THE YOUTH CLUB DICTIONARY

BBC CHILDREN IN NEED

JD

Help protect the places that speak the language of young people

WITH CONTENT FROM OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE YOUTH CLUB DICTIONARY


FOREVER
FORWARD
JD



To youth workers, past, present and future.

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Help protect the places that speak the language of young people

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

* THE GUARDIAN, 2025

PREFACE

For over a century in the UK, youth clubs have been places where young people can thrive.

Safe spaces where identity is discovered, futures are realised, and culture is born.

But many are fighting to stay open.

More than 1,200 youth clubs have closed since 2010 in the UK.*

Leaving many young people with nowhere to go and no one to turn to when they need it most.

This book was commissioned by JD Sports in partnership with BBC Children in Need and Oxford University Press through a shared belief that youth clubs are of vital cultural and societal importance.

And must be protected.

The Youth Club Dictionary contains 26 familiar words that become redefined when used in a youth club. These new definitions reveal the significant and life-changing impact that youth clubs and youth workers have on young people.

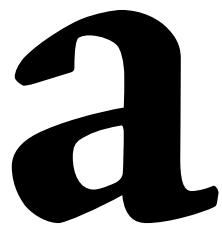
A dictionary born in youth clubs, codifying the language used there. 26 definitions researched through workshops and writers rooms across the UK.

9 youth clubs.
200+ young people interviewed.
219 worksheets.
And countless slices of pizza and cups of orange squash.

This book only scratches the surface in revealing the power of these sacred spaces. There are millions more stories out there.

Help protect the places that speak the language of young people.

DEFINITIONS



A

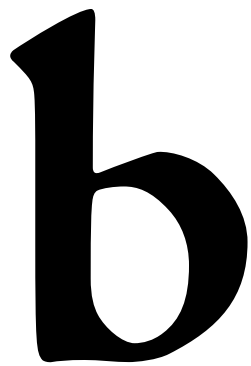
All Right

interjection | ˌɔːl ˈrʌɪt

1 Expressing that all is satisfactory or in good order.

2 A means of deflecting attention away from painful feelings.

The young people in here have mastered acting tough, it's a survival mechanism. But after a while you recognise when "all right" means "all right" or when it means "things are heavy today, can we chat?"



B

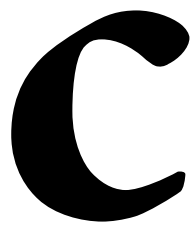
Braid

noun | breɪd

1 A length of hair made up of three or more interlaced strands.

2 An act of care.

I did Toni's braids at Youth Club. It felt nice to show someone I care. I think she looks so cute. No one had ever done that for her before.



C

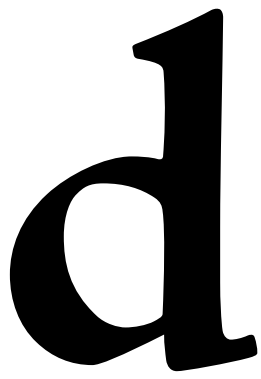
Carrot

noun | ˈkarət

1 A cultivated plant of the parsley family with feathery leaves, which yields a tapering, orange-coloured root eaten as a vegetable.

2 An instrument of trust.

I got asked to chop carrots for the Youth Club dinner. Nobody had ever trusted me with something before. We made a curry. Everyone said it was the best they'd had.



D

* THE GUARDIAN, 2025

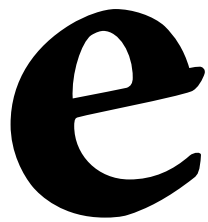
Door

noun | dɔː

1 A movable hinged, sliding, or revolving barrier used to open and close an entrance to a room, building, or vehicle or in the framework of a cupboard.

2 A gradual erosion of hope, joy and safety.

*Since 2010 over 1,200 youth clubs in the UK have shut their doors.**



E

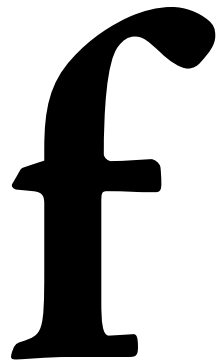
Escape

verb | ɪ'skeɪp

1 To break free from confinement or control; an act of escaping.

2 A place with rules within which freedom is found.

Yeah there's rules at Youth Club. But no one minds. This place is ours so we respect it. That way it'll always be somewhere we can escape to and do things our way.



F

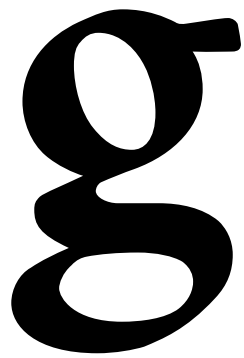
Fighting

verb | fʌɪt

1 To take part in a violent struggle involving the exchange of physical blows or the use of weapons; to quarrel or argue.

2 A discipline that promotes self-control.

I fought everyone in my life.
They said I had a problem.
Not my Youth Worker though.
He told me to give boxing
a go. Now my temper isn't the
boss. And I'm competing for
a title soon. The Youth Club even
got me some pink gloves.



G

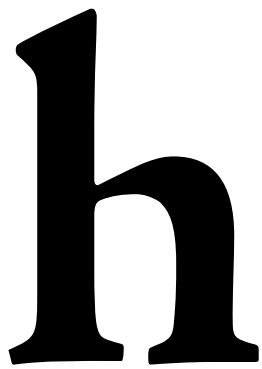
Gazebo

noun | gəˈziːbəʊ

1 A small building or structure, especially one in the garden of a house.

2 A square of fabric on legs under which common ground is discovered.

Jenny and me never liked each other. On a Youth Club weekend away it rained all day and we were stuck under the gazebo together. We were playing cards and both realised we like all the same music. Turns out Jenny is all right.



H

Hostile

adjective | ˈhɒstʌɪl

1 Showing or feeling opposition or dislike; unfriendly.

2 A way of feeling safe, until you are actually safe.

Sometimes it's hard for me to trust people. I used to be a nightmare with my Youth Worker. I'm not always hostile but I do have my off moments! I'm so glad they never stopped showing up for me.



I

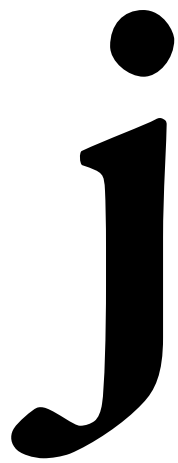
Ink

mass noun | ɪŋk

1 A coloured fluid or paste used for writing, drawing, printing, or duplicating.

2 A liquid used to prove the world wrong.

I was put in bottom set in school. People called me thick. But they just didn't get me. All that changed at my Youth Club. We did a workshop on writing lyrics. I wrote a track and shared it with my mates.



J

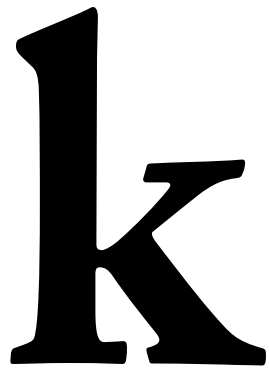
Joke

noun | dʒəʊk

1 A thing that someone says to cause amusement or laughter, especially a story with a funny punchline.

2 A test to establish if a person is worthy of respect.

Joking with my teachers means the reflection room. Our Youth Leader can handle us bantering with him. He doesn't have to be the big man all the time.



K

Kid

noun | kɪd

1 A child or young person.

2 A collection of experiences that persist into adulthood.

There's no "line" you cross where you stop being a kid and become an adult. All those experiences follow you. Being a Youth Worker means you don't talk down to or diminish people just because they're young.

1

L

Language

noun | ˈlaŋgwɪdʒ

1 The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure.

2 A mechanism for resolving cross-generational mistrust.

Language means different things in different places. In this place the adults talk to us like we're on their level. They properly listen. Like what we've got to say actually matters.



M

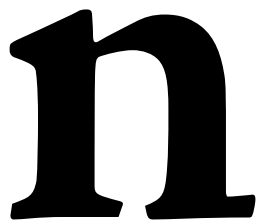
Minibus

noun | ˈmɪnɪbʌs

1 A small single-decker bus or coach, typically having seats for between ten to fifteen passengers.

2 A vehicle that alleviates economic inequality.

One of our young people can't afford their bus fare. But this place means so much to her. It's no worries for me to swing by in the minibus on the way in. She's always saying she's happiest when she's at the Youth Club. That's the reward for a 5-minute detour.



N

Noticeboard

noun | ˈnʌθɪŋ

1 A board to which paper notices such as announcements or advertisements may be fixed.

2 A window through which a better future is visible.

Our noticeboard at Youth Club is actually amazing. It's got workshops on body image, nutrition, business skills, revision clubs. It's not selling us stuff we don't need. It's where I can learn things I don't get taught in school.

O

O

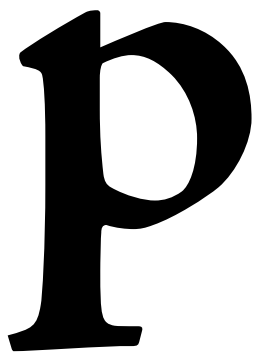
Overtime

mass noun | ˈəʊvətʌɪm

1 Time worked over and above a person's regular or set working hours; payment for work performed in such extra time.

2 The sacrifice of one's own time in order to fuel the passion of others.

There's no paid overtime as a Youth Worker. But when a kid who's a gifted drummer wants to practice, you just make time. The noise does my head in, so I listen to podcasts in my headphones while they crash away in the other room.



P

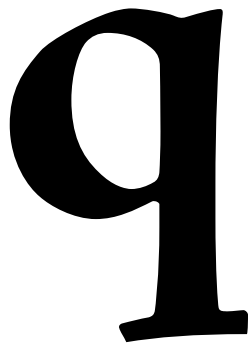
Ping Pong

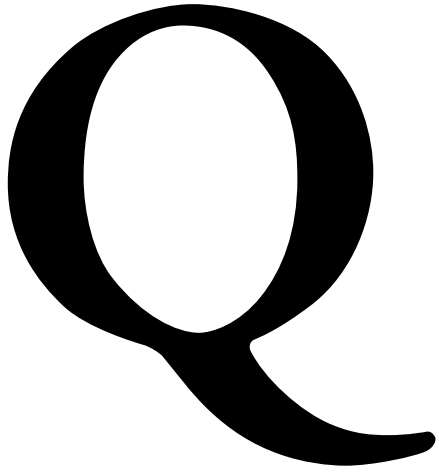
noun | ˈpɪŋpɒŋ

1 An indoor game based on lawn tennis, played with small bats and a hollow plastic ball, with a table in place of the court.

2 A method for dispelling fear.

Mum and Dad splitting up felt scary. Thinking I'd never see my Dad again. No one asked me if I was good with it. I was playing ping pong with Henry and found out the same thing happened to him. He's actually fine. He has two bedrooms now he told me.





Quilt

noun | kwɪlt

1 A warm bed covering made of padding enclosed between layers of fabric and kept in place by lines of stitching, typically applied in a decorative design.

2 A labour of love that forces people to be present.

During the summer holidays I thought I'd be bored out my mind. But Brenda taught us how to crochet a quilt. It was wholesome. I completely forgot to check my phone. Until I took some videos later.

r

R

Remember

verb | rɪˈmɛmbə

1 To retain in or recall to the memory; to keep in mind, recollect (a thing, person, fact, event, saying, etc.).

2 The disproportionate importance of details in the lives of young people.

My Youth Worker remembers everything. My favourite tunes. My birthday. If I've got a test at school. Most adults are in their own world and don't realise how much these things matter.

S

S

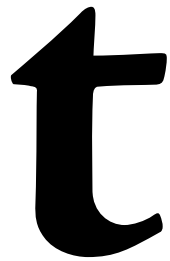
Squash

mass noun | skwɒʃ

1 A sweet concentrated liquid made from or flavoured with fruit juice, which is diluted to make a drink.

2 Substance used to facilitate bonding.

Squash means good times. Not because it tastes nice, it's actually a bit grim. Squash means we're done spending the day with our best mates.



T

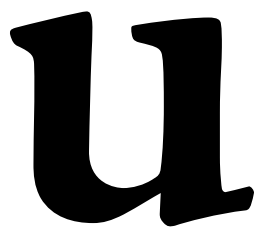
Toast

mass noun | təʊst

1 Sliced bread browned on both sides by exposure to radiant heat, such as a grill or fire.

2 Belonging expressed through a sweet or savoury snack.

Older kids never speak to us at school. But the first day you come here, they make you toast. Everyone always argues about what should go on it. Some of us say jam. But I think chocolate spread is miles better.



U

Unc

noun | /ʌŋk |

1 An informal term for: one's uncle; an uncle.

2 A person akin to a blood relative who refrains from making biased judgements.

A Youth Worker is like family, but better sometimes. Like, if there's problems I can't talk to my Mum and Dad about. I can chat to Adrian. He doesn't judge us, ever. I rate him. That's why I call him "Unc".

V

V

Vacuum Cleaner

noun | ˈvakjuːm kliːnə

1 An electrical apparatus that by means of suction collects dust and small particles from floors and other surfaces.

2 A tool that says this space matters.

At home vacuuming's just a chore. But here it's different. It's our space. It matters. And we're proud of it.

W

W

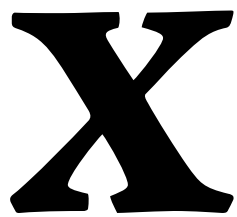
Waterfall

noun | wɔːtəfɔːl

1 A cascade of water falling from a height, formed when a river or stream flows over a precipice or ledge.

2 The first time someone leaves the postcode they were born in.

I'd never left my home town before. Last summer we did a camping trip to the countryside. That was the first time I've ever seen a waterfall. It was legit the most amazing thing I've ever seen. I'll never forget it.



X

X-ray

noun | ɛksreɪ

1 Electromagnetic radiation of high energy and very short wavelength, which can pass through many materials opaque to light, and can be used to produce images of the internal composition of something.

2 A demonstration that safety nets exist.

I fell off my bike and swore I'd broken my wrist. I couldn't ring my Mum because she was at work. So I called the Youth Club and Tina, my Youth Worker, took me for the x-ray. Luckily it was just a sprain.

y

Y

* YMCA, 2026

Youth Club

noun | ˈjuːθ klʌb

1 A safe, supervised place where children and teenagers can hang out with friends, play sports, and join in social or creative activities.

2 Spending on Youth Services by local authorities has dropped by £1.3bn since 2010.*



Z

Zero

noun | ˈzɪərəʊ

1 No quantity or number; nought; the figure 0.

2 An abundant state where you feel like you're enough.

Things can feel really pressured. At school. Online. Whatever. Here there's no one after me for stuff. I can just be me and that's calm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

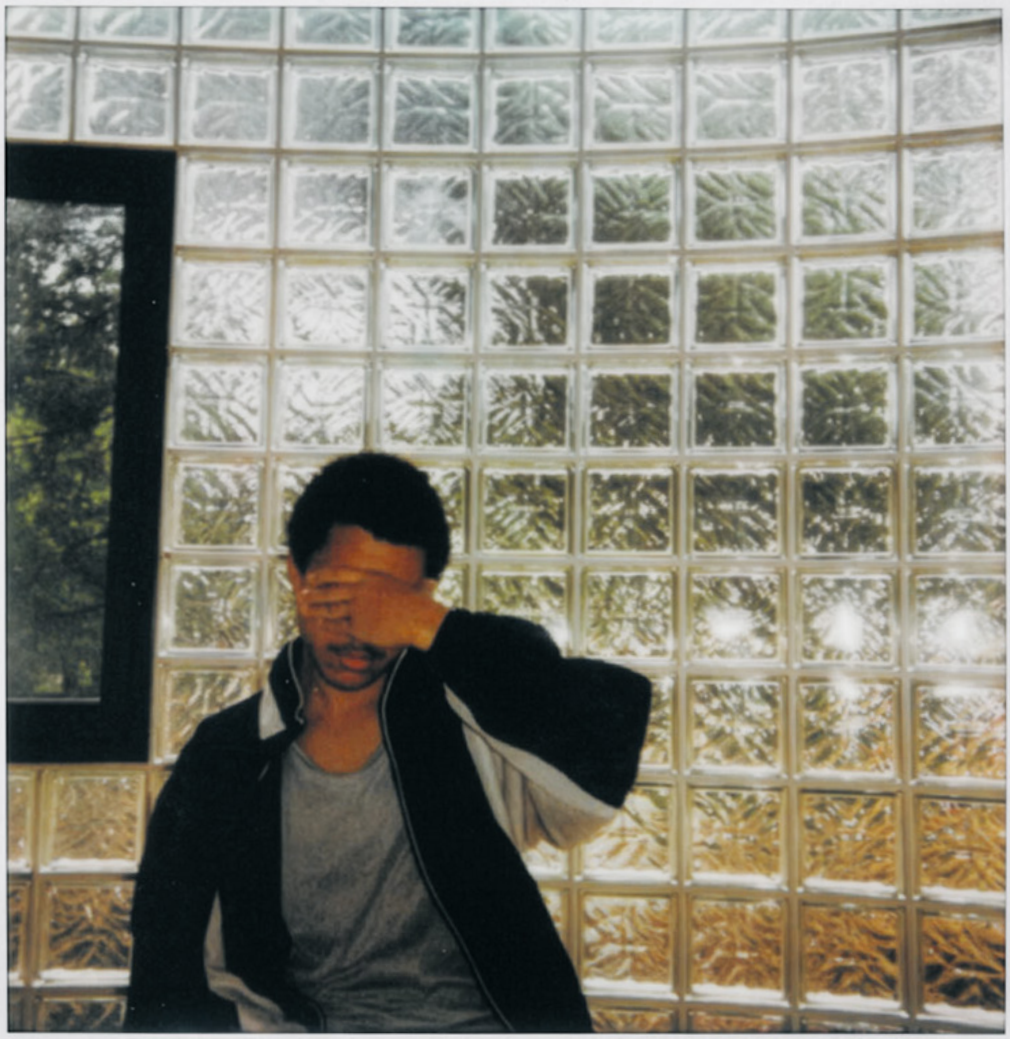
This book is the result of months of research, interviews and workshops.

Hundreds of young people and their youth workers participated from across the UK.

Like a regular night at youth club, these sessions were punctuated with joy, love, vulnerability and jokes.

The following pages not only document them but truly reveal the power of these sacred spaces.

To the young people and youth workers across the UK that shared their stories and experiences that inspired this book – thank you.







