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Your editor:

Steve Beebee
steveb@nya.org.uk

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EDITORIAL

IT'S THAT time of year when many of you will be going back to school or – scarier still – going off to college or university for the first time. The uncertainty of being away from home for perhaps the first time and being hurled into a new social circle is daunting enough by itself, so the last thing you want is to have constant money worries as well. With recent reports indicating that student debt is at an all-time high, it's never been more important to keep those finances in check.

Are your parents going to pay for everything, or do you need to find an extra source of cash while you are learning? Before you panic have a look at Directgov's website – that's the government's website for the public. It has some new pages that include details on funding available to carry on in various types of learning. You can find extra help with covering your costs, such as the cost of transport to college or sixth form, and bursaries for specialist courses for those studying away from home.

Directgov also has information on the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16 to 18-year-olds – which is cash paid directly into your bank account – not to your parents or your college – to help you keep on learning. You could get up to £30 a week during term time to help you with the cost of books, travel, equipment or anything useful to continue learning. To see if you qualify log on to www.direct.gov.uk/EMA

Another aspect of student life is getting used to living independently, so don't miss our handy checklist in *Ruckus*, alongside all our usual lifestyle articles, celebrity interviews, comment and opinion.

Steve Beebee
Editor
steveb@nya.org.uk


The National Youth Agency


youthinformation.com



Jason Robinson

Known in some circles as Billy Whizz due to his remarkable speed and agility, **JASON ROBINSON** has achieved something that hardly anyone in the world will ever achieve – he’s lifted a World Cup! A crucial part of England’s 2003 Rugby World Cup winning squad, Jason’s overcome a lot in life to get to where he is – and these days he’s focusing on getting more young people into sport. **STEVE BEEBEE** caught up with Jason to look back on his glittering career ...

You retired from competition recently after a truly stellar career. What are you up to now?

Jason Robinson: “I’ve been working with Tesco on a scheme to get young people into sport. I’m going up and down the country doing coaching sessions. We’re talking about sport and trying to raise interest and awareness. I’ve also been doing some actual

rugby coaching with the children and young people which is a lot of fun, and hopefully doing them good.”

How important is it for young people to get into sport at an early age and stick with it?

“It’s incredibly important. When you look at the levels of childhood obesity in this country, it’s absolutely

frightening. It is so important to give children and young people an alternative to sitting on the sofa playing video games. Some of them don’t get the opportunities to participate in sport and others don’t want to cos they think it’s not for them. But really, if you look at a sport like rugby, there’s a role for everyone. It doesn’t matter if you’re big, medium

sized or really small – there is a role in a rugby team for you.”

Thinking back to when you were a kid, what was it that got you into rugby in the first place?

“I got into rugby thanks to one inspirational teacher at my school. I really didn’t know where I was going in life. But thanks to that teacher I got into this idea of throwing balls around, of running, and training hard. I realised not only that I was getting good at it, but that I had found something I enjoyed. It was all thanks to those early opportunities and being encouraged to have a go.”

Is it true you had to overcome a lot of childhood problems at an early age to get where you are?

“Well, we’ve all got our issues, haven’t we? I didn’t come from a sporting family. I wasn’t surrounded by former rugby players, far from it. But all along I’ve managed to find the inspiration to progress. First of all it was through teachers and later through Va’aiga Tuigamala who was a great role model to me. I firstly joined a local club and managed to progress from that.”

What impact did your friendship with Tuigamala at Wigan have on you?

“Well, early in my career, I did drink too much, no doubt about it. Unfortunately at the time there was a big drinking culture attached to the game of rugby. Things are a bit more rigorous now and the players are more health conscious. Again I looked to

“I got into rugby thanks to one inspirational teacher at my school. I really didn’t know where I was going in life. But thanks to that teacher I got into this idea of throwing balls around, of running, and training hard.”



Tuigamala and saw how different he was. He wasn’t getting drunk. In fact, he seemed to have a great life – he was a brilliant player and had a lovely family. I started thinking to myself ‘I want to be like that.’”

You soon established yourself as a regular player for England, and also the British Lions. What does it mean to represent your country?

“It’s a very special moment. To play for your country is one of the ultimate accolades or things you can achieve

in any sport. You’ve come up from club level and suddenly you’re in this other team, the English national side, and there’s a great sense of pride and achievement associated with that.”

Even non-rugby fans remember you for your amazing speed and that ability to fox the opposition with sidesteps. Have you always been super quick or is it something you specifically trained for?

“I’ve been quick from an early age, but speed is certainly something I’ve worked on. As a boy I had natural speed, but at that point you can’t really tell, because your body isn’t fully grown. Luckily I have been able to keep that attribute and make the best of it. You train hard and you never stop learning. Above all, that’s the thing to remember. If you think you know it all, that’s the moment it starts to slip. While I’ve always had the speed, it’s something I’ve trained hard for as well, because you want to maximise any skill you have.”

We’re sure you’ve been asked this hundreds of times, but can you put into words the feeling of winning a World Cup – something you achieved for England in 2003?

“The six months leading up to it was the hardest six months of rugby I have ever known. Manager Clive Woodward did not leave a single stone



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untuned. I remember some of the matches were great, and there were some which weren’t so great, but what was clear was that there were some real characters stepping up to the challenge out there. We got to a point where the Jonny Wilkinsons, the Martin Johnsons and the Lawrence Dallaglios were getting the best out of themselves, and it was all coming together. When the final whistle blew, the feelings were a mixture of relief, surprise and exhaustion. There was a sense of disbelief, and the euphoria came along afterwards.”

Those few weeks after winning the World Cup must have absolutely insane. What do you remember of that, and were you aware that rugby had surged in popularity? After all, the England footie team wasn’t doing much worth singing about ...

“When we got home, everyone was absolutely incredible to us. The crowds that hung around the hotel, the unbelievable reception we got when we went through London – all that sticks in my mind. It was a bit of a whirlwind – people were saying the country hadn’t experienced anything like it since the football World Cup of 1966. Certainly there was a rise in interest in rugby, and that was great to see. In one way, I don’t think the sport of rugby was quite prepared for it, but it’s hard to predict the impact of something as big as a World Cup win.”

Aside from the World Cup, what other highlights of your career do you like to look back on?

