:



Below is an account of our Induction programme from Katie Fieldhouse, a recent starter and one of our new senior leaders:

*When first exploring Ruskin Mill having seen the job at Sunfield School, the visions, values and ethos of the trust resonated greatly with me and it seemed somewhat of a dream to have found somewhere so aligned with me. To discover that a two-week induction would be arranged for all new staff members in order to really delve into the visions, values and ethos, amongst other things, was just fantastic. Never before have I heard of or experienced such an in depth and thorough induction. The reality of the induction was every bit as special as I had anticipated it to be, a real investment in and commitment from the Trust/School to new staff members and for that I am truly grateful.*

*To arrive and be made to feel so at ease, genuinely cared for and valued immediately in addition to being greeted by such a wealth of not only knowledge but passion, by such inspirational people was amazing. Throughout the induction, all of the sessions on the seven fields of practice that underpin Practical Skills Therapeutic Education were an absolute highlight for me and I found myself wanting to learn/experience more and more. Not only the content, but the delivery of this really encapsulated the true essence of each field and the Trust as a whole. Visiting the Rose Garden, St Mary's, the Steiner Library, the Farm and the entire landscape when looking at the Field 1 Genius Loci, as well as the work we did on Field 3 Biodynamic Ecology was an excellent way of connecting with the landscape and experiencing how important these Fields are when developing the curriculum and the young person's overall journey at Sunfield.*

*The overall experience was powerful, immersive and inspiring. Experiencing this as a collective with other new staff members of whom I created the loveliest bonds with through our shared induction made it all even more wonderful and a personal favourite was us connecting through song. I could not have wished for more, something that I will not only always remember fondly but that will shape all of my work here at Sunfield.*

As well as our wide range of in-house training, we have colleagues engaged in cross-trust programmes including Masters research in PSTE, Art-A journey of the Soul into Colour, Pedagogic Potential of Craftwork, Biodynamic Ecology, Nutrition, and Steiner Educational Insights.

We also have exciting new developments. Cate Zheng, our pottery tutor is now transitioning into her new role as Training and Development Coordinator who will be overseeing the training needs at Sunfield. We warmly welcome her into her new role. Richard Tucker is currently transitioning to a new role, that of Head of therapeutic Care, which is part of the HEaRT training team within the Ruskin Mill Centre of Practice and based at Sunfield. As part of his new role he will be overseeing the development of a new training provision at Sunfield. We are currently renovating one of our unused buildings and transforming it into a training home which will be providing regular three-day residential seminars in Homemaking particularly for our care staff. This will complement our existing training provision called Upper Grange based in Stroud. We hope that this practical, reflective and immersive training opportunity for our care staff will be able to build upon the already wonderful work our homes do with our children and young people.

Sunfield Senior Leaders

<https://www.rmt.org/sunfield/>