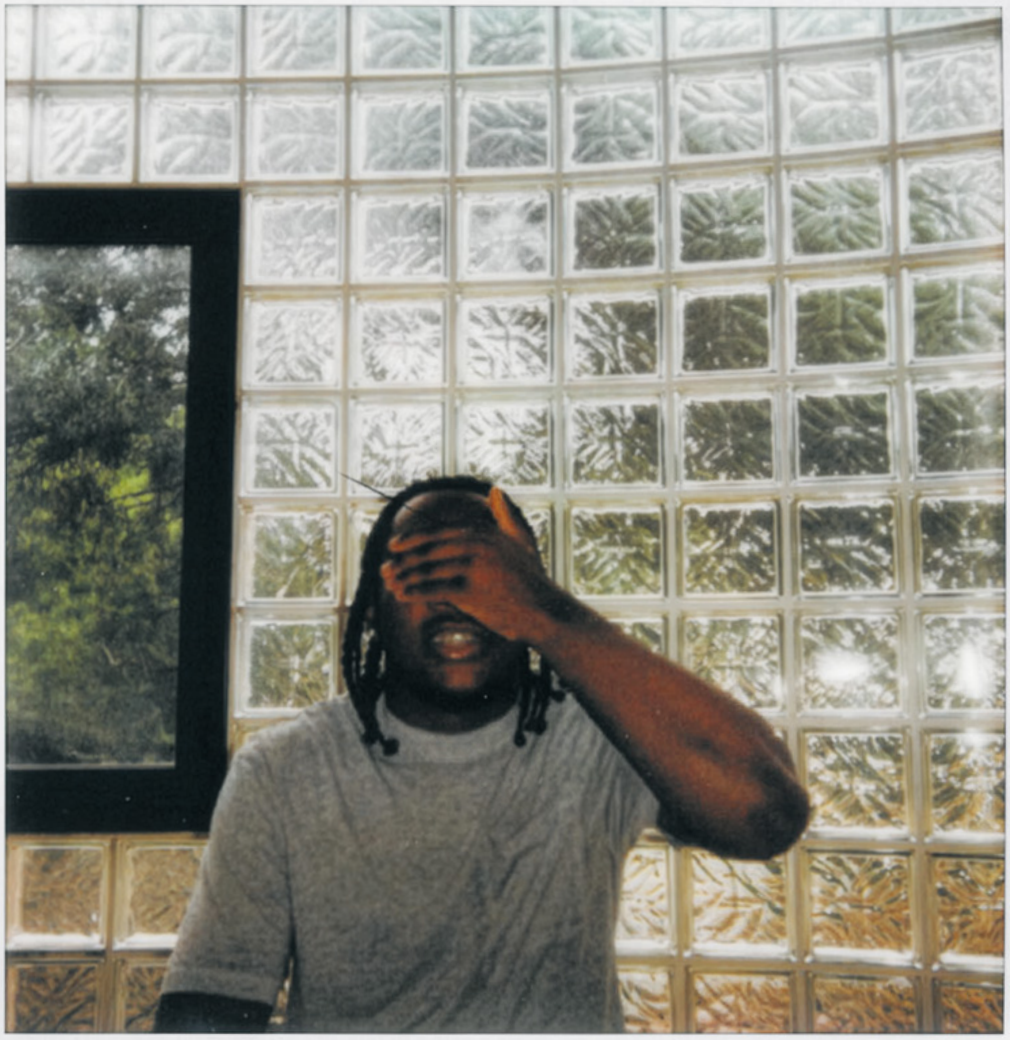

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THE PROCESS








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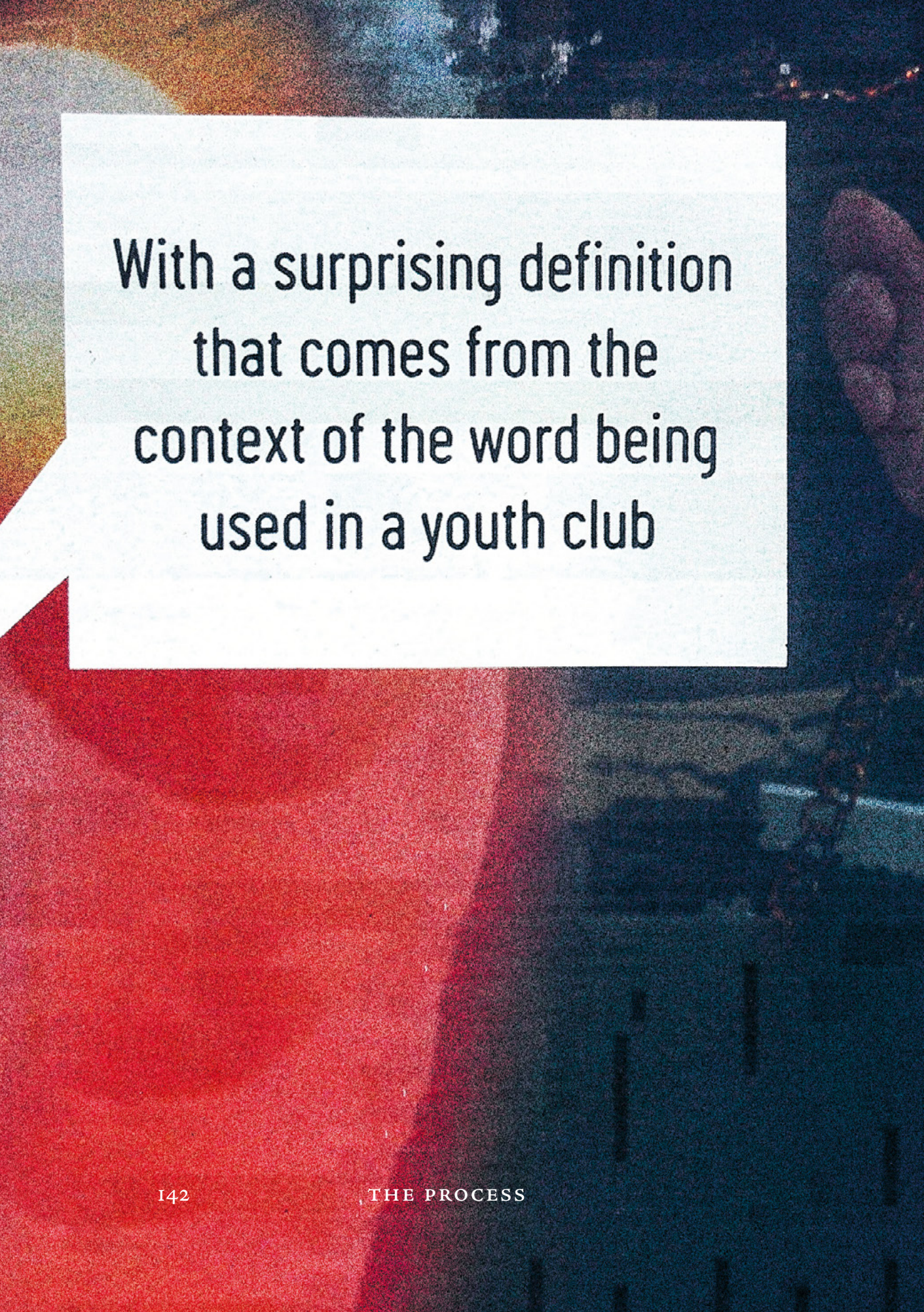


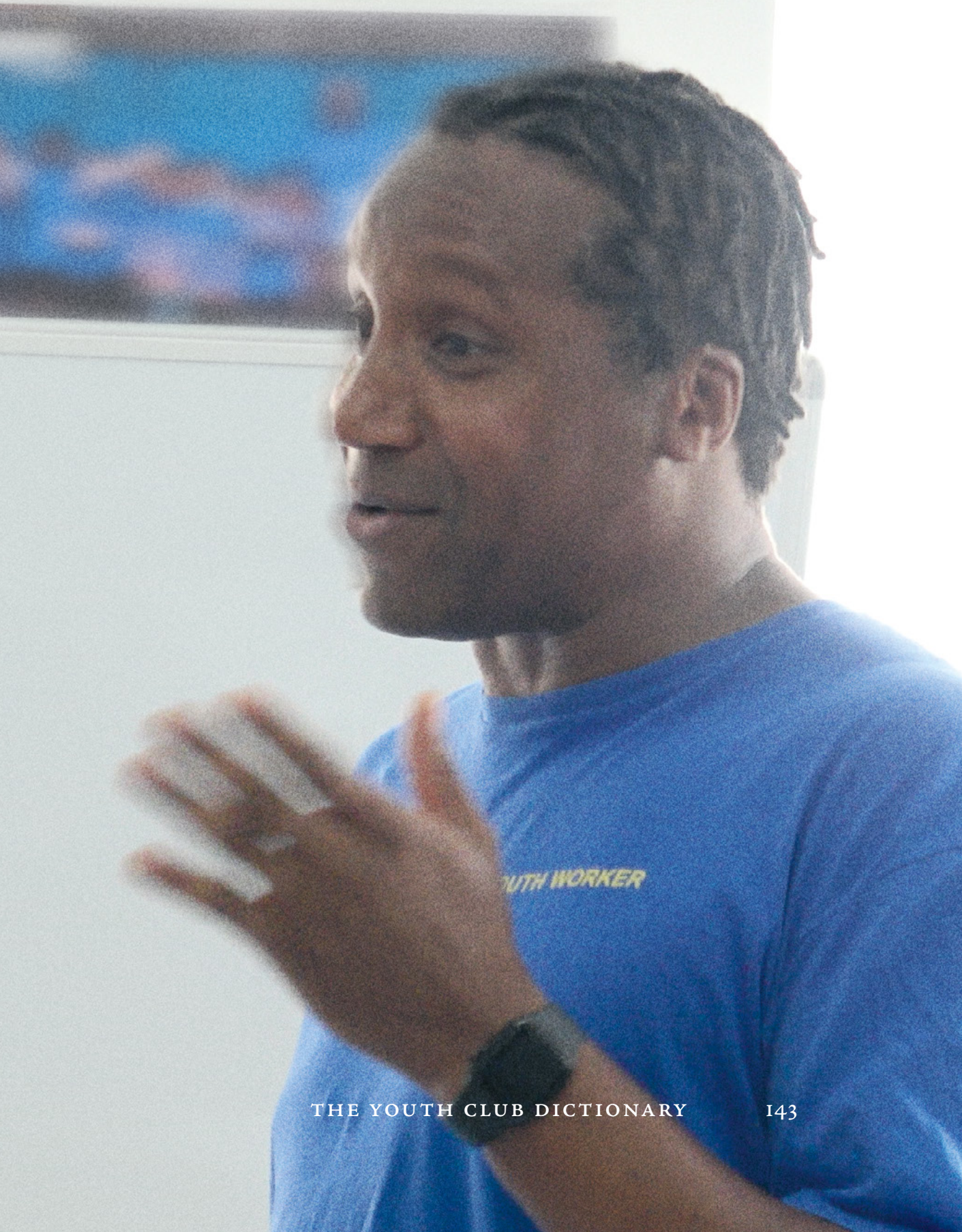




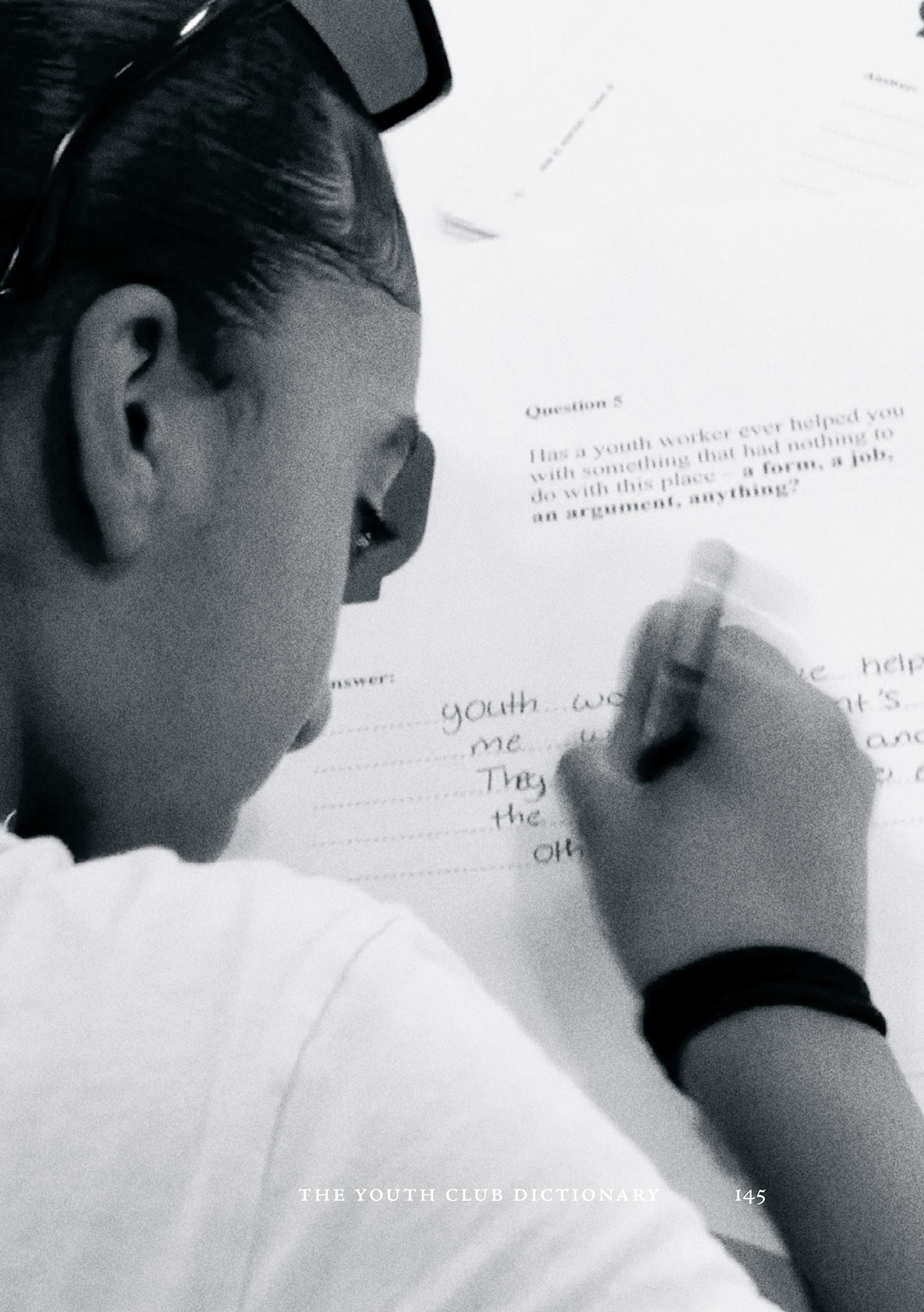





With a surprising definition
that comes from the
context of the word being
used in a youth club

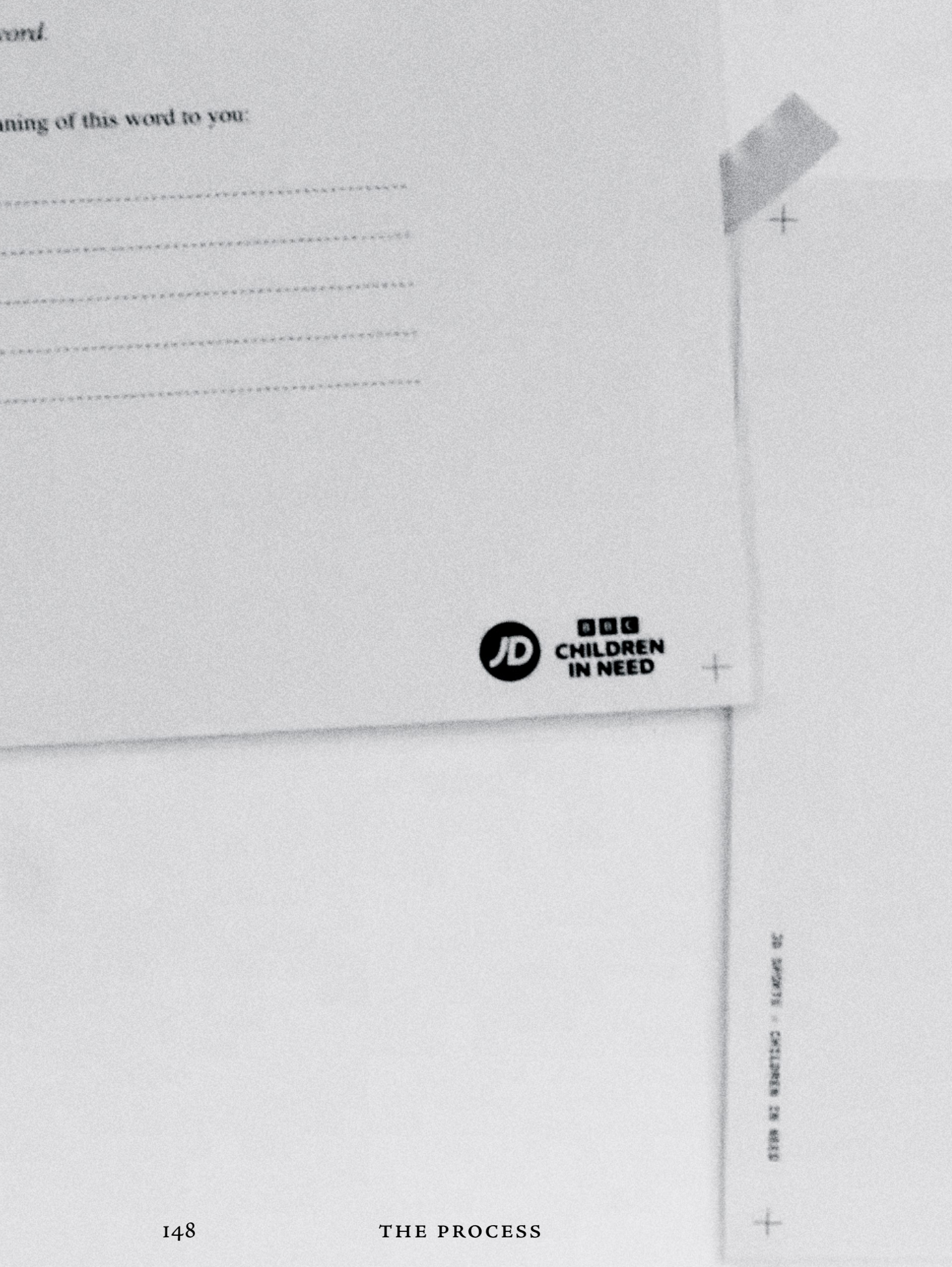

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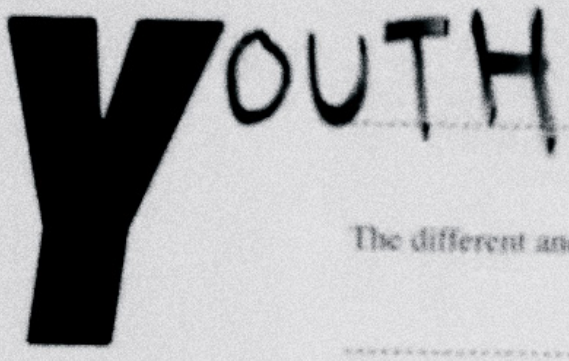



Question 5
Has a youth worker ever helped you with something that had nothing to do with this place — a form, a job, an argument, anything?
nswer:
youth
me
They
the





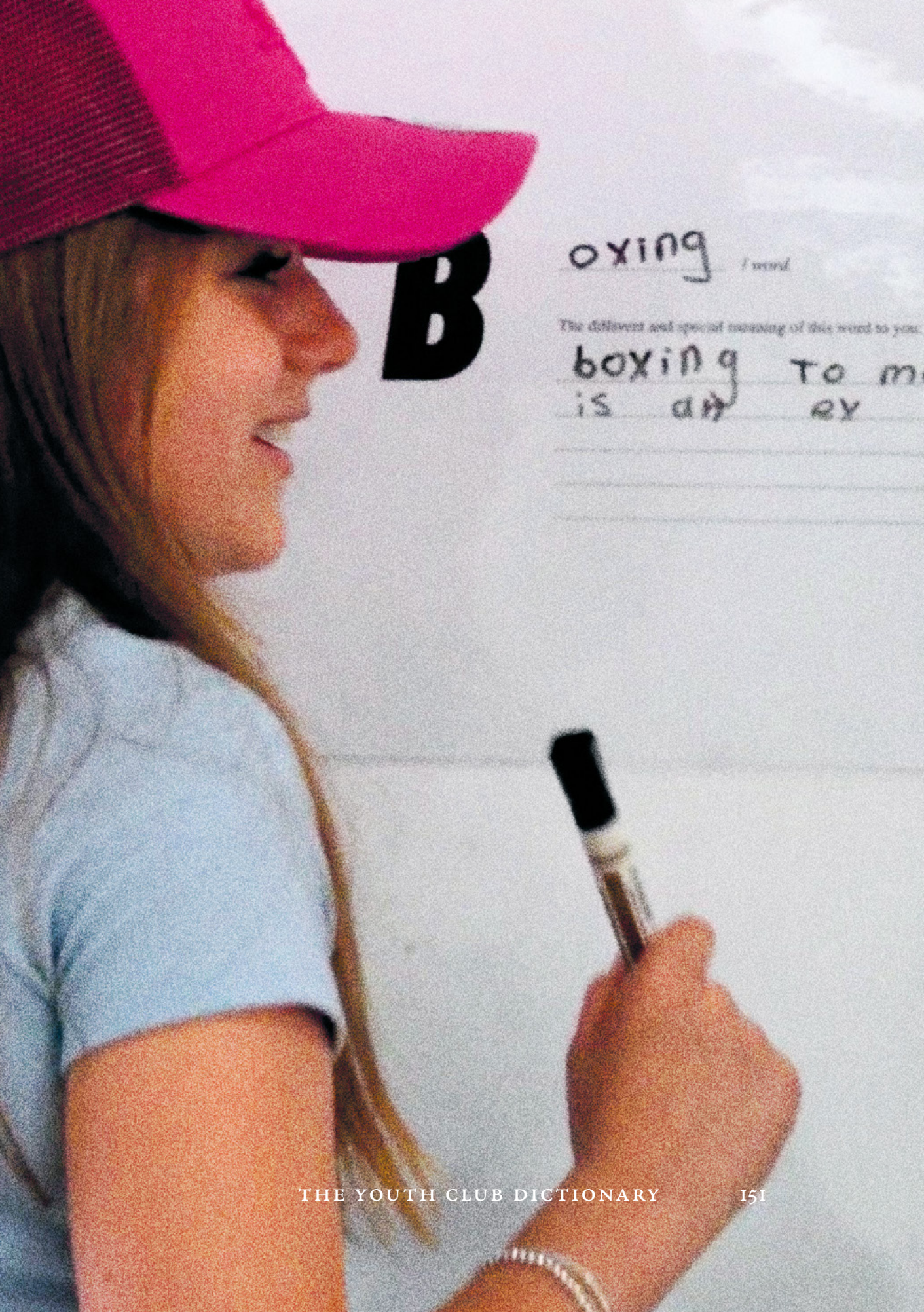

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The different and special meaning of this word to you:

