

The Story of Shout!

by

Paula Boulton

Shout! was:

“A remarkable social experiment spanning 20 years”

“An excellent way to teach critical thinking”

“I was a member of Shout! for about seven years from 2011, Racytile to Look Both Ways era. The middle years? I always considered Shout! to be something of a family project, and not just because I’m fortunate enough to be a Boulton, but because there was a strange sort of magnetism to it.

The subject matter and research processes were not exactly easy going, but it genuinely felt like the work we were involved in was important.

As a creative endeavour, Shout! was a credit to all involved, and the energy and enthusiasm that went into all Shout! productions shine through in whatever format it takes.

An enduring example that, rather than reacting with apathy as people are only too quick to assume, young people properly engaged and empowered will communicate with empathy and passion which, forgive the pun, is still worth Shout!ing about.”

Jack Roe, former Shout! member

Contents

- CORBY LIFE 5
- THE STORY OF SHOUT!..... 7
- HOW IT ALL BEGAN 9
- WHERE WE WERE BASED 11
- VENUES THAT WE CALLED HOME 12
- WHO WE WERE 13
- HOW WE WORKED..... 14
- IMPACT..... 19
- COMMISSIONS..... 21
- COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS 22
- WHAT WE CREATED 23
- SEX AND SEXUALITY 24
- TACKLING TEENAGE PREGNANCY STORY 31
- EDUCATION AND BULLYING 33
- RACYTILE 39
- DRUGS AND ALCOHOL 45
- CORBY LIFE..... 47
- CORBY HISTORY 49
- CHANGING CORBY..... 50
- GLOBAL CITIZENS 51
- MIXING THE GENERATIONS..... 52

CORBY LIFE

Some background information for readers who don't know Corby.

Corby is a working-class industrial town in Northamptonshire, the county of “spires and squires”, which grew from a village of 1,500 people to a town of 12,000 in the 1930s when Stewarts and Lloyds decided to build an integrated Ironstone and Steelworks on the site. It gained a reputation as a rough town, which has been hard to shake off.

Locals referred to the Corby Steelworks, the largest in Europe, as “the Works”. It closed in 1980 with the loss of 11,000 jobs.

“The Tubes” was the name for the Tube Works, which still employs 500 workers.

Corby is known as Little Scotland due to the number of Scots who moved here for the Steelworks in the 1930s. The percentage of Scots in the town had decreased from 33% in 1961 to 19% by 2021.

The Corby Candle was a chimney which used to burn off excess gases from the Steelworks. It could be seen for miles around.

Wonderworld was a multi-million-pound leisure park planned to be built where the Steelworks had stood. It was never built.



Demolition of the Steelworks

Corby has a growing problem with drugs, like many other towns in the UK. County lines drug trafficking is the practice of trafficking drugs into smaller towns and rural areas away from big cities. Vulnerable children, especially those in pupil referral units, are targeted and groomed as drug dealers.

CBC – Corby Borough Council – was the local administrative body from 1993 until 2021, when it became part of North Northants Unitary Authority. This move was opposed by the local people, but imposed by government after the Tory-led county administration became effectively bankrupt in February 2018.

The town has numerous Working Men’s clubs and other club houses which are referenced throughout. One of the oldest clubs was Corby Trades and Labour Club, which was founded in 1963 as a base for the Trade Union and Labour movement in the town. Many of them were run along traditional CIU (Clubs and Institute Unions) guidelines, with very formal committees setting the rules, which imposed a very high standard of behaviour.

The town had an acoustically perfect concert hall and an excellent theatre in its Civic Buildings, built in 1965. It developed structural damage, and closure was prevented when it was taken over by volunteers and became the Willows Arts Centre in 2002. This finally closed in 2009 and a new smaller theatre – the Core Theatre – was built next door.

The Connaughty Centre was a central Youth Centre facility, named after a formidable youth worker called Nellie Connaughty, who used to run dances in one of the schools, referred to as Nellie’s Bin.

Kingswood and Pope John are two of five secondary schools in Corby. Kingswood became a specialist arts college; Pope John was the Catholic school.

The Women’s Centre was a volunteer-led facility in the town, with rehearsal space and back-up counselling services.

Pen Green Family Centre is an award-winning state-of-the-art facility for under-5s and their families.

Bodywise was a health clinic for teenagers.

HIMP – Health Improvement Programme – was a funding stream for voluntary organisations.

THE STORY OF SHOUT!

Shout! began life as a one-week Performing Arts summer school in August 1998, and became a weekly club that met regularly for over 20 years. Remarkably, we stayed true to our original purpose, which was to give young people a voice as they explored what they wanted to shout about.