“Looking back on my career, it’s impossible to pick one highlight. I’ve got a long, long list of them – aside from the World Cup, I think of achievements at club level and perhaps in particular the British Lions. Being part of that was a great

experience. The thing I’m happiest about personally is my consistency. I’ve been able to play at a fairly high level throughout my playing career. Sometimes people don’t see that – they’ll see you touch the ball twice and do something magical and say you’ve had a great game, and then they’ll see you slave away like a madman for 80 minutes and think you’ve had a poor game. But I’ve been satisfied with what I’ve been able to bring to the pitch.”

You’re the first player of mixed race ever to captain the England, and one of relatively few to play at the top level. Do you think rugby has a problem reaching young people of Black and Asian origin?

“It’s true – and it’s also true that historically the game has not reached people of all races. It’s something that rugby union is looking at. I think it’s very important to get schemes going in the inner cities, or in areas that are deprived, so we can give opportunities to young people who wouldn’t normally get them. Think of all the talent we’re missing out on. There must be any number of potentially great players who have never lifted a ball. I know that the sport is looking at it, and I am sure it will improve.”



checklist: Independent Living

Presenting a simple checklist that might help you get things right first time out, we attempt to explain and simplify home tasks to create a clean and comfortable living environment, essential if you're living away from your folks for the first time, or going away to uni etc ...



On a weekly basis:

- Wipe kitchen, including cooker, and bathroom work surfaces
- Wipe kitchen and bathroom floors
- Clean loo – put down a loo cleaner and brush thoroughly. Use a bleach if the loo is discoloured
- Vacuum throughout
- Dust and tidy
- Change beds – this can be fortnightly for sheets or duvet covers if you wear night clothes, or weekly if you don't. Change pillow cases weekly. Have an under-pillow case on each pillow and wash it every three months
- Washing- keep light colours apart from dark. You'll need to wash both piles separately or your whites will discolour. Check washing instructions on clothes. Wash white cottons on highest temperature for good results
- Launderettes can be found in most towns if you do not have a washing machine of your own
- Iron –if you fold items carefully this should only take half an hour
- Empty all rubbish bins and put out rubbish in time for collection. Consider your recycling options
- Shop for fresh goods (ie fruit and veg) on a weekly basis

Fortnightly:

- Check and if necessary clean fridge. Chances are that every six months your fridge/freezer will need defrosting
- Check and if necessary clean cooker/microwave
- Keep an ongoing shopping list (add to it when something is used up) and try to do a main shop fortnightly

Twice a month:

- Wipe window sills and doors internally and externally
- Sweep paths
- Clean windows

Annually:

- Wash or have duvets and pillows cleaned
- Check cupboards and clear out unwanted goods
- Take down pictures and wipe

GETTING THE JOB: YOUTH WORKER

IT ISN'T ALWAYS OBVIOUS HOW YOU START A CERTAIN CAREER AND EVEN BEING SURE IT'S ONE THAT YOU REALLY WANT. HERE WE LOOK AT HOW YOU GO ABOUT BECOMING A YOUTH WORKER AND OFFER GUIDANCE ON GETTING THAT FIRST JOB.



What exactly is youth work?

It's a type of informal education that can help, teach and engage young people. They might be learning about themselves, others and society, acquiring new skills that might eventually help them get a job, or receiving personal one-to-one support on some level. A good youth worker can link a young person who might have specific difficulties, such as homelessness or drug problems, with the specific source of help they need. The youth service aims to empower young people, giving them a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole. Unlike going to school, young people that attend youth projects do so voluntarily, so the work that takes place must really engage them and be something they want to do.

What skills do I need to be a youth worker?

According to renowned youth work writer Howard Williamson, effective youth workers need three things:

- Good listening skills
- A good sense of humour
- Eternal patience

Youth work starts where young people are and takes into account their preferences and view of the world. Even so, youth workers must



challenge young people to think about their behaviour and its consequences, and question their prejudices and assumptions. Even when activities appear to be purely recreational, a youth worker will seek to draw out educational elements. Put another way, a youth worker must have a plan of action, exceptional interpersonal skills,

be able to get on with other people and understand them, and communicate well at all levels.

Youth workers are not expected to be an expert on everything affecting young people, but they should have a good knowledge about the community in which they are working, and the

“Working as a volunteer can be a good way of finding out if youth work is for you, as well as getting your foot in the door.”



circumstances of young people within it. They also need to keep abreast of policy developments and legislation at both national and local level.

Depending on circumstances, a youth worker might take on a wide variety of roles and / or responsibilities. As well as direct work with young people, they might be designing new programmes, supervising other staff, drawing up budgetary plans, and liaising with other professionals, parents, the local authority and other bodies. Again, communication skills are key to success. Some workers may also specialise in areas such as music, drama, health or sports, but there are generally a great many administrative tasks to fulfil as well. Others might specialise in 'outreach' work – going out and meeting young people in the places they socialise.

Bear in mind that some youth workers are employed by the local authority on a full-time basis, some are part-time, and others work on a purely voluntary basis. Working as a volunteer can be a good way of finding out if youth work is for you, as well as getting your foot in the door.

Getting a youth work qualification

There are several ways of qualifying to be a youth worker:

- NVQs and VRQs in Youth Work are offered in the workplace by employers, sometimes in conjunction with a local further education college. NVQs and VRQs in youth work are currently available at two levels, Level 2 and Level 3. Level 2 is for individuals working face to face with young people, while Level 3 is aimed at those who are involved in similar work but who have additional responsibilities as well.
- Higher Education qualifications – Dip HE, Foundation Degree, BA (Hons) and MA - are currently offered by around 30 English universities and colleges of Higher Education. Courses are available for both full and part time study and require completion of field work placements.
- Distance learning – a few educational institutions offer this.

The National Youth Agency can provide much more information on training courses. See its web pages on Youth Work Training and Becoming Qualified >>>





Oh, for the love of charity!

Fifteen-year-old CLAIRE TURNER provides an amusing overview of her time spent working on Saturday's in a charity shop. All forms of human life, it seems, are here ...



Claire Turner

THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS that every girl needs – shoes, hair straighteners, nail files, a little black dress and a hair dryer. To be able to afford these much-needed items, I work on Saturdays as the 'Saturday Girl' in a local charity shop. So far, I have found it the funniest and most interesting place in which I have ever worked. Of course, I haven't worked in many other places, but that is completely beside the point.

Every bag of donations that arrives is different. We've had bags in that are full of junk, rubbish, and evidence of mice - bags that look like all is lost, but at the very bottom there is an old WADE piece of china, that will fetch a lot of money. We've had bags from

trendy people that are full of size six clothes from Next and Dolce & Gabbana, with deodorant stains under the arms; and bags from an old lady's relatives, as they clear out her house full of Wallis, thick woollen skirts, horrible old baggy blouses, and of course, terribly old fashioned shoes.