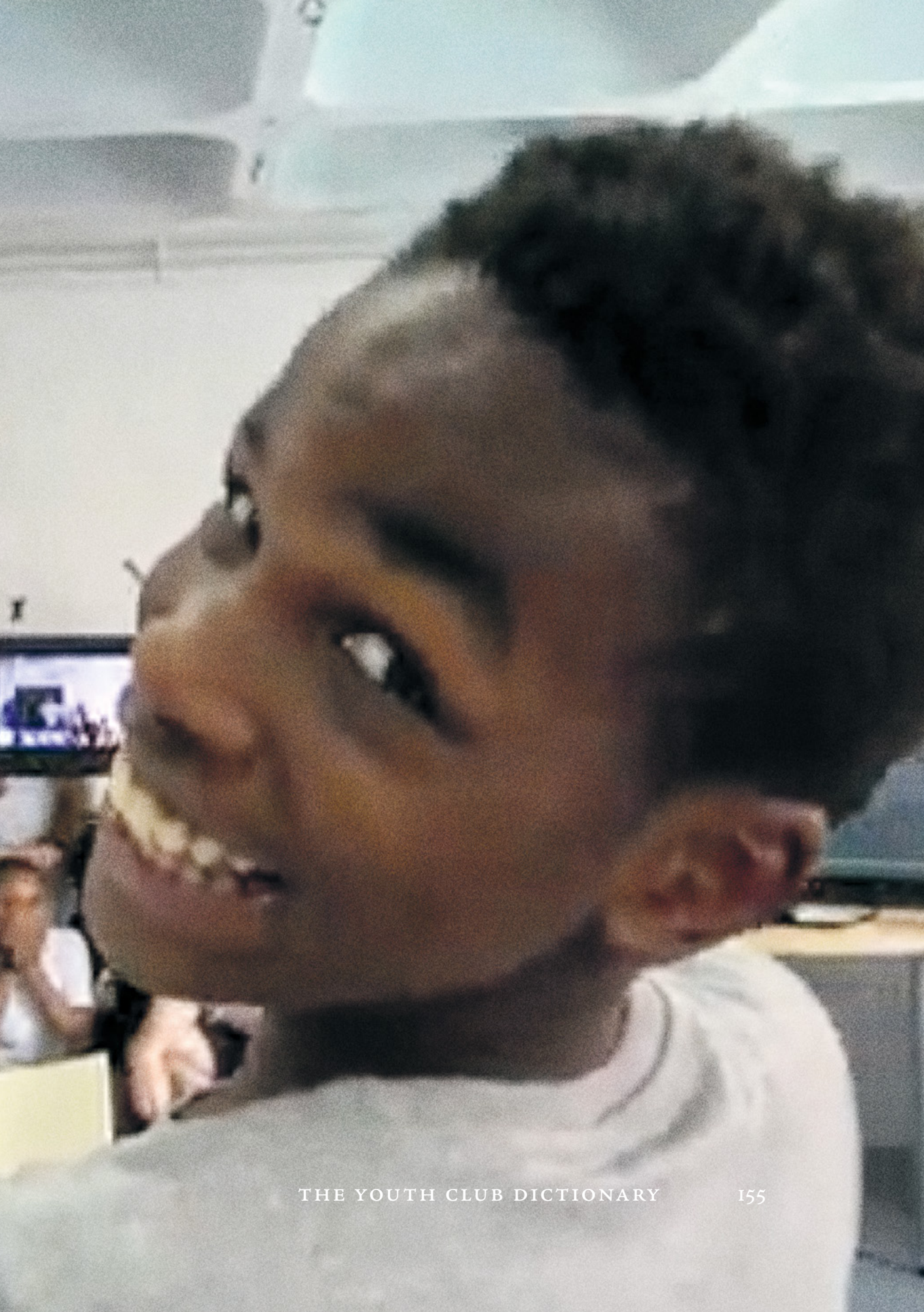



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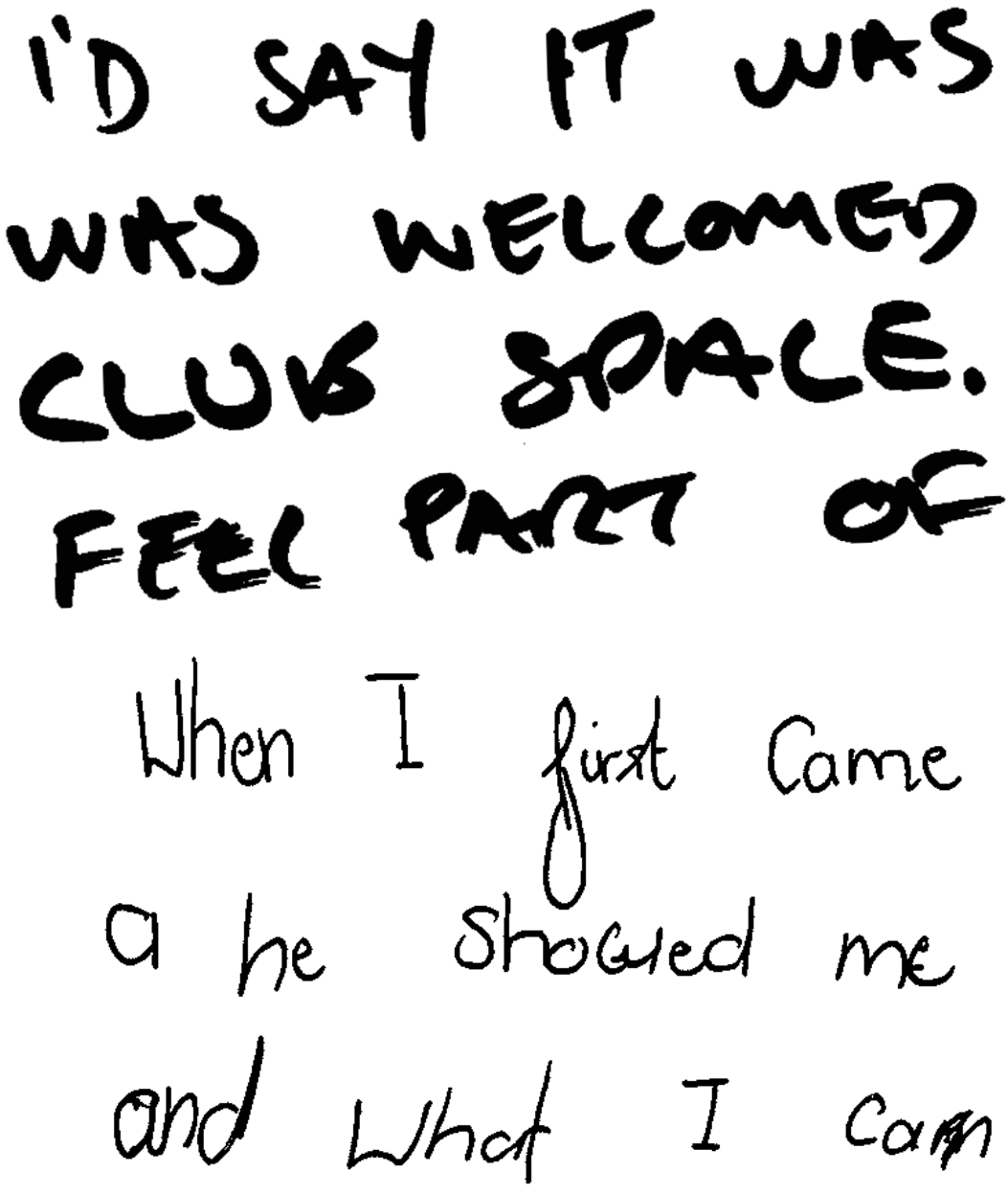



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THE QUESTIONS

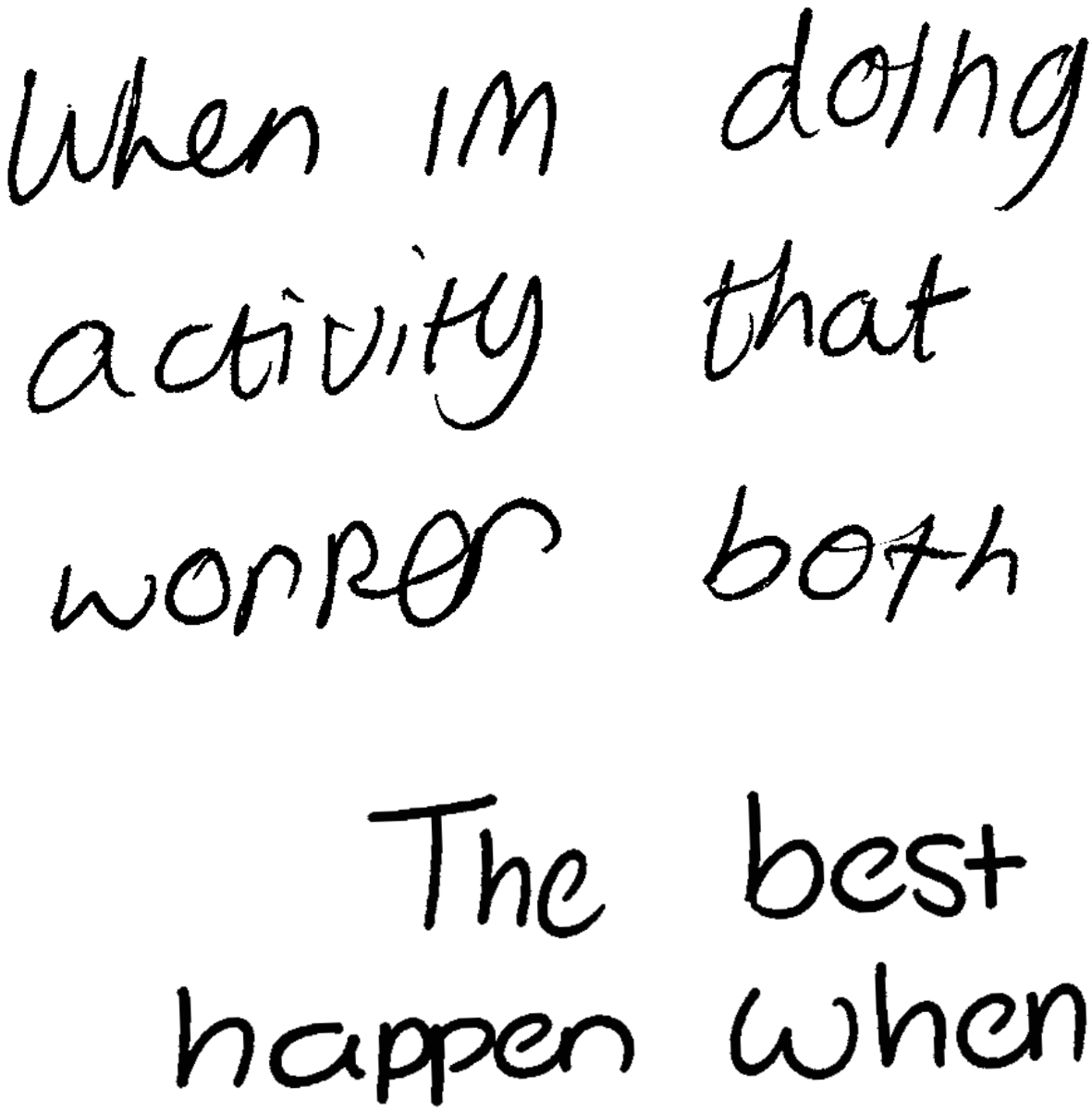
Think back to when you first started coming.
Was there a moment a youth worker
said or did something that made you think,
"Okay, they're alright."? What was it?



THE WAY I
INTO THE YOUTH
AND MADE TO
SOMETHING.

I was greeted by Adrian
What I could do
make.

When do the best conversations actually happen with youth workers?



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enjoy .

Conuversations
you can trust
them

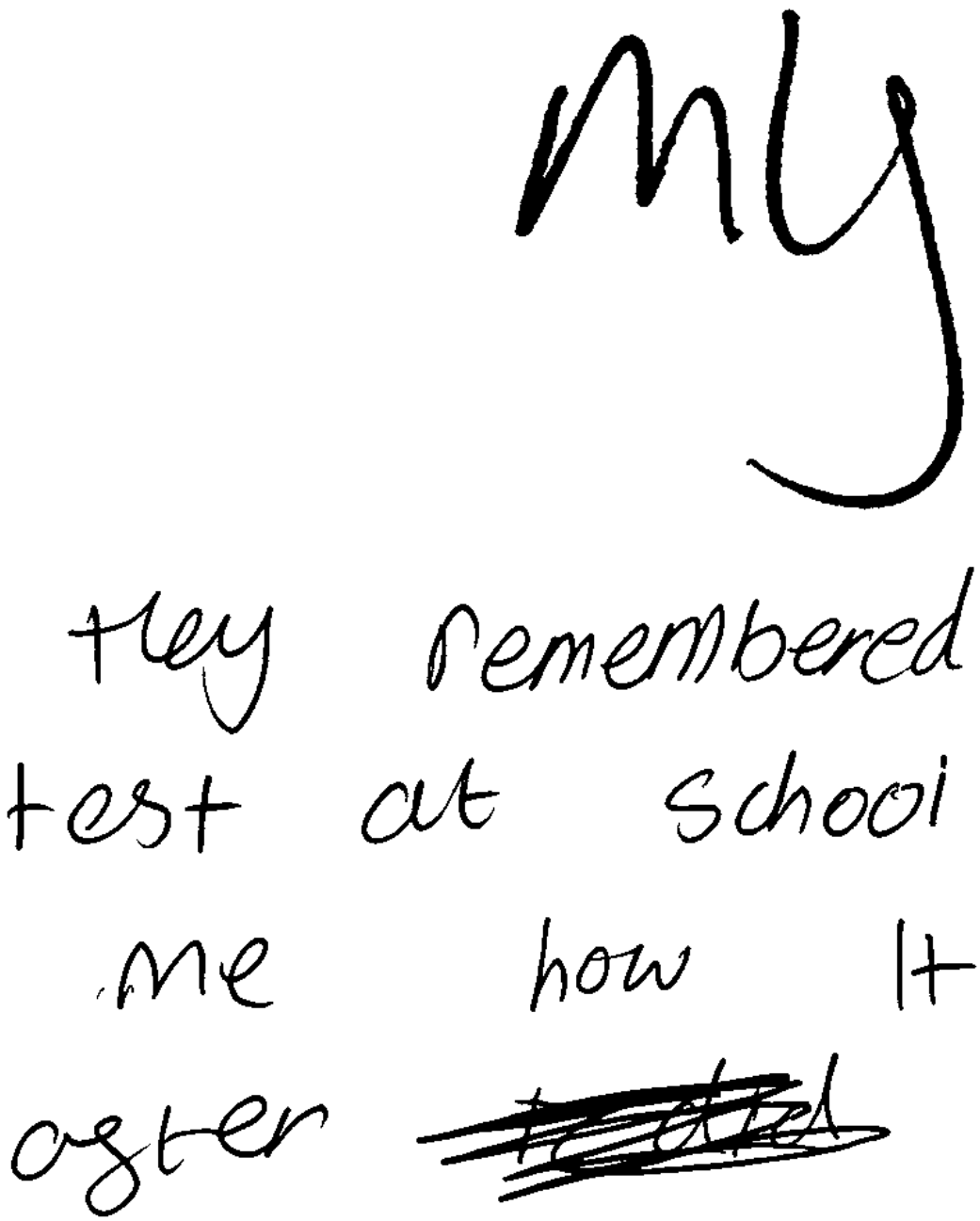
I always the tipe of
up the mood
sad so ever
in I great them
"how are you?"
when start up

I think this helps
the activities | fun

person - to brighten
when people are
time they come
with a "hello" or
and we start
conversation then.

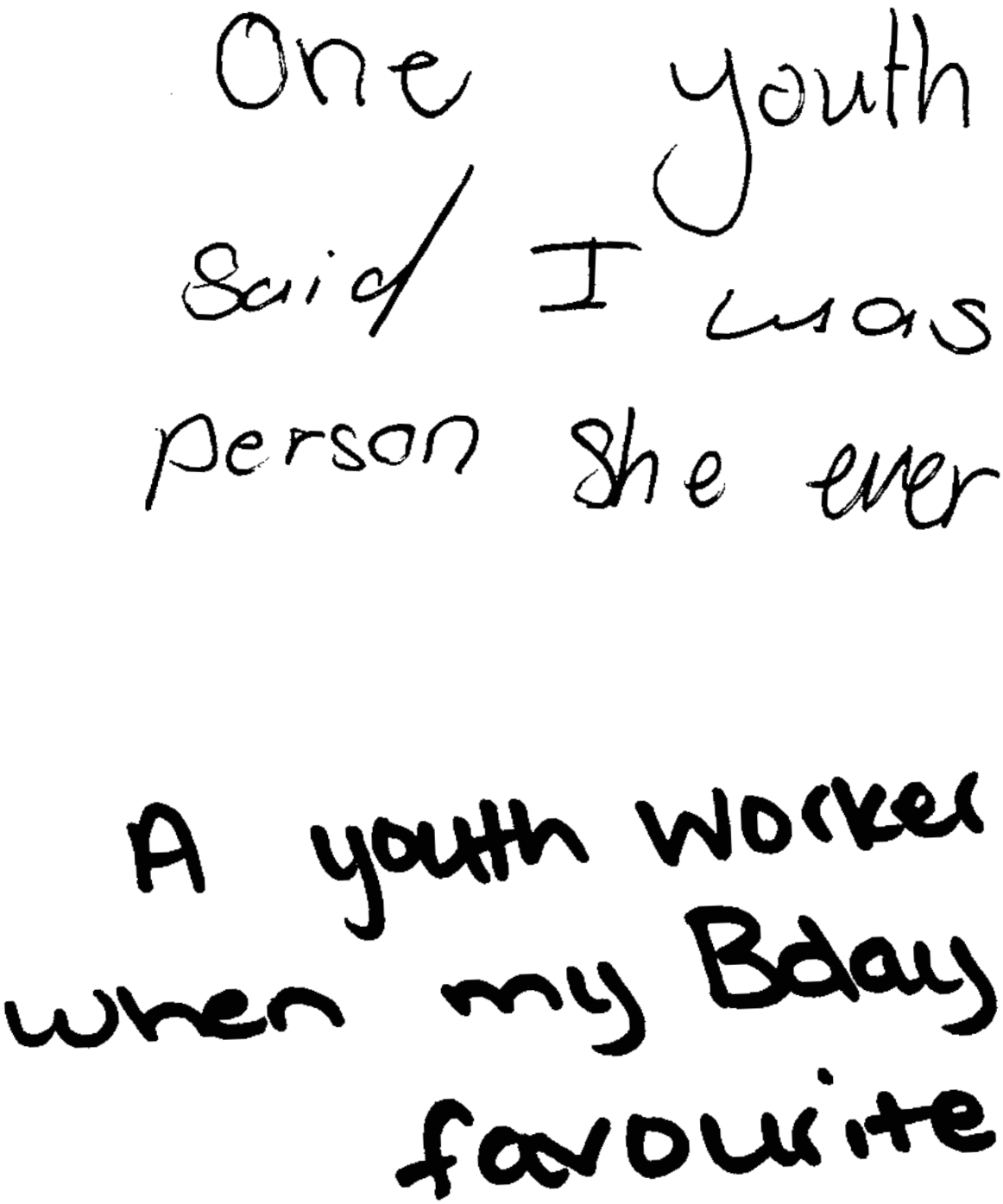
us all prep for
we have ahead.

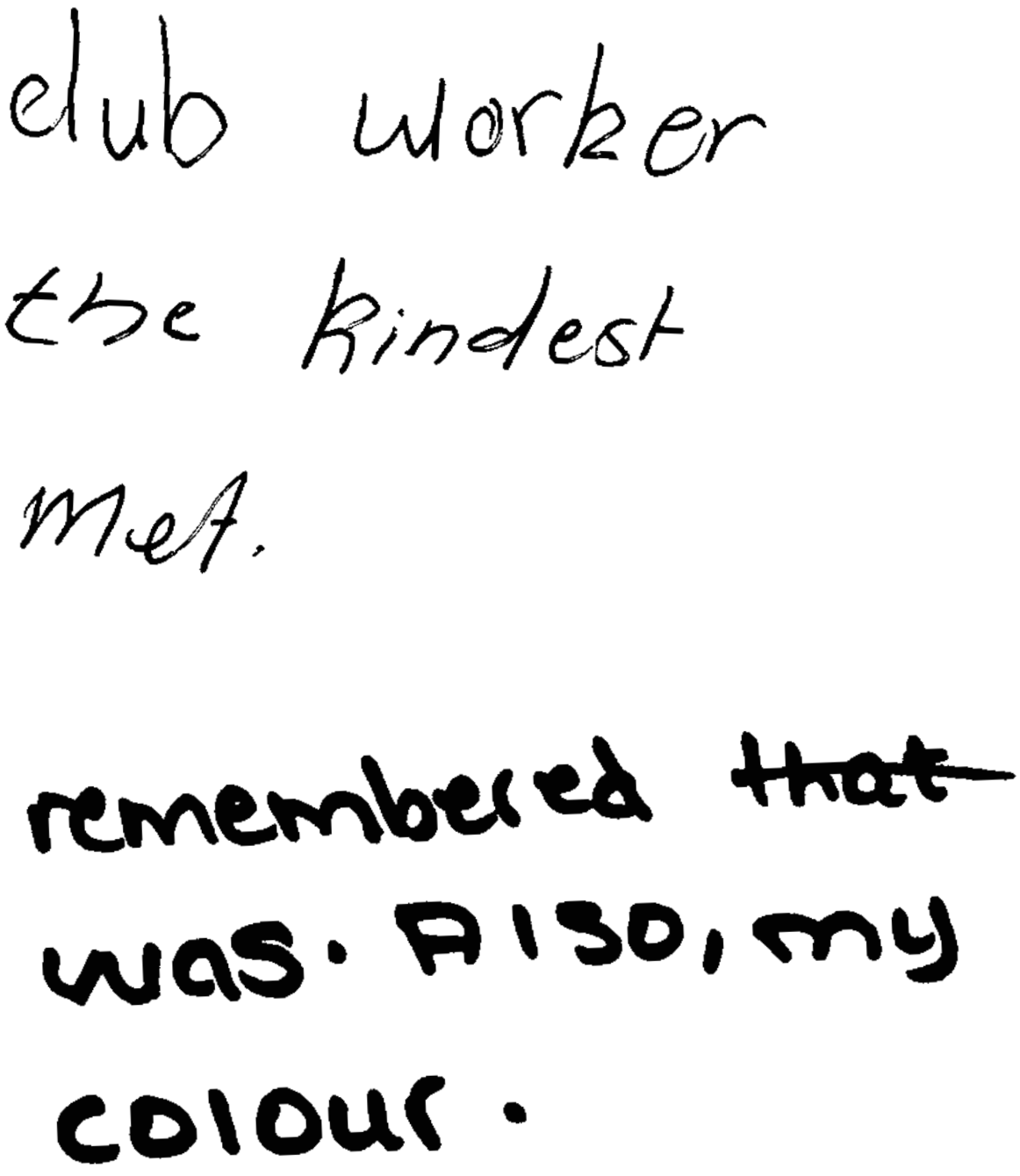
What's the smallest thing a youth worker has remembered about you that you didn't expect them to?



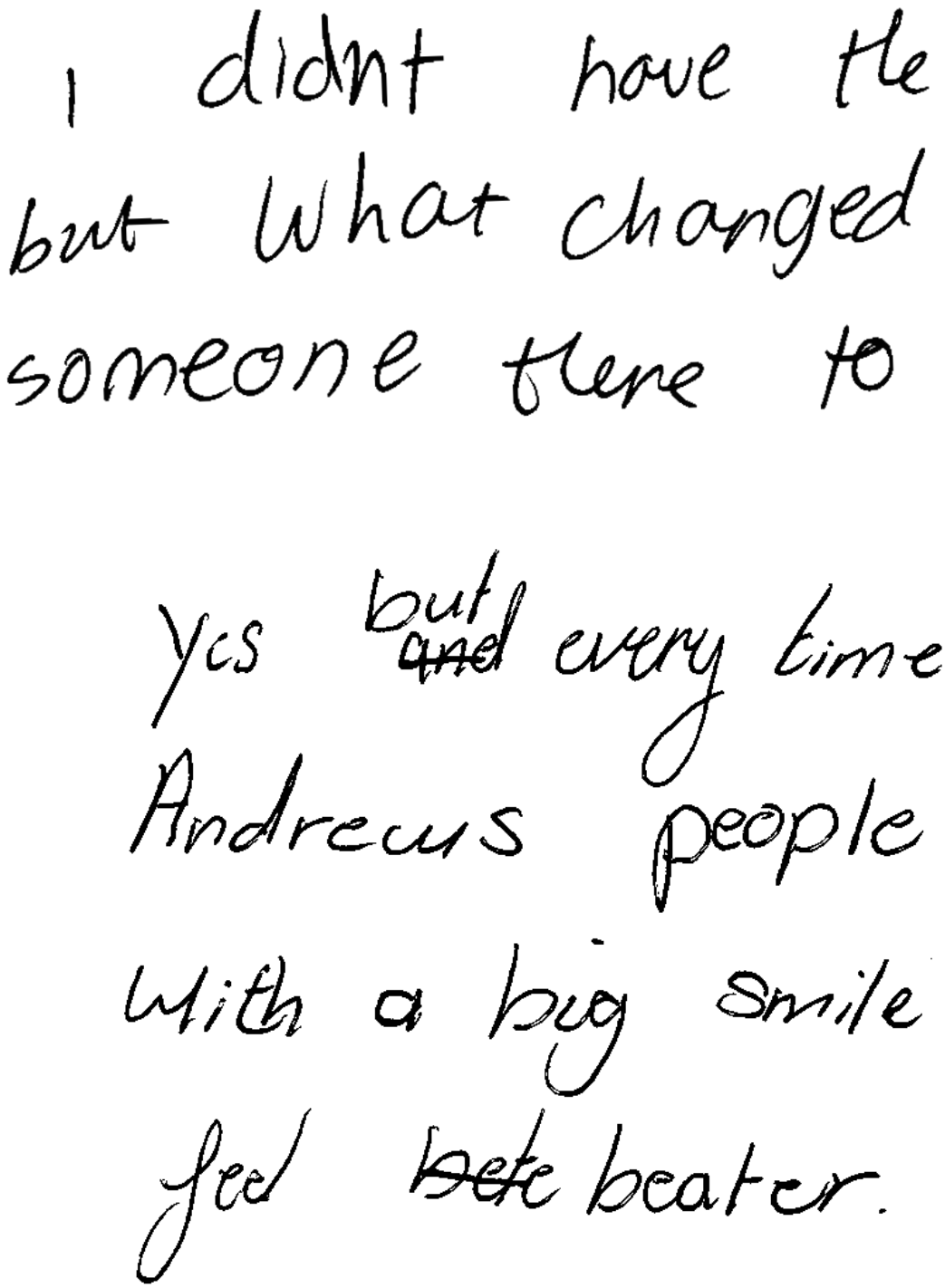


I had a
and ~~asked~~ asked
went ~~the~~ the day
It


One youth
said I was
person she ever
A youth worker
when my Bday
favourite


club worker
the kindest
Mel.
remembered ~~that~~
was. Also, my
colour.

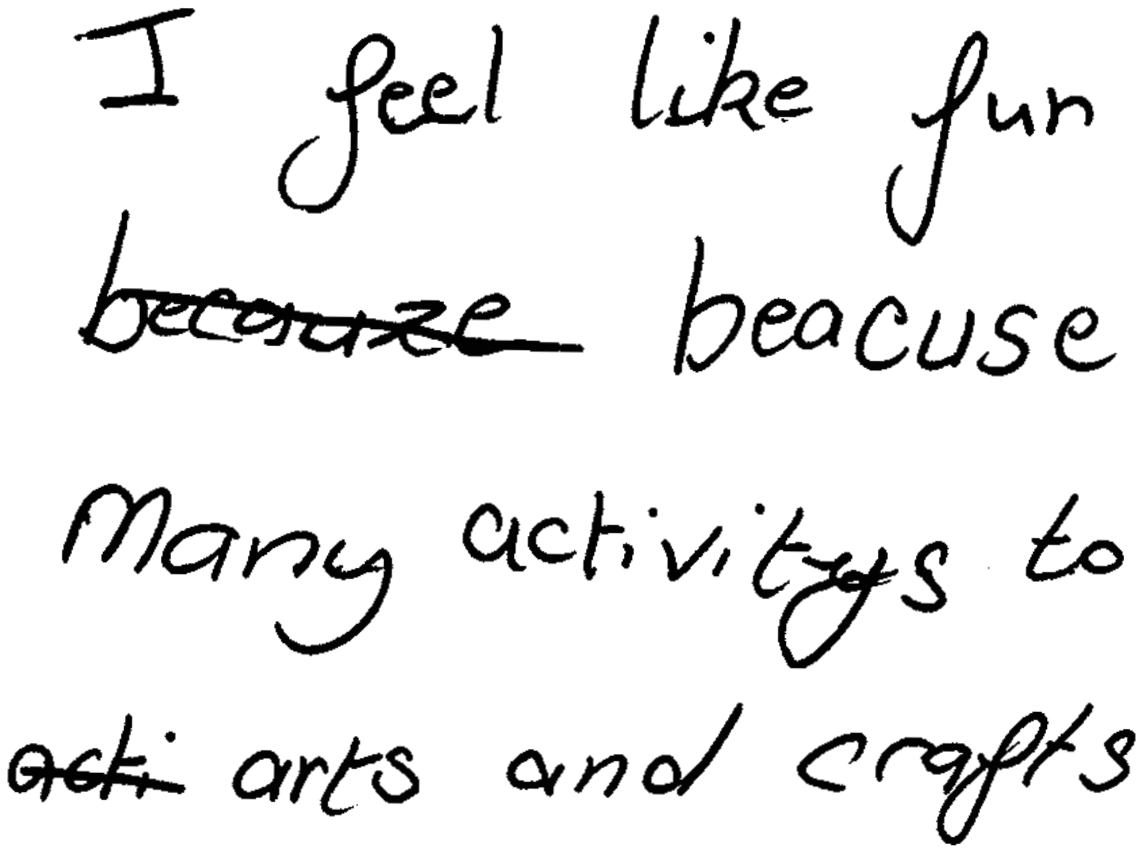
Was there a day you came in not okay and left a bit different? What changed it?

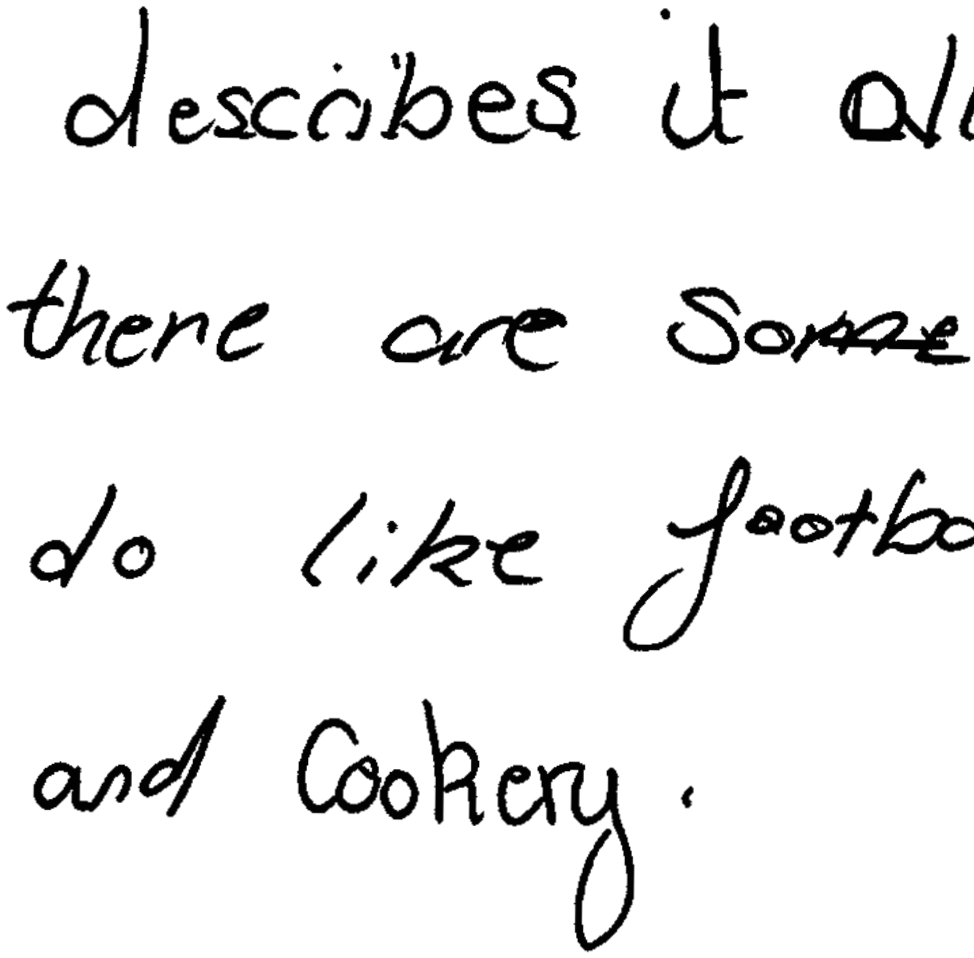


best day at sch
it wos just having
listen and not judge.

I step foot in
alway greet my
which makes me

Is there an ordinary, everyday word – e.g. chill, dream, Tuesday, level up – that means something to you because of this place? What is it, and why?




describes it all
there are Some
do like football,
and Cookery.

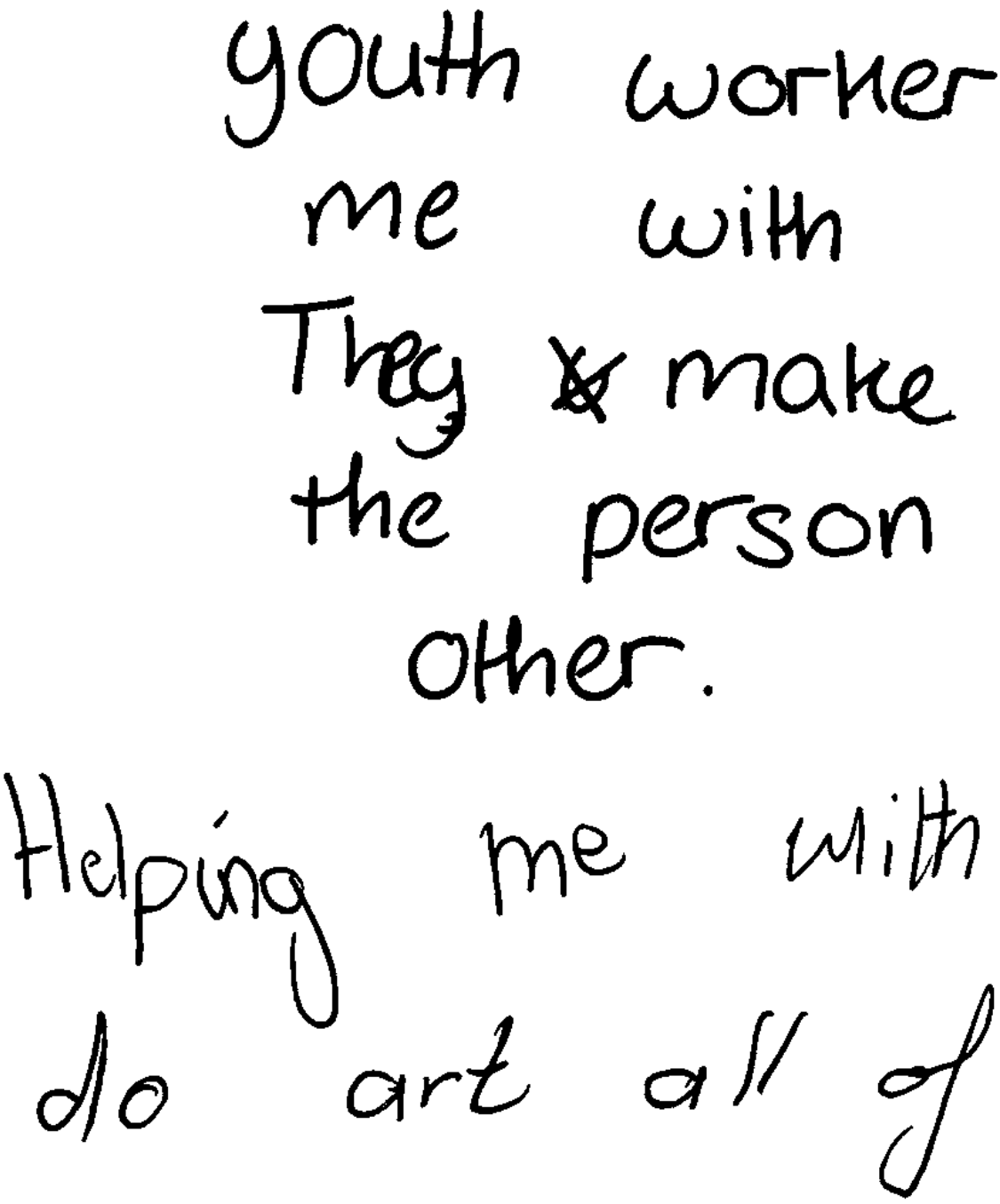
my word is chill
means relaxing.
like a sage
to do what

the ordinary
hi because
agnolege me.

. normally it
but here it feels,
space for me
I want

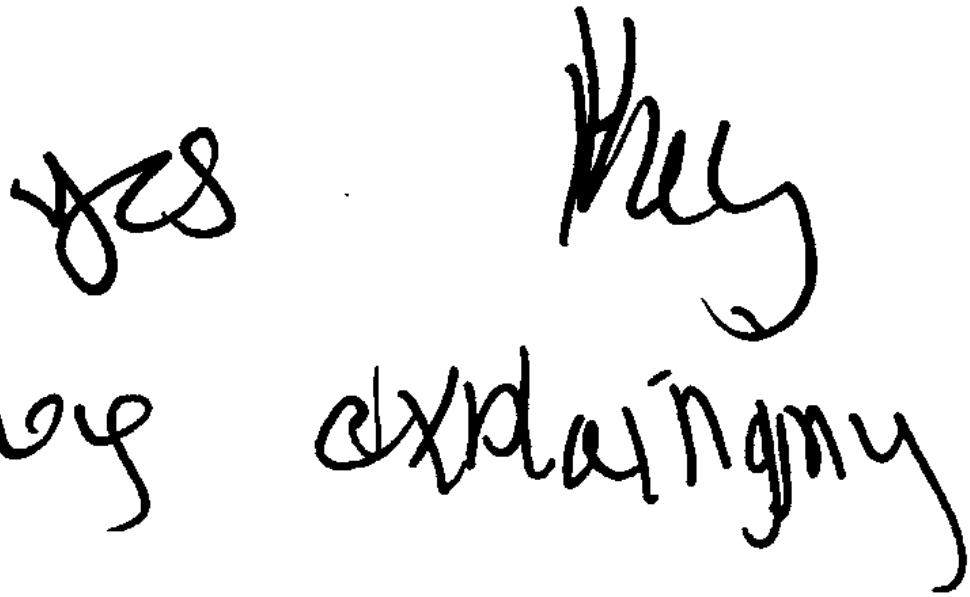
world of
I know really

Has a youth worker ever helped you with something that had nothing to do with this place – a form, a job, an argument, anything?