Every customer, from those who argue for a discount to those who press a little more money into the lady 'on the till' - is different. Until I started working at Hi-Trade, I would never have believed that rich old men sneaked into charity shops to steal. But, they do! 'Burglar Bill' is what we call our most antagonistic and heinous sinner. His name isn't Bill, and as far as I know, he's never burgled anything

"We hear everything because we are the place where people on their shopping rounds, with not much more to do, like to stop to gossip."



(yet), he just sticks to shoplifting and raising a rumpus if he's caught.

I had to laugh when he arrived with one walking stick and was encountered leaving with two. The walking stick would only have cost him all of three pounds. He apparently owns a huge house on a well situated road in Sidcup, but he dresses like he doesn't have a penny, and manages to maintain an air of complete unseemliness and filth. Of course, funnily enough, the thing that repulses most of the 'Old Dears' is the fact that he sings in a church choir and wears a cross round his neck while pinching from under their noses.

What I love most about working in a charity shop is the quality of some of the things we get donated. Nearly every week I manage to leave with three or four bags full of clothes, shoes, creams and who-knows-what, with just £5 missing from my purse. Nearly every week is completely different from the one before, and each has a different incident that occurs. We hear everything because we are the place where people on their shopping rounds, with not much more to do, like to stop to gossip. We heard about the person who was organising Jimmy Mizen's funeral; I talked to someone who's husband's nephew had just been murdered by his wife; we heard exactly when the local swimming pool was going to be opened almost before the people who worked there did.

It's almost like a small community in a big town, where everybody knows everyone else, but on a much smaller scale. We know most of our customers, and they know us. Of course, there are more personal incidents, such as this one:

It was a hot afternoon, and I'm sure I looked more than a little disheveled as I ran back and forth, trying to get things done right for the lady I was working with (I still hold that she was having a 'senior moment') when a large woman in pink stopped me to ask if I worked in the shop. I admitted that I did, fully expecting her to ask the usual questions such as 'Where is the changing room' or 'Can I have the pair for this shoe', but she did nothing of the sort. She turned away from me rather rudely and said in loud, confident tones to her companion: "Community service dear, that's why she's here. It's part of the Prime Minister's new scheme or something. I don't know, politics can be so confusing these days."

Me? Community service? Home schooled, well behaved me? I stopped by the nearest mirror and surveyed myself. I couldn't see anything about me that looked like I was doing community service. As it happens, I don't work in the shop because of some crime I've committed; it is simply a fun thing to do and it earns money. It has proved that saying that Mum always said: "It doesn't feel like work if you are enjoying yourself."

One day, an old man that I didn't know by sight came into the shop with a lady who looked like she was caring for him. "See that lady in the burgundy top?" he said in a stage whisper to this lady. I was standing at the counter, on the customer's side, and was counting up some leaflets for the lady behind it when he said this. I looked down and

realized I had a burgundy top on. For a minute I wondered if he was referring to me, as people have taken me for older than my fifteen years before.

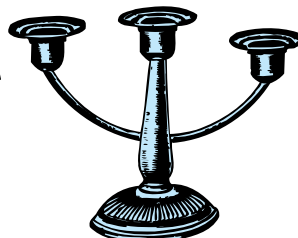
"She's wearing a wig!" he announced loudly.

"Hmm, he's certainly not talking about me" I thought. "There is no way that anyone could mistake my straight brown hair for a wig."

"Eh? Lady?" he appeared at my elbow. "Are you wearing a wig?"

My face must have showed all of my emotion: horror, surprise, amusement and slight offence, as the lady beside the man (who, I discovered, was not a daughter or carer, she was just a shopper in the wrong place at the wrong time) tried to patch things up and assure me that it was a compliment not an insult.

From insults to compliments to strange combinations of the two, the charity shop always keeps me on my toes, wondering what will happen next. So, if you happen to go past a charity shop some time soon, and see old ladies with cups of coffee at the counter, you'll realise that charity shops are not all ghostly, decrepit, moth ridden and falling down. They are lively, full of gossip, and very busy places.





Getting your Kix!

Remember when you were five or six years old dancing around the room to your favourite pop song? How would you feel if – years later – your favourite pop singer asked you to actually join her band! STEVE BEEBEE meets ex-Fuzzbox star VIX and her new, ever so slightly starstruck, young band. It's time to welcome VIX N THE KIX!

Imagine the scene. Your band is playing a regular gig at a pub in Birmingham when all of a sudden an established artist who's had four Top 40 hits walks up to you. She doesn't just want to meet you – she wants you, all of you, to join her band. It might seem like something out of a fairytale, but that's pretty much what happened to the three young members of all-girl rock band Mimi O'My.

Known then as Firebrand, the trio were performing at a Birmingham gig designed to promote females in music. They didn't realise until they arrived that the headline act that night would be Vix N The Kix, the band formed by ex-Fuzzbox singer Vix. Soon, as well as relaunching their own band, they'd be hooking up with Vix full time. Sarah, Becci and Chelsea, all aged between 17 and 25, would soon be sporting Kix-

friendly pseudonyms Slix, Trix and Chix respectively, starring in promo videos and touring overseas.

As the singer in Fuzzbox, Vix had a Top Five album and several chart singles at the end of 1989. She was barely 20 at the time, and only 16 when Fuzzbox started. Since then she's worked with young people on music workshops, vocal coaching and self-esteem, and is also a reiki master (a type of healing and complementary therapy). She's also kept her hand in with music, performing with The Wildhearts and Ginger's offshoot band Sonic Circus among others. The desire to front a band, though, never really left her, and in 2006 she put together the first incarnation of Vix N The Kix.

"It goes back a couple of years," she tells me over a coffee in the gardens

behind her new apartment. "I'd love to have kept the same line-up but it's difficult for people to commit when they've got jobs or they're studying. It's hard to find female musicians full stop. It's all still amicable between

"As the singer in Fuzzbox, Vix had a Top Five album and several chart singles at the end of 1989. She was barely 20 at the time."

me and the first version of the band, but I had to keep turning down tours and didn't feel I was moving forward. A little while back we played at a gig comprising only female bands, and that's when I encountered these three, who were playing there as Firebrand. I could see their hunger and drive. Their ambition and commitment to the music really appealed to me, because I'm also very driven.