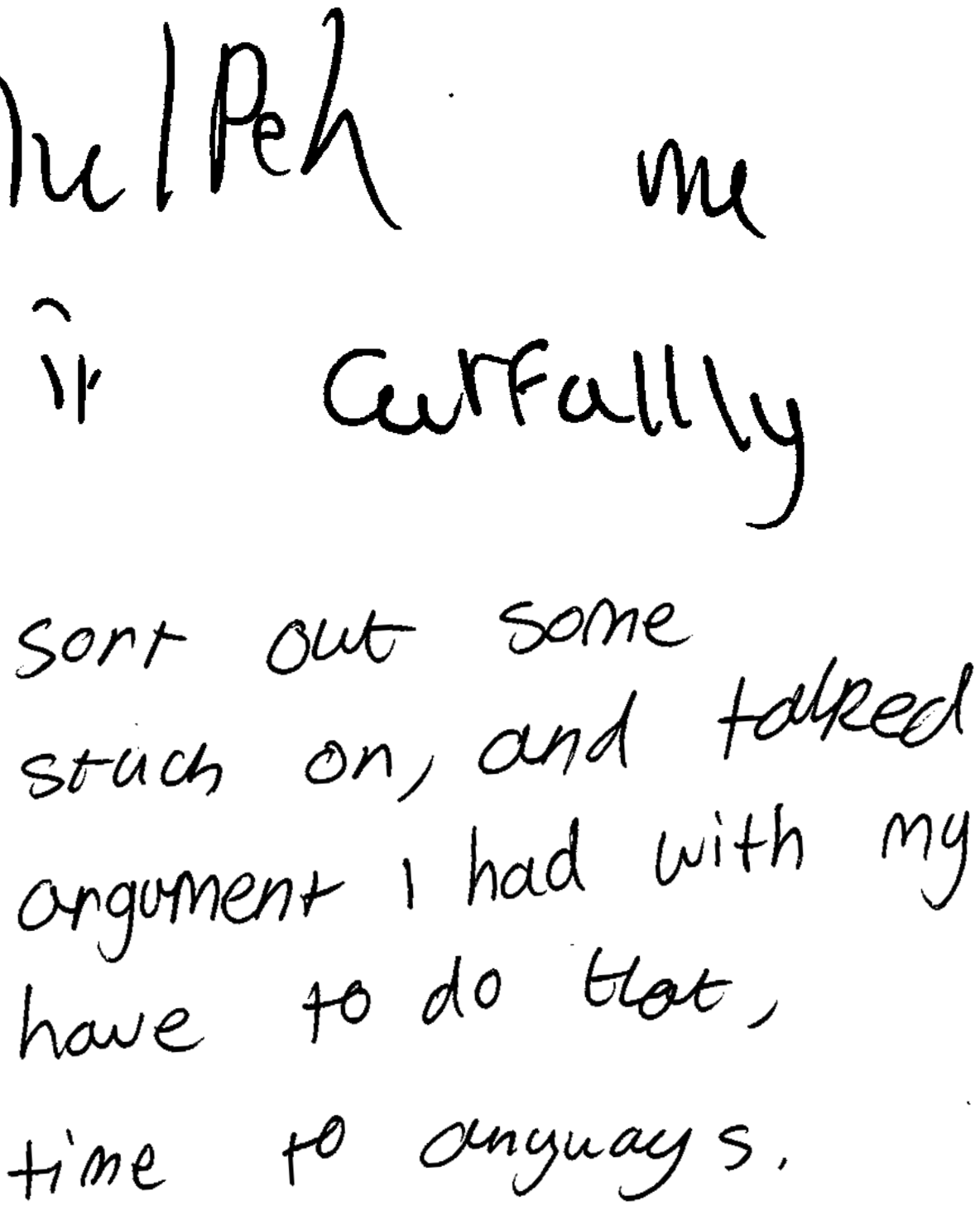


have helped
argument's bc
me and
Speak to each

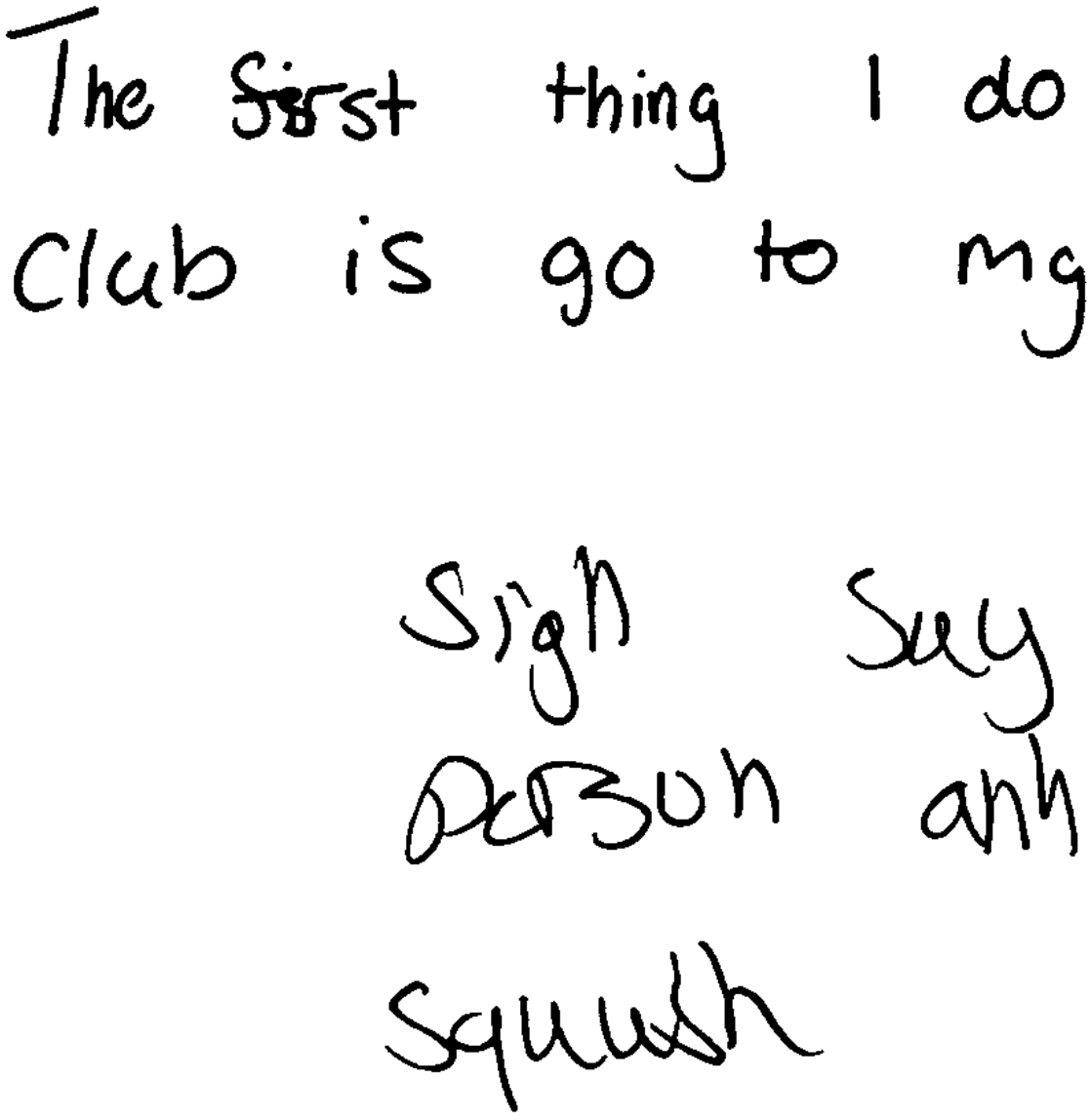
art as I normaly
the time -



Yes they helped me school some times I was me out of an friend, they didnt but they took the


help me
it carfully
sort out some
stuck on, and talked
argument I had with my
have to do that,
time to anyways.

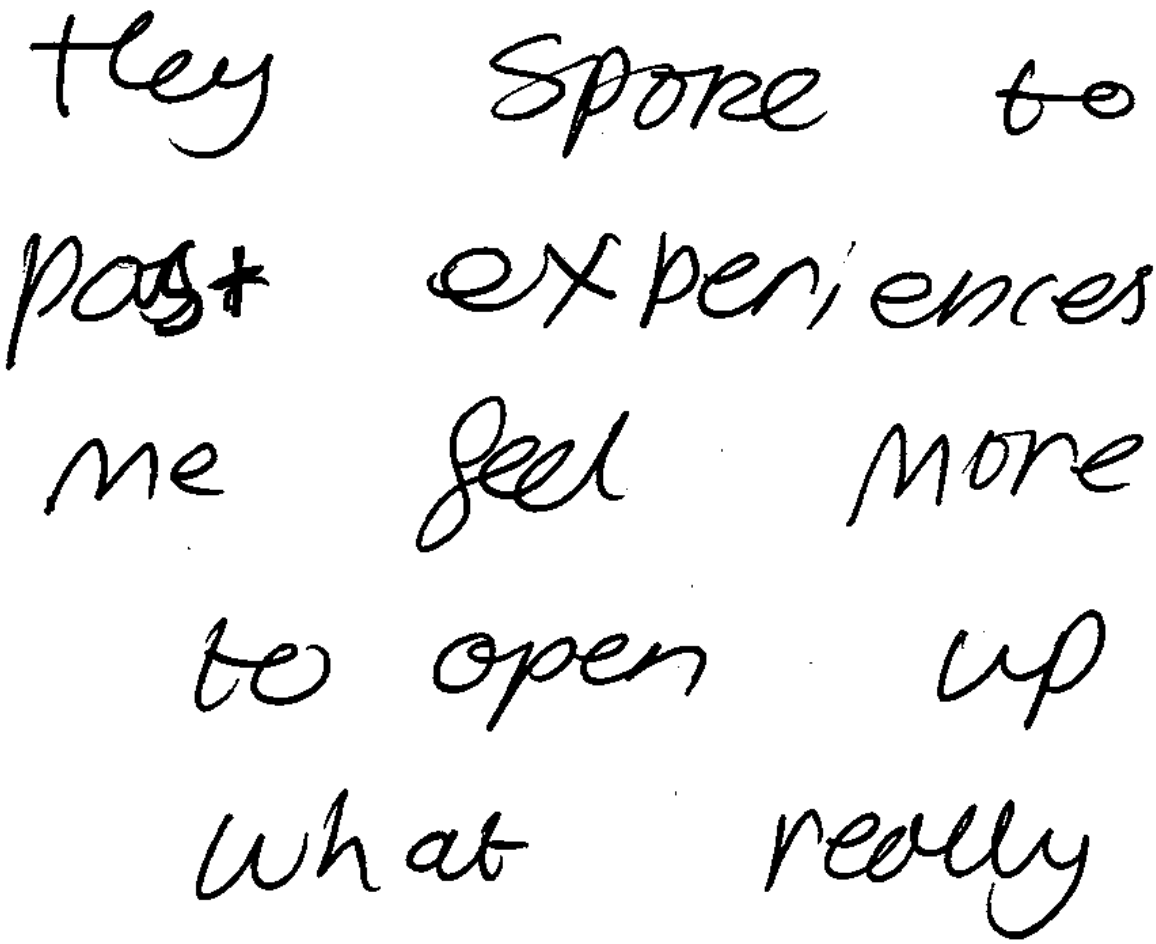
When you walk through the door here,
what's the first thing you do?



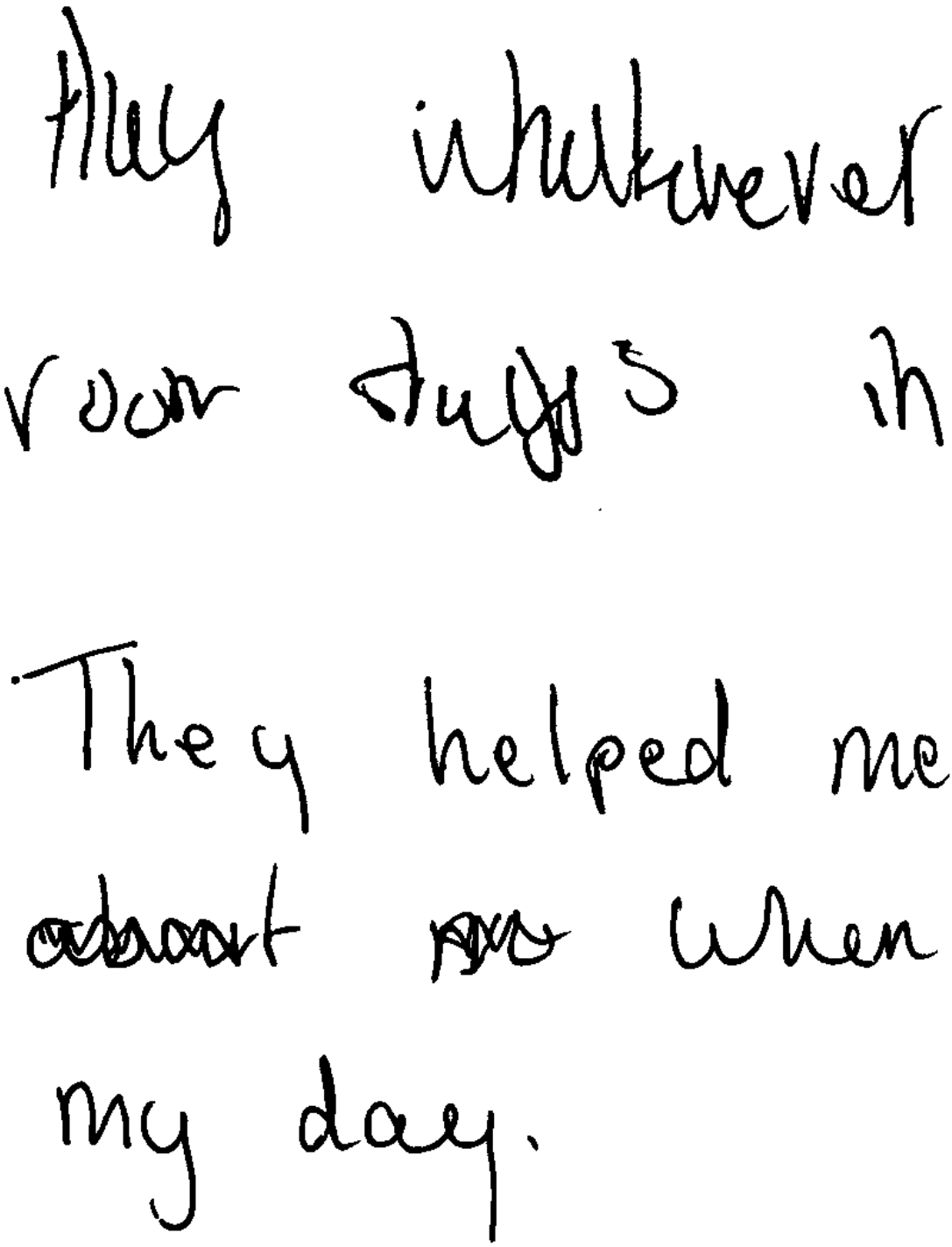
when I walk into
friends.

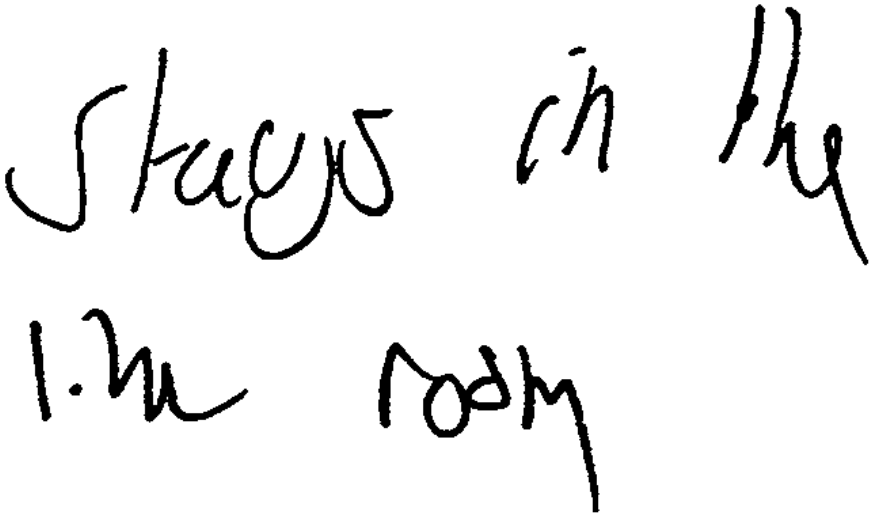
hello to everg
go with some

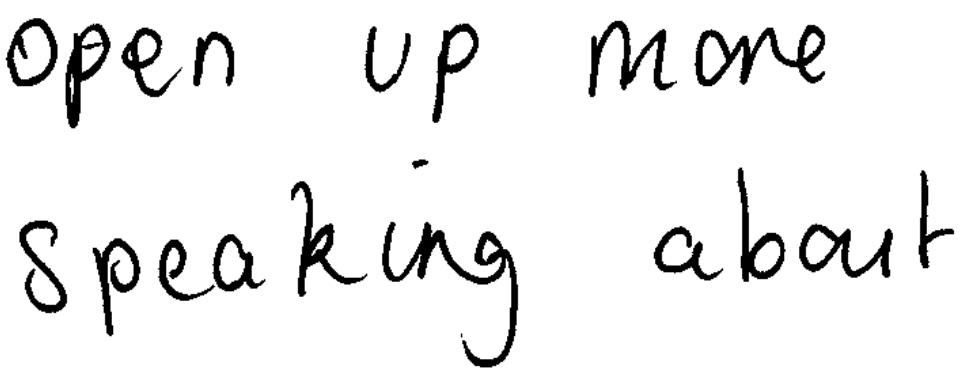
What did a youth worker get you talking about before you ever talked about anything that actually mattered?



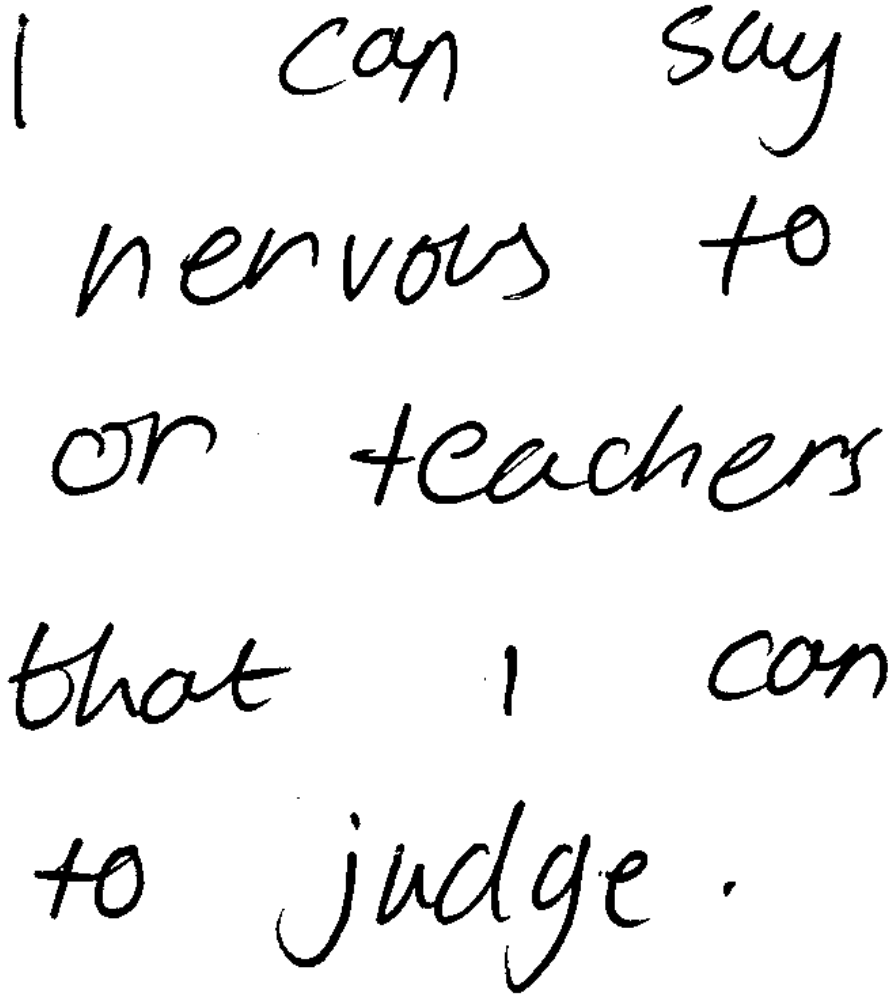
me about
which made
comfortable
to them about
matters.