"I didn't deliberately approach them because they were young people, although you often find that older people are less able to commit their time because of various things. Saying that, I do like to be surrounded by the energy that young people can bring. They don't all have that energy, but these three certainly do. I also need people to be on the ball, and not be as crazy as we were back in Fuzzbox days. That sort of thing would drive me potty at this stage of my career."

At first, bassist Sarah, aka Slix, didn't know what to make of the approach by Vix. It all seemed a bit too good to be true. Being asked to join a band fronted by someone you used to idolise is not something that happens every day. "We'd played loads of gigs like this in the past, but we didn't know we were on the same bill as Vix until we walked through the door and spotted this striking figure," she recalls. "We knew straight away who she was. I was quite intimidated because the first music I'd ever been given by my dad was the *Smash Hits Poll Winners Party* album on double cassette in 1989, featuring *Pink Sunshine* by Fuzzbox. I was about five at the time and *Pink Sunshine* was my favourite song on it, so I used to dance around the room singing in front of the mirror!"

Vix herself was only 16 when she started Fuzzbox, and in a sense it all happened too quickly. The four friends

had only formed a band for fun and were signed by a record company after only their second gig. "We were lucky," she reflects, "but we were a break from the many very serious and gloomy bands around at the time. We were a breath of fresh air, and it just goes to show that if you try things, if you take a risk and dare to be different, you never know what might happen. These days I do a lot of music workshops and vocal coaching with young people that are at risk or come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and it's great to see their confidence improve."

By the time they released *The Big Bang*, Fuzzbox were on TV and the radio all the time, thanks to immediately memorable hit singles like *Pink Sunshine*, *Self* and *International Rescue* (check them out on YouTube). They ended up appearing on *Top Of The Pops* eight times – back then, easily the most prestigious TV show any pop band could hope to appear on. "It was fun meeting people like Simply Red but it was also a bit like being in a school corridor – you all had your own rooms and you were called out in order to go and rehearse, and unless you crossed each other in the corridor, you didn't get to meet people. We ended up passing notes under other artist's dressing room doors: "Hi, we're Fuzzbox – if you want to meet us, we're in such-and-such a room!" I do remember the directors being very bossy, telling us exactly what to do, including telling members of the band to sing certain lines that they weren't really singing. It all had to be done their way.

"Back then, there seemed to be stacks of money around in the music industry. Now the industry is relatively skint, but the good thing is that it takes you back to that indie, punky DIY way of doing things. It's not easy - you've got to market and manage yourself and probably be more ambitious because people are much less likely to spot you and decide to invest lots of money in you. That whole punk ethos is back, and while the internet has its pros and cons, one good thing about it is that you can stick out a single on itunes or whatever and it can be dead cheap for people. We can also do our own videos and stick them on MySpace and YouTube and so on."

When Sarah got the email from Vix asking her – officially - to join the new



Vix

"It all seemed a bit too good to be true. Being asked to join a band fronted by someone you used to idolise is not something that happens every day" – Sarah



“When you’re all working together to a common aim, music can transcend generations.”

Mimi O’My

factor, we are totally on the same wavelength.”

There should be no shortage of potential fans for Vix N The Kix. Their look is a retro lashing of slick fifties glamour and flirty burlesque, and their music alternates between fun, punk-inspired blasts of guitar-powered pop to lush, emotive ballads – influences taking in everything from No Doubt through Garbage to Roxy Music and The Pretenders. Chances are that fans of Fuzzbox, and those that are simply too young to have ever heard of Fuzzbox, will be swept along for the ride. There’s already a lively promo video for *Blah Blah Blah*, likely to be the first single, that showcases the girls in their glory, and mucho touring beckons for the near future, along with a full album that was already in the bag even before Sarah, Becci and Chelsea joined the band.

It’s all happening for Vix right now – but isn’t she even slightly worried about taking such relatively young musicians out onto this particular rollercoaster ride? Not a bit of it. “Their attitude is absolutely perfect and I don’t have to nurse maid them at all,” she affirms. “We all communicate very well, and I can leave them as a unit to do a lot of things. What’s fantastic is that they rehearse their butts off anyway so they’ll do their stuff and then I turn up and don’t have to go through every single last note with them, because they’ve already mastered it. Working with these girls means I can go straight in at a higher level. It’s all coming together right now, and we’ve got tours in the Middle East and other countries later this year and hopefully by November the album will be out. I also hope we’ll write another album together because I love all the Firebrand and Mimi O’My stuff – it’s got real energy and a sense of melody, and I know we could write a great album together. This lot may be young but they have so much experience already and are so tight as a unit – there’s no limit to how far they could go.”

Blah Blah Blah promo video
– <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sw3F0LNin9s>
Facebook – <http://www.new.facebook.com/pages/Vix-N-The-Kix/23452839705>
MySpace – www.myspace.com/vixvixvix

band, she very nearly got the wrong end of the stick and deleted it. “I thought Vix was just asking us if we knew any decent female musicians. I didn’t quite read between the lines. I forwarded it to Becci who said ‘you absolute idiot – she’s asking us if we want to do it!’ After that, we got very excited about it.”

For guitarist Becci (aka Trix), the benefits of joining up with Vix outweighed the cons by about one hundred to zero. “We know we can learn so much from this,” she says. “The fact that Vix has done it all before, that she’s a professional and has got up to do it all by herself. She knows the mistakes, has learnt

from them, and brings a wealth of experience into the band. Even the image thing – we’ve always struggled with that while Vix has an identity and a direction that has real strength. That was inspiring by itself. I just knew that on every single level we would benefit from this as both musicians and people.”

Becci is also quite certain that the age difference between the three newcomers and Vix is nothing more than an irrelevant number: “There’s no doubt in my mind that it’s the best thing we’ve ever done. It doesn’t matter at all about the age difference. When you’re all working together to a common aim, music can transcend generations. Apart from the learning



In the Army now (well, the Cadets)

You may never have considered the UK Armed Forces as a possible career move, let alone as something that could be fun. But for a young person there's actually a lot more to be gained from joining the Cadet Force than simply preparation for the military. RUCKUS takes a look at Yorkshire's biggest school-based Combined Cadet Force.

Recently the government carried out a review of the military's role in society. Its conclusion was that more secondary school age pupils should be encouraged to join the cadet corps – apparently it improves discipline while helping to improve public perception of the army, navy and air force. But

more importantly than that, from your perspective, it can get you out and about, be a great confidence booster, and generally give you something positive to do that might well leave you with any number of new skills for life. And it doesn't mean you have to actually join up with any of the armed services afterwards. It can certainly help if that's what you want, but it's an experience that by itself could be right up your street.

The 400-year-old Batley Grammar School in Yorkshire is proud of its Combined Cadet Force (CCF) traditions, which it has maintained ever since the Ministry of Defence (MOD) first formed the cadet force right back in the 1950s. Young people aged 13 to 18 can join either the Army or Royal Air Force (RAF) sections, training for one lunchtime and one evening each week in skills including flying (yes, flying!), shooting (seriously), map and compass work, mountain walking,

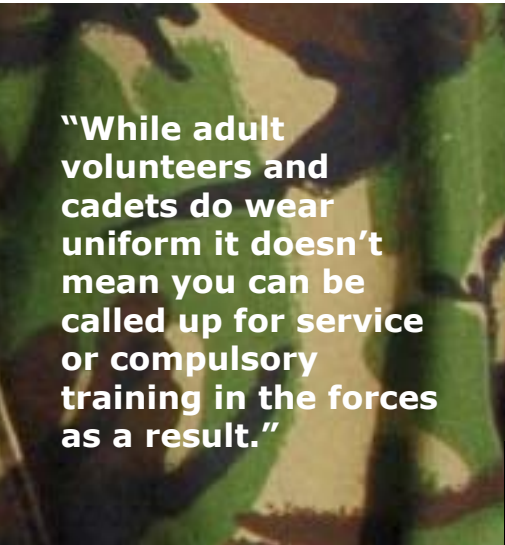
survival and canoeing, as well as being given the chance to travel. In return for the school's commitment, the MOD provides support including uniforms, weapons and equipment, access to military transport and training advice.

There are currently 253 CCF contingents based in both state and

"Training for one lunchtime and one evening each week includes flying, shooting, map and compass work, mountain walking, survival and canoeing."

independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. The CCF contingent may comprise up to three service sections – Army, RAF and Royal Navy. The CCF is, of course, not actually a true part of the UK armed forces – while adult volunteers and cadets do wear uniform it doesn't mean you can be called up for service or compulsory training in the forces as a result. And, of course, you don't have to join up afterwards.

CCF units can expect to be inspected by the military now and again – so best do your buttons up and polish



“While adult volunteers and cadets do wear uniform it doesn't mean you can be called up for service or compulsory training in the forces as a result.”

those shoes. The uniforms, marching ability, first aid and weapon training of Batley's 75 cadets have been officially inspected recently by Major Nigel Banks of the Army Air Corps and Colonel Brian Denney, of Rifles TA and Cadets Yorkshire. Cadets were also given the chance to fly in one of two RAF helicopters that actually landed on the school playing fields, and – we might imagine – caused rather a large amount of interest among doubtless envious non-cadet pupils.

“I have always wanted to fly,” enthused 18-year-old Nick Walters, who joined the CCF in Year 9. “I am learning so much and loving every minute of it – and winning a flying scholarship recently with the RAF has to be the highlight.”

And no, it's not just for boys. Beth Gillman, 15, was among 26 female cadets from Batley. She said she was attracted to the CCF because of all the opportunities it offered to learn new skills. “It's been great,” she said. “Last August I was one of 14 cadets

from Batley who went on a three-week expedition to Namibia, where we helped build a greenhouse for a school as part of the Okaepe Project. It was an amazing experience and taught me so much about a completely different way of life.”

Major Banks, himself a former member of Batley Grammar School's CCF, said: “I really believe that my time in the CCF helped prepare me not just for life in the forces but for everyday life. Completing challenges that have an element of danger attached to them gives cadets a great sense of achievement and this really builds their confidence.”

More info:
The Army Cadet Force –
www.armycadets.com

The Air Cadets –
www.aircadets.org

Royal Navy Community
(includes details of its cadets) –
www.rncom.mod.uk



Over the wall: a journey across China



Now that the Olympic Games have been held in China, this huge and once very secretive nation is finally opening up its arms to the rest of the world. China has been criticised for its human rights abuses, and has a long way to go, but for the first time it has become a realistic tour destination for those of us from 'the West'. STEVE BEEBEE visited the vast country with Travelsphere and presents his own unique China tour diary ...

DAY ONE

Ever since I was a kid I've had a desire to visit the Far East. This was my chance. China is a huge country, bigger than the USA and Europe - but it's also one that has been so repressed at times that its doors have been virtually closed for a long time. That's changing now, particularly after the Olympic Games took place in Beijing this year.

I was travelling with a large group, and was lucky enough to get a seat by the emergency exit on the flight over. This means extra leg-room, and I'm 6ft 3 inches tall so I really appreciated it. The flight takes 10 hours, in an Air China Airbus A340, and was very comfortable. It's not the Chinese way to be gushing with false smiles etc, but the flight attendants were polite and high on the efficiency factor. At the end of the flight they all did a synchronised

bow, which was a nice touch.

DAY TWO

We were all weary after the long flight, but we soon revived when we saw the strange beauty of the country we'd arrived in. We were at Beijing (formerly Peking), the capital of China, and clearly a long way from home. The buildings, the roads, the people - all a huge and very welcome culture shock.

We met our Beijing guide, Francis - not his real name, all Chinese guides adopt Western names so it's easier for us to remember (!). The bus took us through bustling Beijing, a vast city, to The Temple Of Heaven, an ornate structure centuries old where the ancient Emperors would pray for a good harvest. Francis taught us a bit of rudimentary Chinese: 'Nee How' is 'Hello'.



Temple of Heaven, Beijing

Tiannamen Square



DAY THREE

Our first stop back on the coach with Francis was Tiannamen Square and The Forbidden City. Both were magnificent. To this day, soldiers march across The Square, the biggest town square in the world, more for show than in defiance. Chairman Mao is interred in a grand mausoleum central in The Square.

The Forbidden City is a collection of exorbitant buildings and courtyards where the Emperors used to live, rule, and frolic with their many concubines. It took my breath away – I had always wanted to visit this strangest of places since seeing the film, *The Last Emperor*. Being there, it was so easy to imagine the Emperors at work and at play. They lived extraordinary, sumptuous and somewhat erotic

“It was so easy to imagine the Emperors at work and at play. They lived extraordinary, sumptuous and somewhat erotic lifestyles, partly because ordinary people believed they were related to God – and therefore had to be revered in every sense.”

lifestyles, partly because ordinary people believed they were related to God – and therefore had to be revered in every sense.