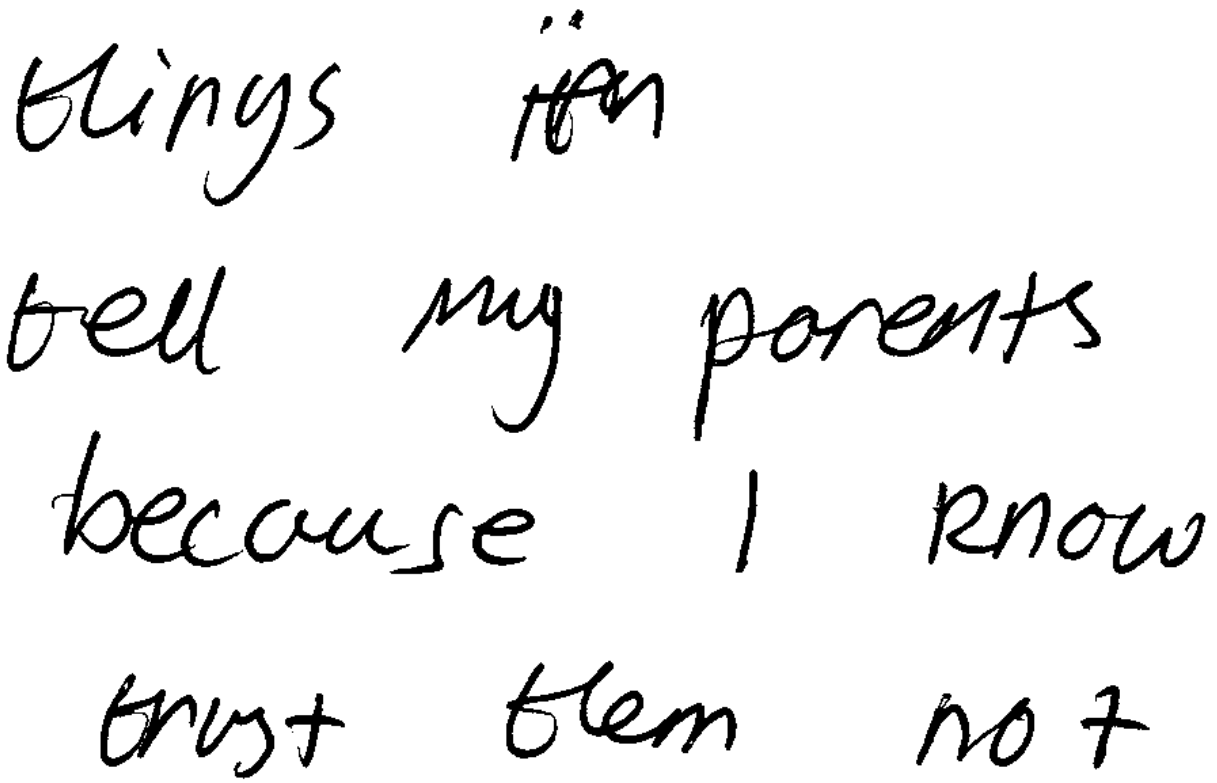

They inluenced
your drugs in
They helped me
about me when
my day.


Stages in the
life room

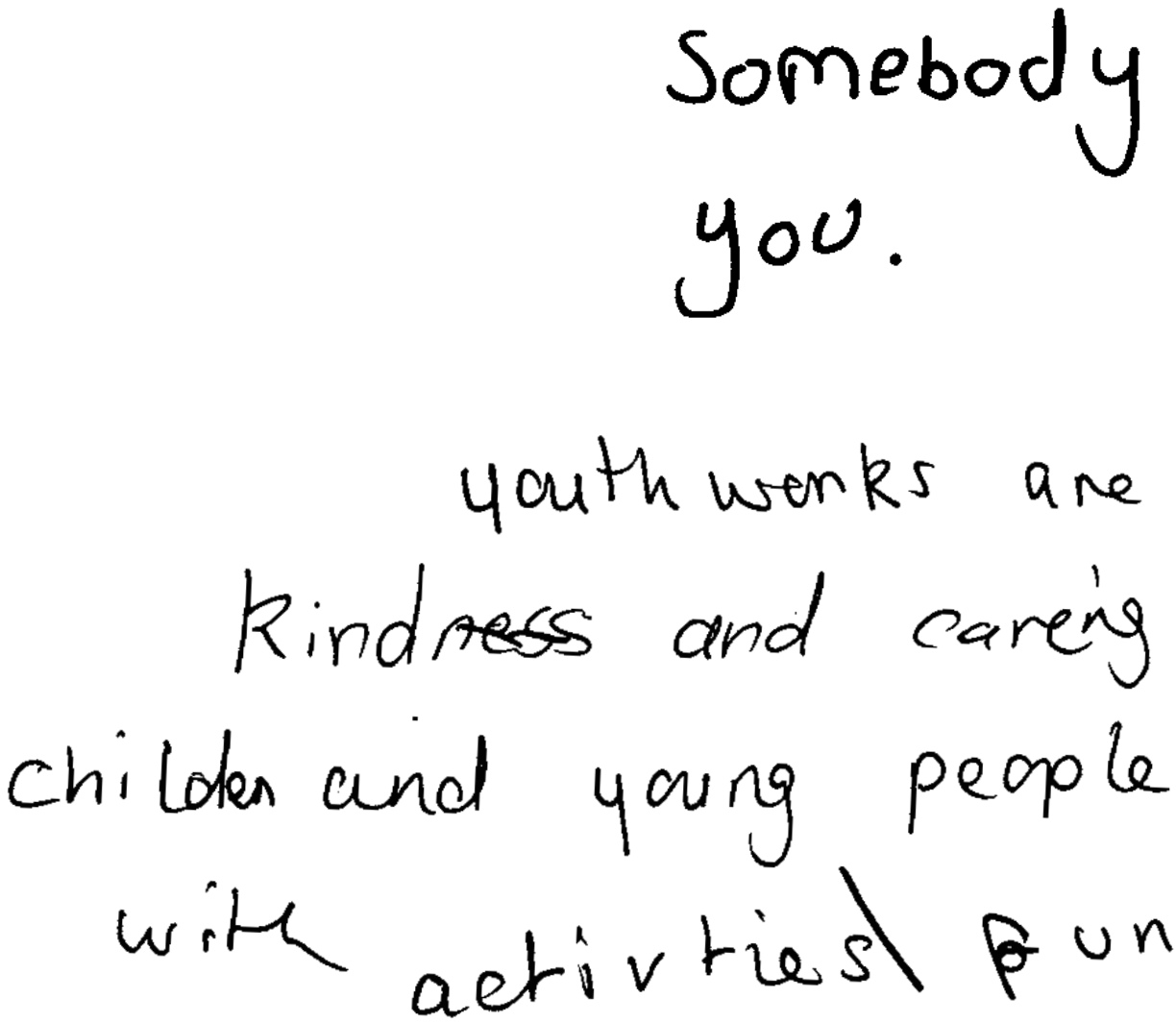

open up more
Speaking about

What can you say to a youth worker
that you'd never say to a teacher, a parent,
or anyone else?




things I can
tell my parents
because I know
trust them not

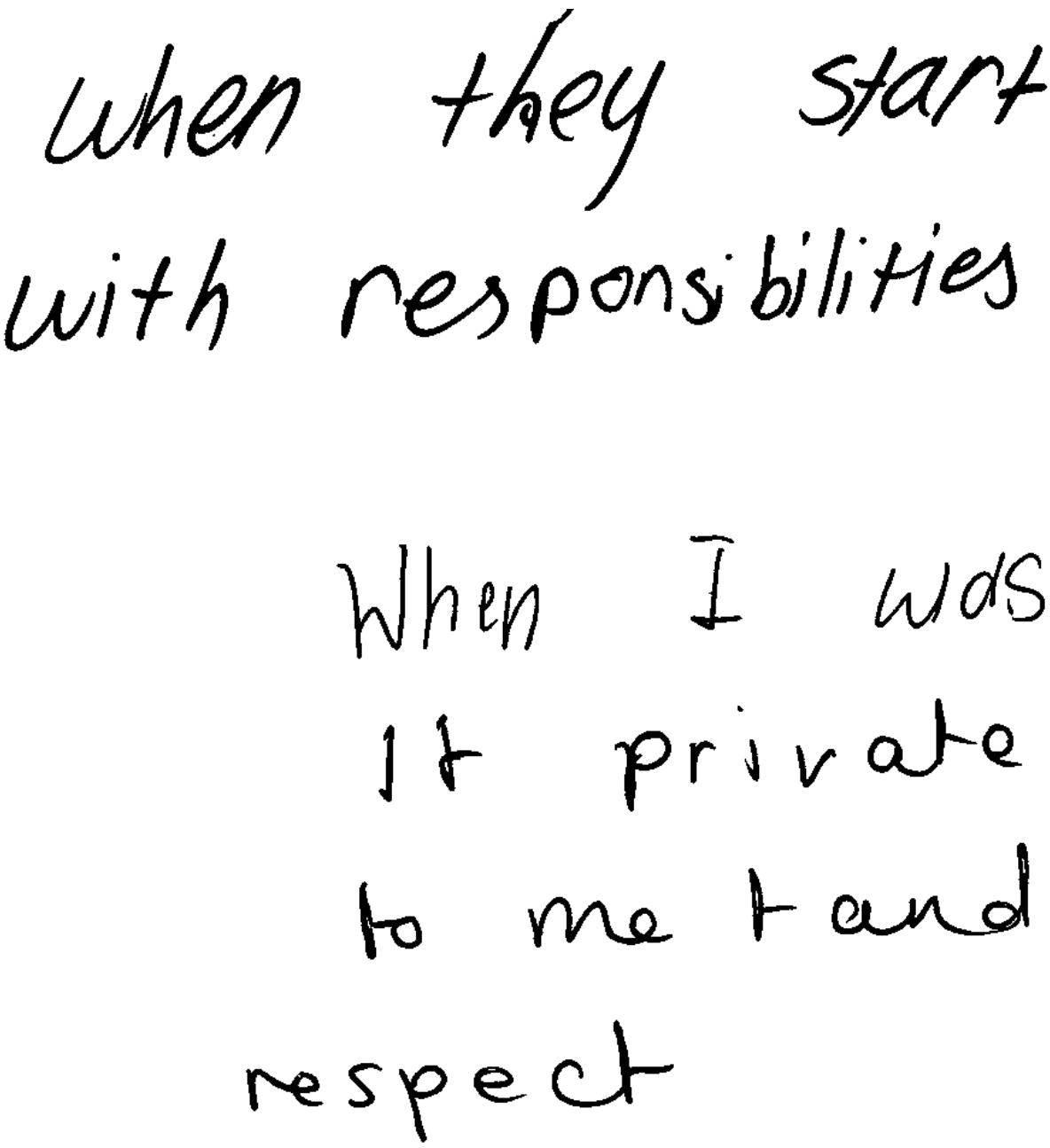
If you had to explain what a youth worker actually is to someone who's never met one – but you weren't allowed to use the words "help" or "support" – what would you say?



Who is The For

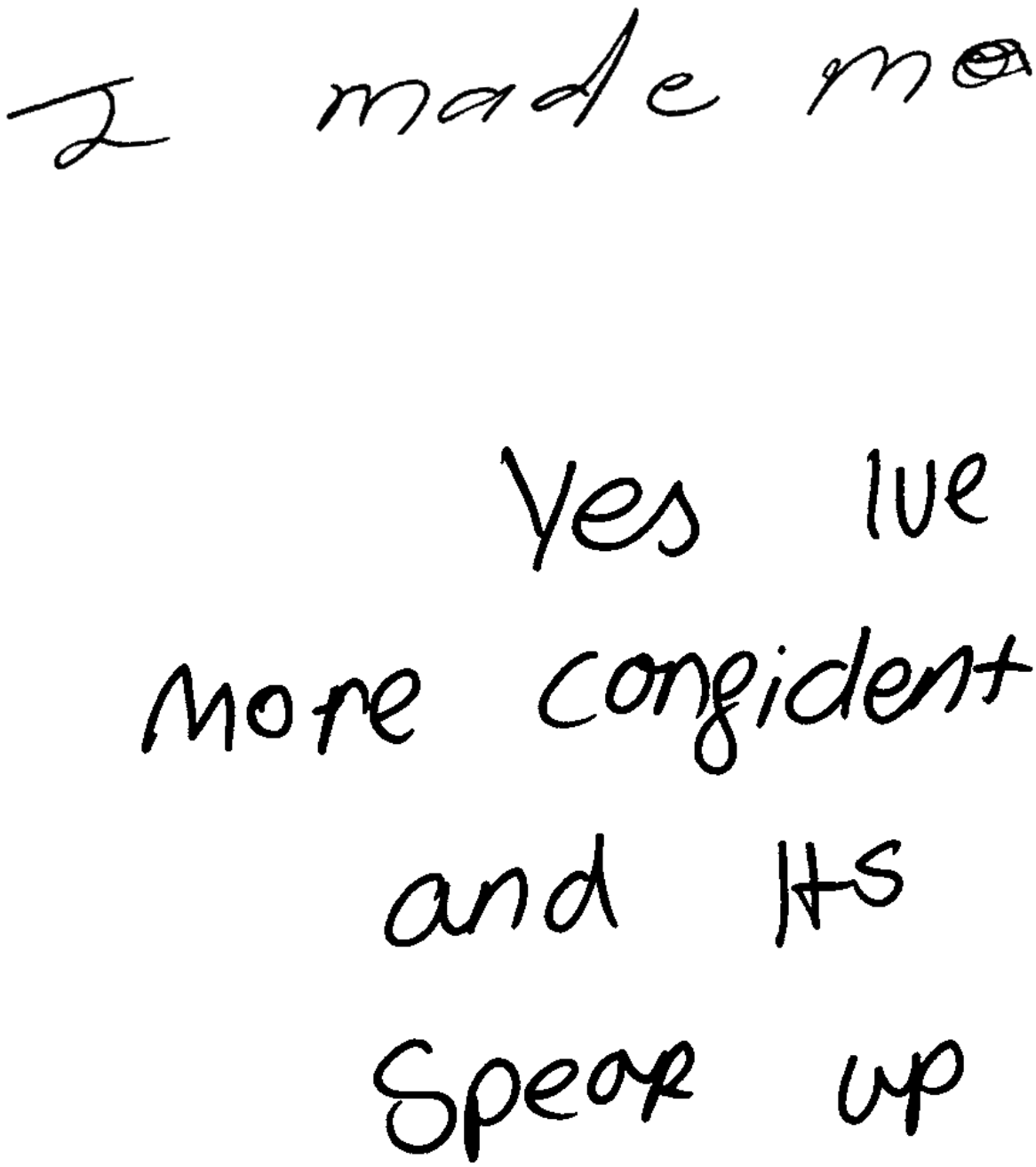
People who ~~are~~ looking after
~~to~~ While, ~~Some~~
~~and~~ provide them
things to do

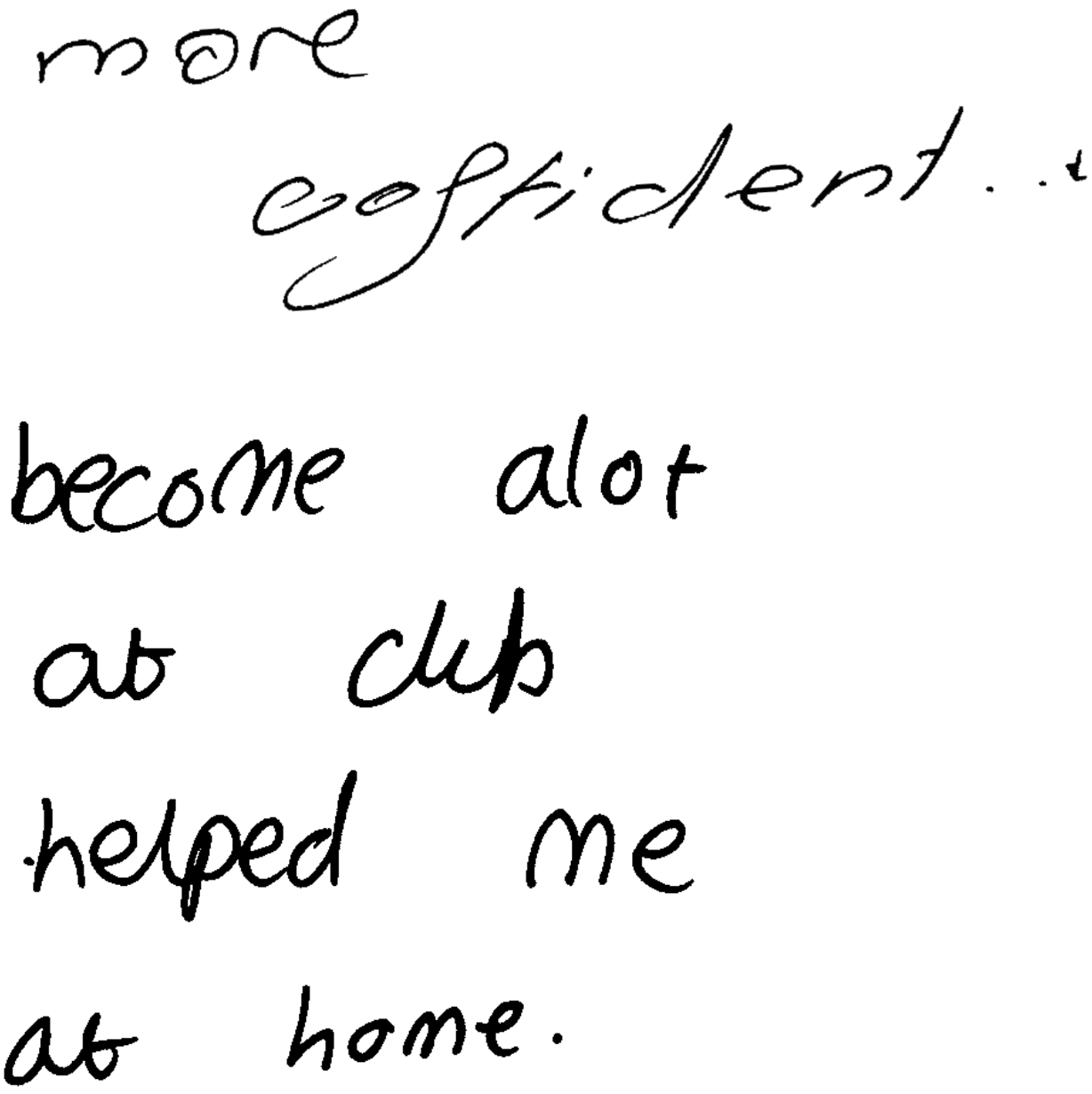
When did a youth worker first treat you like an adult, or take you seriously?

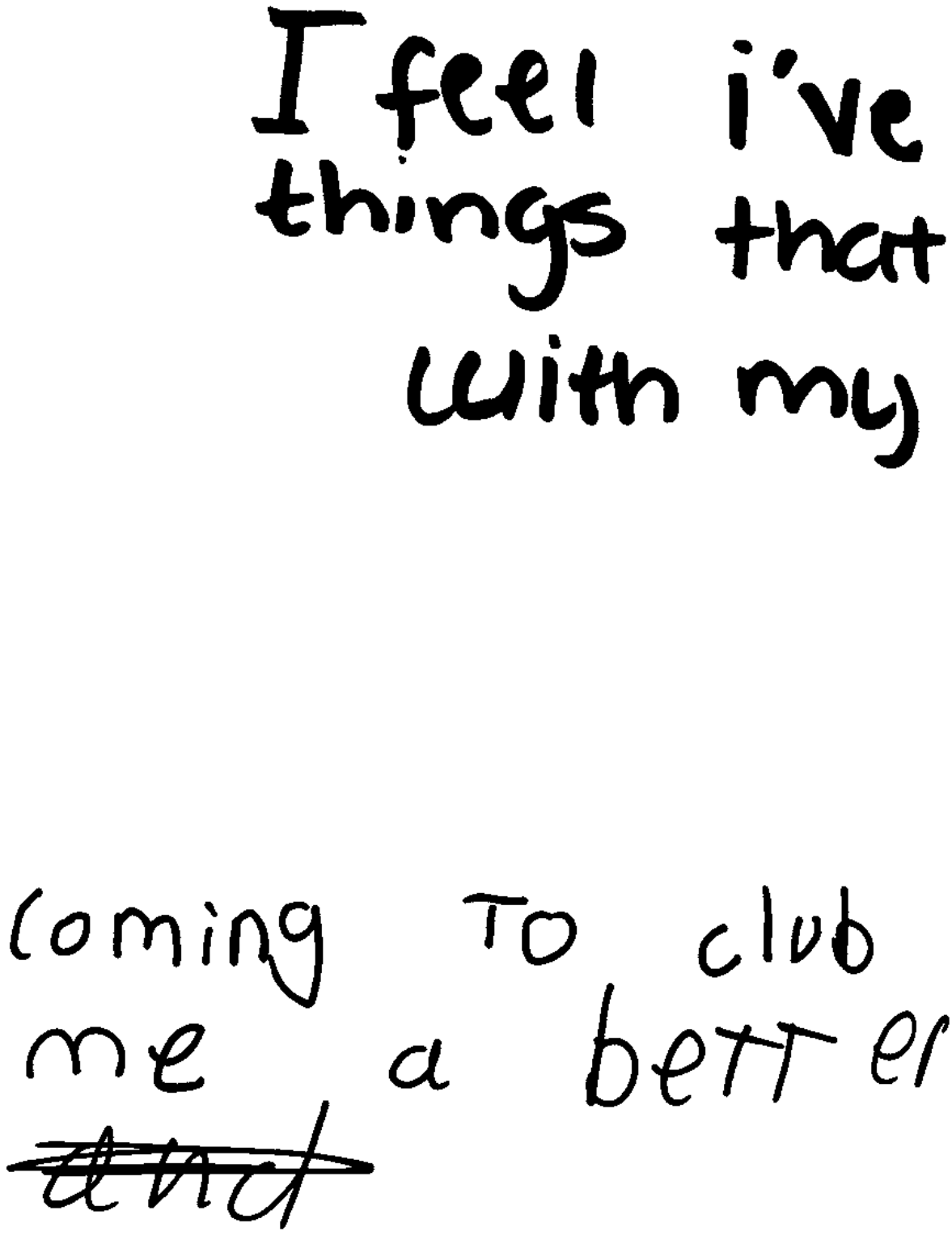


to trust me
and to lead
activities
upset.
- but, they listened
treated, me, with

Has joining the youth club had an impression on your family/home life?



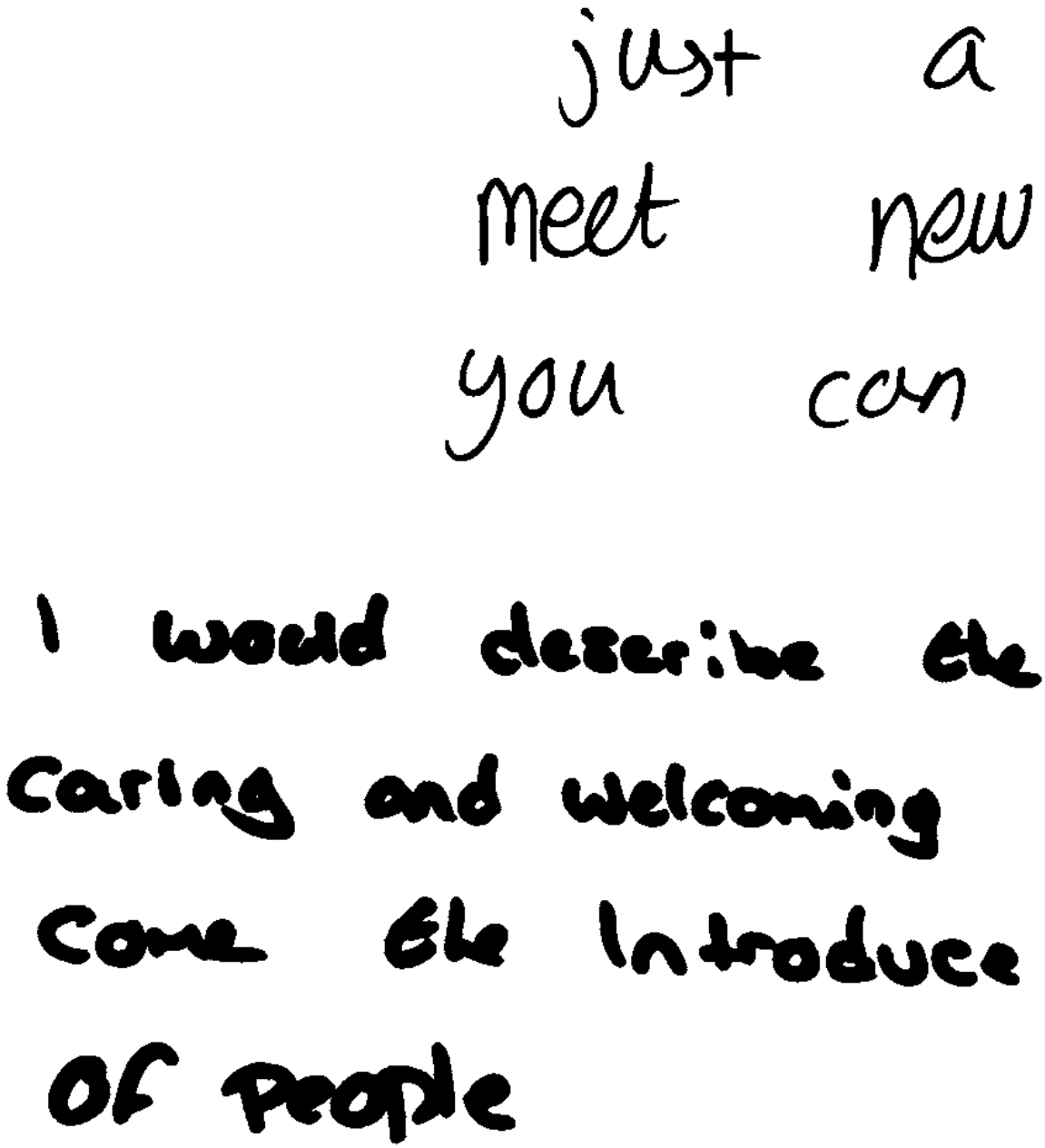

more
confident..
become alot
at club
helped me
at home.

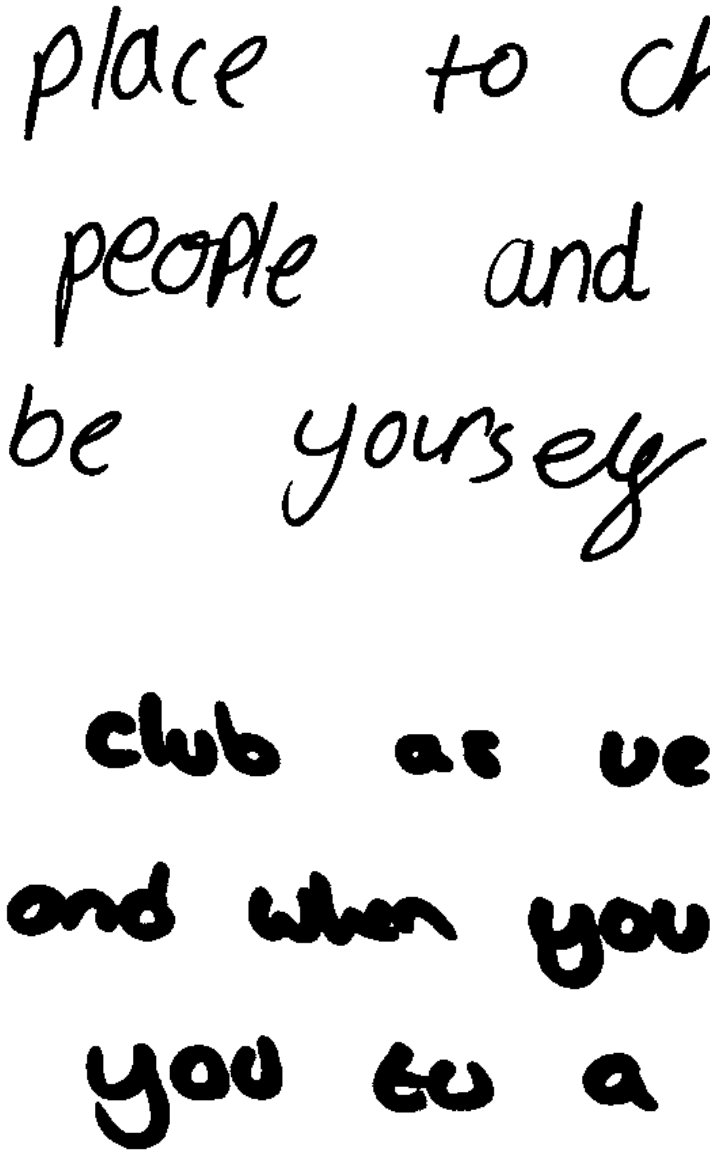

I feel i've
things that
with my
coming TO club
me a bett er
and

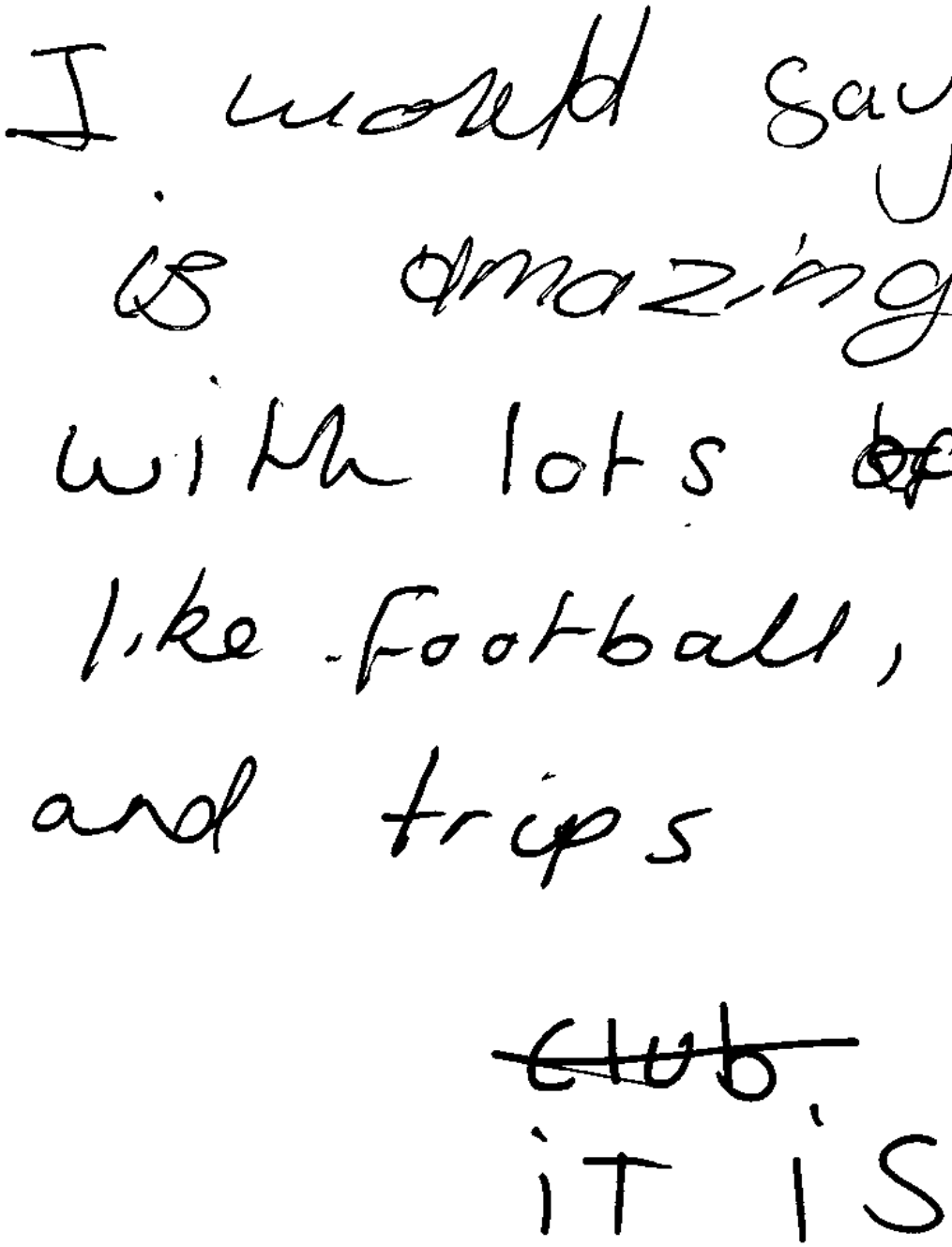
learnt some
help me
everyday
life.
~~activities.~~

has made
boxer.

If a mate had never been, how would you describe this place to them – not the official version, your version?



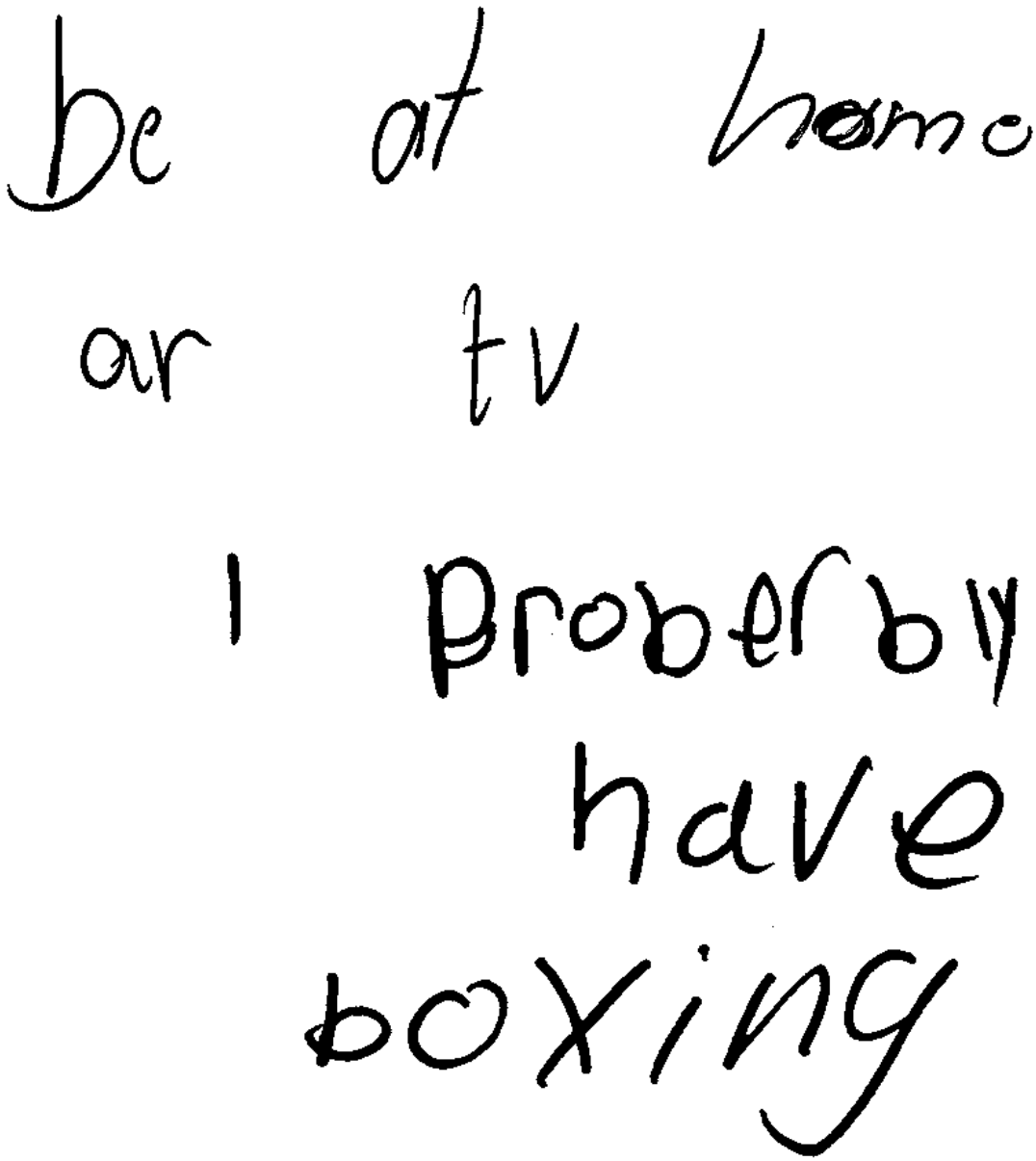

place to chill
people and
be yourself
club as very
and when you first
you to a lot


I would say
is amazing
with lots ~~of~~
like football,
and trips
~~club~~
it is

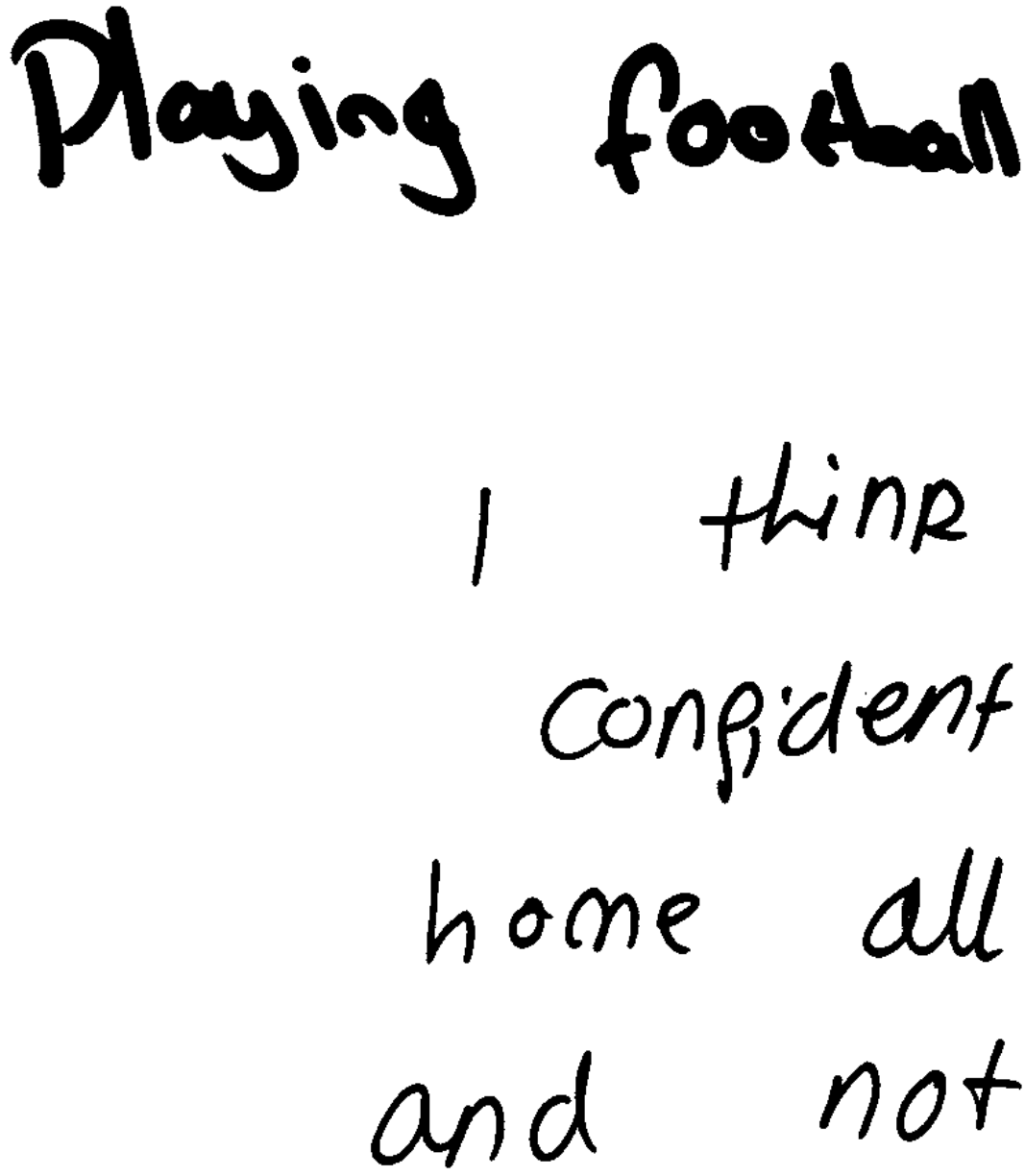
this place
and fun
things to do
Cooking, Craft