We then visited The Summer Palace, another of the Emperor`s playgrounds. This rural retreat is a sea of opulence in an ocean of poverty, surrounded by manmade lakes. There is even a life size marble ship, built for the Empress Dowager Cixi in the 1800s – she liked to fish from it, and would apparently have eunuchs jump into the water with nets to actually put the fish onto her hook. She was a feisty lady and she didn`t like to lose out!

In the evening we visited a Peking opera show. After some curious (to our Western ears) song-based storytelling, this culminated in some frenzied acrobatics that defied belief.

These people have dedicated their lives to their art, and are amazing to behold.

DAY FOUR

Chinese food, incidentally, is not how we imagine it in the West. You don`t choose just one main meal – you all sit around a circular table, and the waitresses bring out a wide selection of dishes that you just dip into at random. Bizarrely, they often bring the rice and soup last, as they believe that putting rice

onto your plate first “is the way of the poor man”!

Today we went to that other great monument to China`s past, The Great Wall. Thousands of miles long, the Wall spans the country and from around 200 BC was an attempt to defend Beijing from invaders. Today it`s a massive monument to endeavour. Despite the cold, we walked along its ramparts and looked down upon it as it snaked across the mountains, dotted with camels, an awe inspiring sight. After the Great Wall, we visited exotic carpet shops, saw amazing carvings and sculptures in jade, and drank plenty of tea – the Chinese love their green or jasmine tea.

We saw silk being made (silk, jade and enamelling are among China`s key exports) at a factory, and visited the Ming Tombs about 40 miles outside of Beijing. The walk to the Tombs is lined by lifesize statues of animals, built by the Emperors to protect them in the afterlife. Some of the animals are mythical creatures and they`re always in pairs – one standing, the other sitting. The idea is that the seated animal comes to life at night to take its turn on duty!

DAY FIVE

I was up at the crack of dawn with the others, as an early train ride to Chengde, in the northeast of China, awaited. Beijing train station is vast, but Francis saw us onto the correct train. Travelling by rail in China is an experience, but not one I can recommend. It was comfortable enough (we were in `soft` class which is as good as you can get – though still far from great), but the real trial is the train staff who are constantly trying to sell you books, jewellery etc. You get used to being harassed by hawkers around the tourist attractions, but it`s a bit much on the train. You can`t exactly walk away when you`re sat in a carriage for four hours.

Chengde itself is real China – a nice enough town that rarely sees Western faces. Our hotel didn`t seem to know what to do with us, especially when we all descended on the bar. It seemed like they weren`t set up to cope with more than a few guests at a time. Our guide in Chengde was Leo, another very polite and friendly guy, who was to take good care of us during our stay.

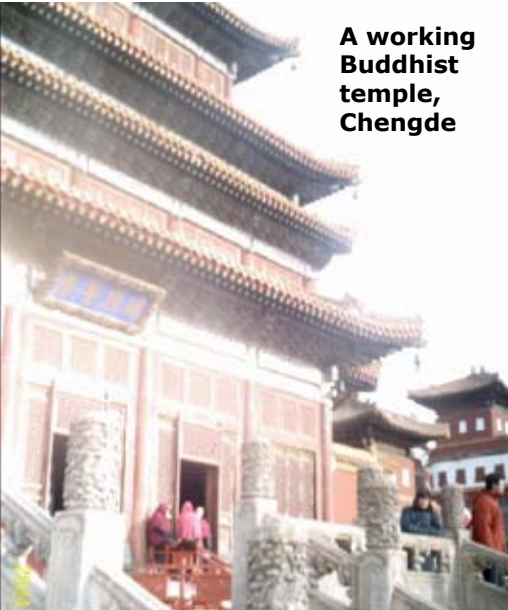


Marble Ship at The Summer Palace

Chengde is part of a different civilisation, and I don't think I've ever felt further from home. Our first stop after a city tour was another of The Emperor's summer resorts, all lakes and pagodas. Very beautiful, despite the piercing cold.

DAY SIX

Today was a busy day, and one that I will always remember. The expected highlights of my Chinese trip were The Forbidden City, The Great Wall etc, and while those did not disappoint, nothing could have prepared me for



A working Buddhist temple, Chengde

"Chengde is part of a different civilisation, and I don't think I've ever felt further from home."

the temples outside Chengde.

The first of these is a working Buddhist temple – and we were fortunate enough to witness the monks chanting. It's impossible for me to describe how beautiful this place was – just imagine the most ornate, Eastern architecture, the burning of incense, the tinkling of small roof-mounted bells, the bright pink and orange of the monks' robes, and the extraordinary low bray of the long horn one of them blows into. It was almost humbling.

At the heart of the temple is the most extraordinary thing – an 80-foot tall wooden sculpture called The Goddess Of Mercy With Numerous Hands And Eyes. It's considered holy so you can't photograph it, but it's amazing to look at – your eyes can't comprehend the size of it.

After that we went to a second, equally beautiful temple, called The Putuo Temple. This is no longer in use, but is maintained and affords some spectacular views over the mountains. It was built in 1771 and is of Tibetan origin. The Emperors were happy to

have different religious denominations living around them, and around Chengde they built many temples each signifying one of China's many faiths. All remain today, save one destroyed by the Japanese.

Later, I walked on my own into Chengde's bustling street market. What an experience! It was packed, and as the only Westerner there I stuck out tremendously and attracted a few looks. No one bothered me though, and I was able to take in the surreal sights and smells of the steaming noodles, and unidentifiable meats etc.

In the evening, some girls from a local school (that we had visited earlier to see an art and calligraphy demonstration) visited our hotel to put on a dance and music show. They asked me to dance with them at the end, and much to the amusement of my travelling colleagues, I (at 6ft 3" remember!) danced with some tiny, tiny five-year-olds! I looked, to say the least, ridiculous.

DAY SEVEN

Thankfully we were not required to get the train back to Beijing, but travelled on the coach instead. Our final destination today was to be the city of Xi'an, in central China. First though, we took in some spectacular mountain views of China, and saw The Great Wall again. On the way, our guide Leo spoke very honestly about his past. He told us how, under Mao, he had spent his childhood working in the fields, starving, labouring for the state to the brink of exhaustion. Later he had joined the Communist Army purely to put some food in his belly. Although Leo had hated the brutality of the regime, he had done it to save himself and give his family a life worth having. Now that China is opening up, Leo is at last free to come and go, and to speak about his opinions and beliefs. We listened in grateful silence – it really brought several truths home to us.

We flew to Xi'an on Chinese New Year's Eve. I could see fireworks pluming beneath us as we climbed out of Beijing.

If you ever go to China, you will find that Chinese people – especially the



Some New Year celebrations



Working Buddhist temple, Chengde

"Our guide Leo told us how, under Mao, he spent his childhood working in the fields, starving, labouring for the state to the brink of exhaustion."

Visiting the site of the Terracotta Warriors



Welcome party at the city gates of Xi'an



"Today's generation of young Chinese is the first generation that is actually allowed to have fun."

The 'bars' are basically clubs – a rush of sound, colour and heat. The music is loud, a sort of synth-based dance vibe, and there is even a man in the bathroom who will massage your shoulders as you wash your hands. Today's generation of young Chinese is the first generation that is actually allowed to have fun.

DAY NINE

The nightlife in Xi'an left a strong impression on me - a culture shock of the nicest possible kind. I could have stayed there a week, and felt a genuine tug of sadness when we left our hotel. We visited another workshop - jade - and another historical burial site, before returning to Xi'an airport, and our flight to Beijing. Our approach was very choppy right to the last, and even I, an enthusiastic flyer, felt a degree of alarm. Needless to say, no harm came to us or the aircraft. Francis (our friendly Beijing guide) was there to meet us and see us back to our hotel. I had a room on the 24th floor this time, and some great views of Beijing lit up at night. Tired after my partying the previous night, I attended a drinks party in the hotel before turning in. It was actually my first glass of wine for some time (the Chinese don't really 'do' wine) so I appreciated that and slept like a baby.

DAY TEN

Our last day in Beijing and, sadly, in China. Francis saw us safely to the airport, where we did some last minute shopping. I bought Chinese Mooncake for my office – this turned out to be horrid so I advise you not to make the same mistake.

But as for China – I loved it – an extraordinary country and an experience unlike any other. I would recommend you go yourself. Make sure you travel with an experienced operator. You can't really do China on your own; it's just not set up for tourism like that, and you have to be very aware of its privacy and lack of free speech. You need to respect its outlook unless you want to end up in prison. To get the best out of China you should go with a group with group leaders. I went with Travelsphere who have been running tours in China for as long as it's been possible to visit there, and would recommend them to anyone.

Go to www.travelsphere.co.uk

of the Terracotta Warriors. When Zheng, the first of the Qin Emperors, died in 210 BC

he had already prepared a vast army of stone warriors to protect him in the afterlife. These were entombed at various places around his burial mountain. In 1974, several thousand of these warriors - all of which are lifesize and have unique features - were unearthed. They had survived more than 2,000 years! To see them is to see one of the true wonders of the world, particularly if you can get your head around how long they've been there.

On return to Xi'an we were greeted by an official welcoming ceremony at the city gates (Xi'an is still surrounded by an ancient, defensive wall and you have to pass through the official gates to gain access). The party, in traditional dress, presented us with souvenirs, symbolic keys and a book of calligraphy, and put on a traditional Chinese dance.

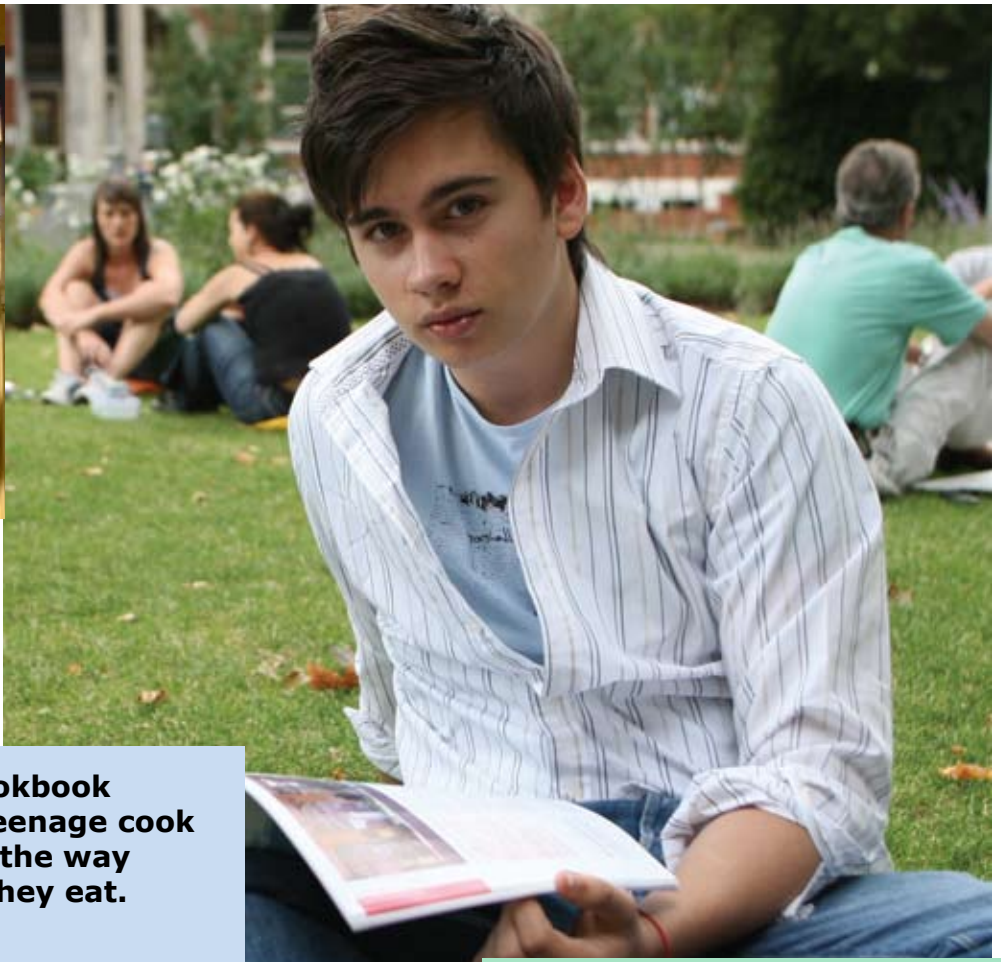
We later visited the theatre where the colours and sounds were intoxicating. That night, four of us plucked up courage to hit the bars in central Xi'an. We were treated like royalty, with many people wanting to shake our hand or chink glasses with us.

children – like to have their picture taken with you. Many of them seemed to think I was famous or a soccer star or something. I said hello ("Nee How") to a couple of children, and their faces lit up as if I'd just given them a great present. I also had to pose for pictures on The Great Wall with various Chinese, which felt very strange. In Xi'an we stayed at the glorious Bell Tower Hotel, my favourite of the three we visited.