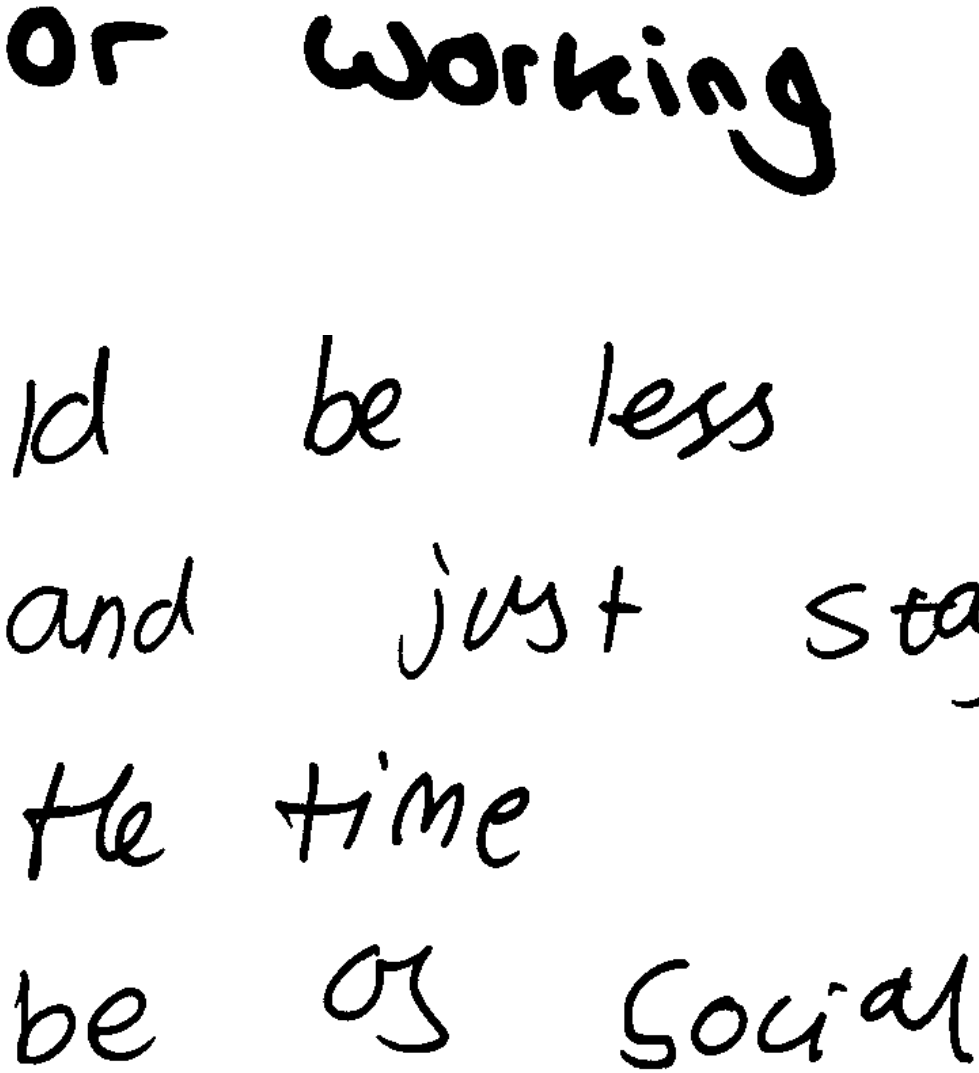
I would say
a clob full
of fun

What do you think you would be doing if you didn't have the youth club you're at?




on my phone
wouldn't
descovered


Playing football
I think
confident
home all
and not

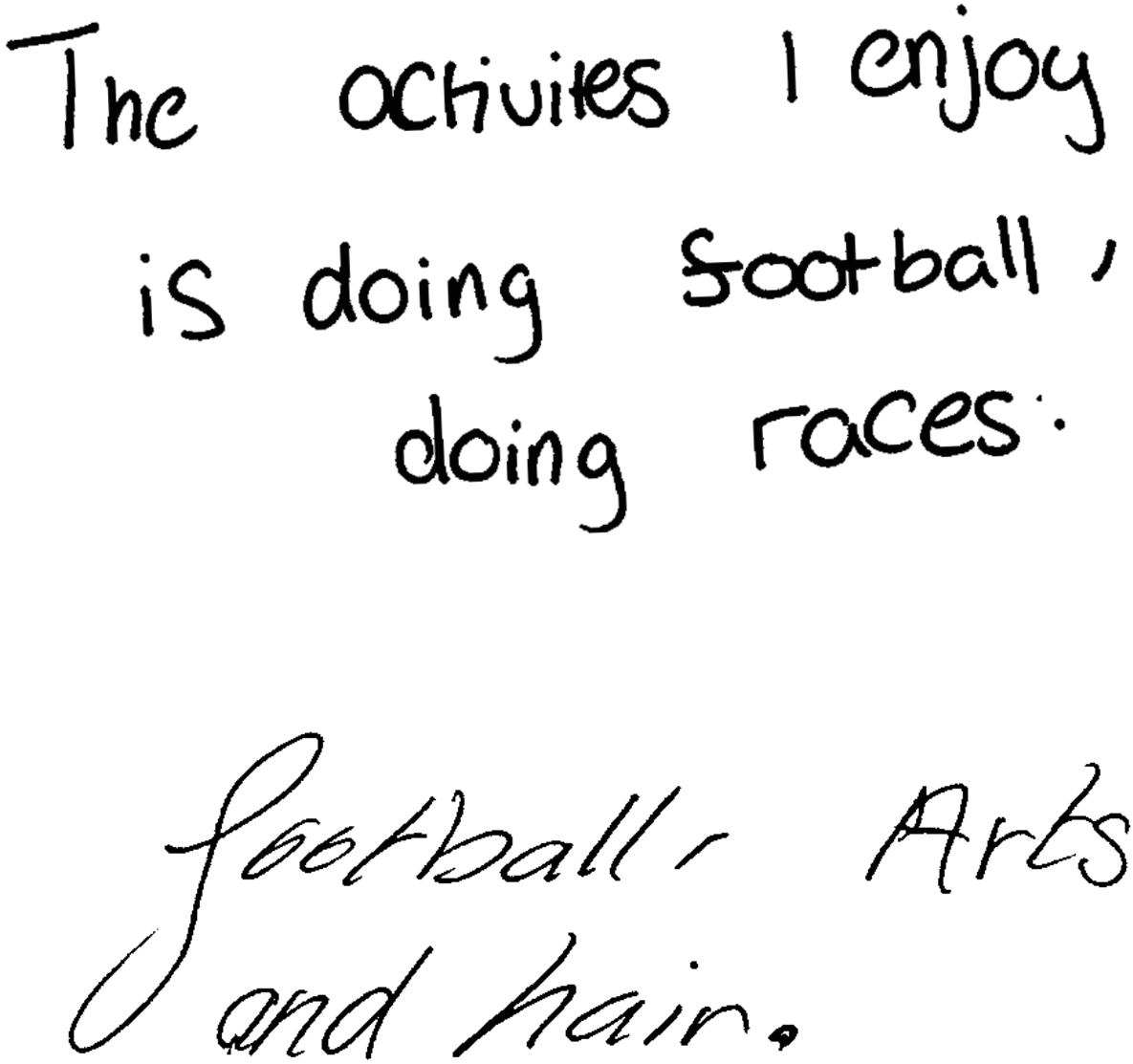

or working
Id be less
and just stay
the time
be of social

What activities do you enjoy doing at the youth club? Would you say any of them were key to helping you feel at home at the youth club?



helps me
confident.

art, and doing hair.

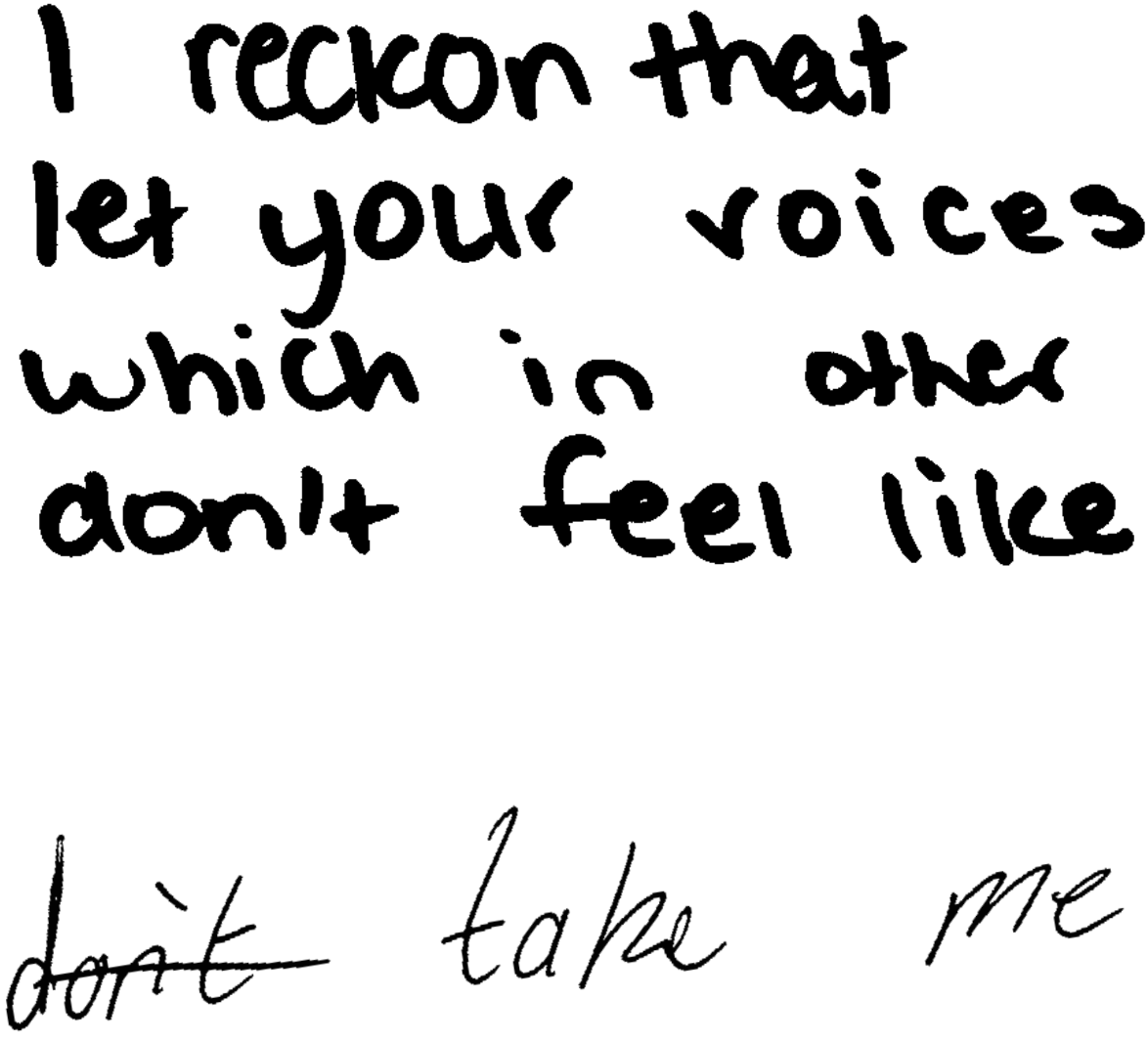

The activites I enjoy
is doing football,
doing races.
football, Arts
and hair.

doing at Club

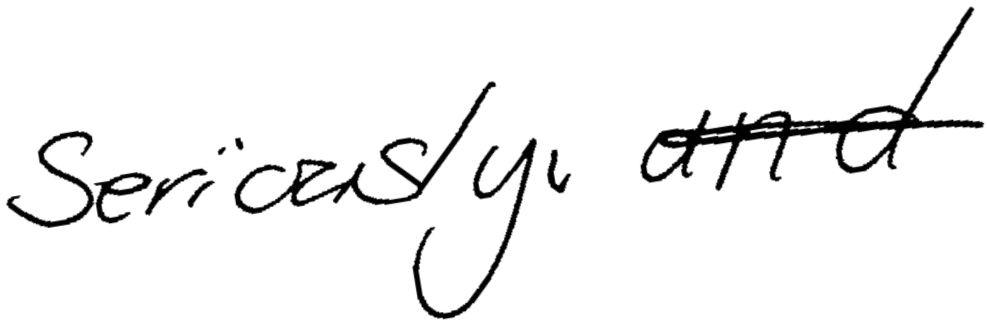
making Slime and

and crafts

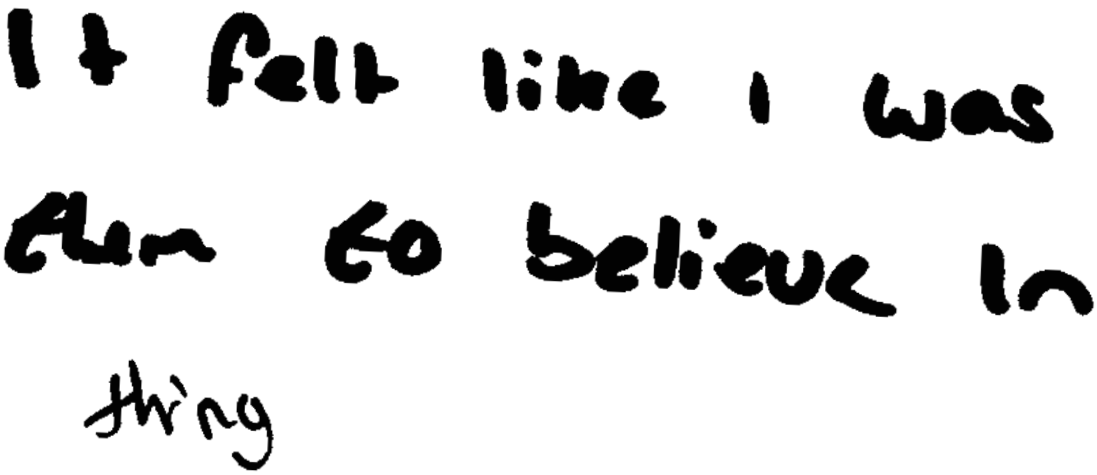
What's something a youth worker has never done that other adults always seem to do?

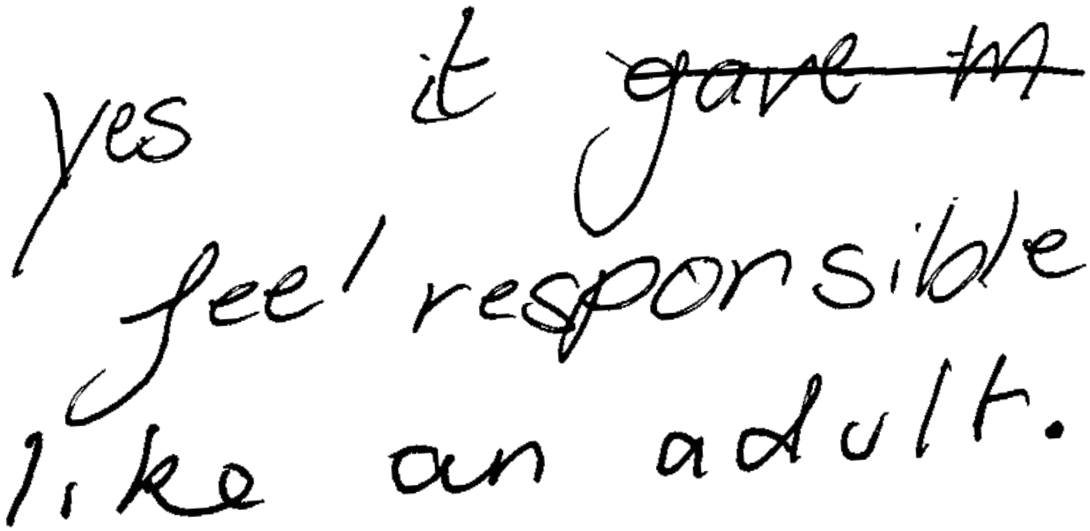


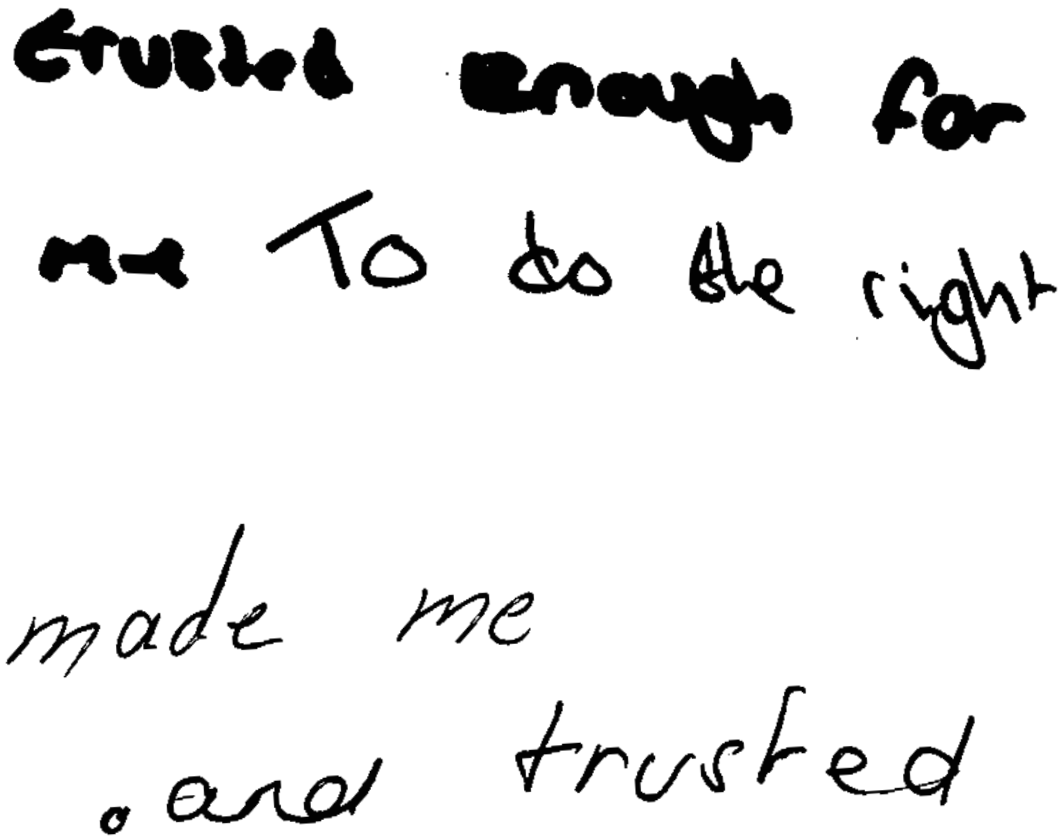
a lot of staff
be heard
places you
that.



Has one ever trusted you with something –
a job, a responsibility, looking after a younger kid?
What did that feel like?






Trusted enough for
me To do the right
made me
and trusted

CREDITS

Special thanks to the young people and
youth workers at:
St. Andrews Youth Club
Carney's Community
Spring's Family Centre
Be The Change
Peebleshire Youth Trust
Ieuenctid Tysul Youth
FACEYOUTH
The Hideaway

Made possible by:
Park Pictures
BBC Children in Need
JD Sports
Oxford University Press
Uncommon Creative Studio

All photography courtesy of Gabriel Chen

THE YOUTH CLUB DICTIONARY

For over a century Youth Clubs and the Youth Workers that run them have been of immense cultural and societal importance in the UK, but in the last 15 years, over 1,200 have closed.

This book is commissioned by JD Sports in partnership with BBC Children in Need and Oxford University Press through the shared belief that Youth Clubs transform the lives of our youth, and must be protected.

Donate to protect
Youth Clubs