I loved Xi'an, more even than Chengde and Beijing. In the city it is like a mini-Shanghai (or think mini-mini-Vegas), gloriously lit and vibrant. As it was New Year, the fireworks and firecrackers went off all night. The Chinese certainly know how to celebrate, and even on landing at Xi'an airport, the air smelled heavily of cordite. A couple of us were actually interviewed by an enthusiastic TV crew. China and the West will undoubtedly become great friends if we learn to respect each other, and if the former can work with us to counter its alleged human rights abuses.

DAY EIGHT

After breakfast, we visited the site



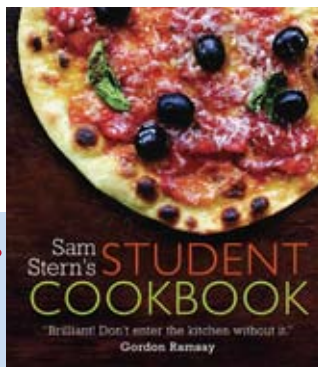
Get cooking with Sam Stern

With his new book **Student Cookbook** hitting the shelves, we think teenage cook **Sam Stern** could revolutionise the way young people approach what they eat. We hope so anyway ...

THERE'S NOTHING BETTER than stuffing your face with quality nosh, is there? Cooking, then, is brilliant – if you can do it, that is. If you can't cook, or have always had it done for you, then it can be a minefield. When you go off to college or uni, or start living away from home for the first time, it can be tempting to live off microwave ready meals and greasy takeaways. That's why it's great to have people like Sam Stern around. Only 17, Sam is a kitchen whizzkid and knows only too well the challenges facing young people today. And in an age where obesity and poor nutrition are everyday concerns, it's never been more important to be able to cook properly. Once you've got the hang of it, cooking can be absolutely brilliant – and you'll be envy of your friends.

Sam's latest book, *Sam Stern's Student Cookbook: Survive in Style on a Budget*, could not have been better timed, and predictably it's excellent. Come to think of it, you don't even have to be a student to get the best out of it – Sam shows you how to make simple but tasty food that's generally good for you and won't ruin your finances. He also gives you tips in basic techniques, planning, doing it on a budget and how to save both energy and cash. It's valuable stuff.

When you're a student, or living away from home, the last thing you want is to get stressed, get out of pocket or get ill due to your lifestyle. We think this book is a great step in the right direction, and we recommend this and Sam's previous work with open minds and rumbling stomachs!



Here's one of Sam's recipes, reproduced here by kind permission:

Chilli Lime Halloumi
(Feeds 2. Vegetarian. 1 x 250g/9oz pack halloumi cheese, spinach/rocket/lettuce, 1 lime, dressing (such as honey mustard or oriental etc), 1 red chilli, de-seeded, finely chopped, 2 pitta breads)

My veggie sister lived on this in her student years. Halloumi can sit in the back of your fridge forever waiting for you to jazz it up with a bit of chilli and lime. The acid bite cuts across the saltiness. Eat with or in pitta.

1. Cut cheese in thick slices. Throw salad into bowl or prep for pitta.
2. Heat griddle or frying pan. Or line grill pan with foil if grilling.
3. Slap down slices of cheese to fry/grill 1-2 mins per side till golden.
4. Drizzle with lime, dressing, chilli. Chuck onto salad bowl/into pitta with salad.

YOU CAN: marinate chunks of halloumi in lime/garlic/oil. Skewer up with veg. Grill and turn till melting for halloumi skewers.

“When you go off to college or uni, or start living away from home for the first time, it can be tempting to live off microwave ready meals and greasy takeaways.”

...Fancy seconds?
Sam's website:
www.samstern.co.uk
Sam's publisher:
www.walker.co.uk

Who exactly is ... Jamie Oliver?

WHEN IT COMES TO COOKING, Sam Stern may be the coolest kid on the block, but for many years that accolade belonged to only one man – Jamie Oliver. The lisping, shaggy-haired superchef is responsible for turning cookery into the new rock n’roll. Well, almost. Coming to prominence in the late 1990s, Oliver brought a fresh slant to cooking, jazzing it up for a new generation. That style has never gone away – it’s just that we take it for granted now.

So who exactly is Jamie Oliver?

- Jamie Oliver, now 33, was born on 27 May 1975 and was initially known as The Naked Chef due to a series of books he produced. He wasn’t really naked – it was a reference to keeping things simple (though, ironically, many of his recipes were anything but).
- He’s often satirised due to his ‘mockney’ accent and use of words like ‘pukka’. He’s also worth about £25 million these days, so laugh away.
- After studying overseas, he worked for Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers at the River Café. Oliver credits them with teaching him to create the fresh and simple food which would become his signature.
- In 2000, he married former model Juliette Norton, often known as ‘Jools’. They now have two children named Poppy Honey and Daisy Boo with one more on the way.
- Several TV series underlined Oliver’s unique style – characterised by rapid cutaways backed by pop music, banter with an off camera Jools,



“In recent years, he began a formal campaign to ban unhealthy food in British schools and get children eating fresh, tasty, nutritious food instead.”

- and a resulting banquet cooked for family and friends, usually set to music (typically Toploader’s *Dancing In The Moonlight*)
- Wanting to create something positive using his wealth and fame, Oliver conceived and established the Fifteen charity restaurant where he trained 15 disadvantaged young people to work in the hospitality industry. This was made into a reality type TV series called *Jamie’s Kitchen*.
- Jamie starred in a series of memorable adverts for Sainsburys, in which he casually wandered around the store, enduring various misadventures before presenting his gran with a meal. He would refer to gran as ‘Tiger’.
- Jamie drives around on mopeds and has an old school VW camper van.
- In recent years, he began a formal

campaign to ban unhealthy food in British schools and get children eating fresh, tasty, nutritious food instead. In the TV series *Jamie’s School Dinners* he challenged the junk food culture by showing schools they could serve healthy, cost-efficient meals that kids enjoyed eating.

- These efforts resulted in the government pledging a £280 million investment in school dinners, and Oliver received an MBE in 2003.
- His latest venture is *Jamie’s Ministry Of Food* in which he attempts to turn Rotherham into “the culinary capital of the UK”. Good luck with that Jamie!

Visit www.jamieoliver.com or join Jamie’s Pass it On campaign at JamiesMinistryOfFood.com