The group was in a constant state of flux, with no secure funding or guaranteed base. Hundreds of young people got involved over the years, supported by committed adults and the wider community. So how did we survive, what did we achieve, what was the secret and what was the glue?

By sharing the story of Shout! I hope to answer those questions and give people an idea of how it worked, so that others may be inspired to set up similar projects and apply our methods.

We still need to “give young people a voice” and work together across the generations to resolve community issues and shape the future. Shout! was a particularly effective way of doing that and clearly met a real need.

Within the pages of this book you will find ample evidence of what happens when young people are given free rein to explore what they “want to shout about” in a safe and trusting environment with no censorship, but with clear boundaries and respected and supportive mentors.

Those who were exposed to the Shout! process know how to think for themselves, and young people today need critical thinking skills more than ever as they drown in the raging sea of information and fake news.

Shout! members also developed self-confidence and learned that they could have agency in their own lives. This is rare for working-class kids struggling to survive in a post-industrial town – in this case Corby, a once-proud Steel town which had had the guts ripped out of it by the closure of the Steelworks in 1980. A town known as Little Scotland due to the influx of Scots in the 1930s who moved here for work when the Steelworks in Glasgow were shut down. Being involved with Shout! was a counterbalance to a disintegrating society.

The process of consultation when researching a new topic involved the kids with members of the community in a very real way, and was a great example of positive community engagement. It gave them a sense of belonging, of ownership, and taught them that they and their opinions mattered.

Watching the kids blossom over the years, following their careers and seeing them take the Shout! ethos with them has been both tremendously rewarding and professionally satisfying.

Drama is itself a powerful tool for change, and used in this way can help to heal communities. It is imperative that we engage young people constructively in building their own future. I hope that this book is used as a manual, and not simply read for its historical and/or sociological relevance.



Press Photo Shout! 1998

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

We begin with the transcripts of the short speeches that the town's Mayor and I gave before and after Shout's first performance. My words give a clear idea of our intentions when we started in 1998. True to our original vision, we were still using the same formula when we finished in 2018.

Opening remarks

Mayor George McCart:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

I'd like to say to the young people: you have been through a remarkable experience, and one I am sure you will all remember for the rest of your lives. You will have discovered talents you maybe never knew you had. It may have set some of you thinking about a career in showbiz or the theatre. I hope friendships you have formed will last long after the curtain has gone down. Congratulations and thanks to you all, but particular thanks to Paula Boulton, without whose talent and direction none of this week would have come about. Well done Paula.

Paula:

Nikki Earle from Corby Borough Council phoned me a few weeks ago and said "We'd like to run some dance and drama sessions for kids in Corby who have never done any. Would you like to do it?" We got together and talked. My idea was to maybe try and give voice to some of the concerns that the children in Corby have got. She came up with the name "Shout!" I went away and thought about it, and asked Sami Scott and Cory Gray if they would join me. I would do drama, Sami dance and Cory singing. We would ask the kids what they wanted to shout about and then shape their responses into a show.

Monday at 4 o'clock we had no idea who was going to come through the door. In dribs and drabs various children arrived. By the end of the night there were 24 of them, aged from nine to sixteen. There were also nine very keen "A" level Performing Arts students who my niece Emma had brought along from a mixture of schools – but largely Kingswood and Pope John. They wanted to share their skills with those who may never have had a chance to perform before. They have been our very able assistants.

I would just like to make it quite clear that our job this week has been to enable and draw out what was already in your children. We had no idea what they were going to shout about. There is no gratuitous sex and violence in the show. But there are some very, very serious social concerns. I hope that none of you are too disturbed. I have been moved to tears on more than one occasion this week. We have got counsellors and therapists on hand, and lots of tissues if you do get upset. So just be prepared.

I hope that we manage to hear what the kids want to say, and help them. They chose tonight's charity – Childline – which might give you a clue about some of the things you are about to hear.

Closing remarks

Paula: There is a parent here for each child, and I have given each child my phone number. If they lose it, I am in the book – Paula BoUlton. So please ring me if your child wants to carry on. It would be awful if we disband after today and don't get back together again.

Mayor McCart: Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls – I am sure you've enjoyed the show tonight. It's marvellous to think that they've come up with this in six days. What could they do with six months' rehearsals? It's great to see the kids involved and I am sure you're very happy for them. They'll never be off your back now, Paula – you've got a job for life.

Prophetic words indeed. I certainly had a job for the next 20 years. So, what was our creative process, how did we work with the community, and what did we produce?

WHERE WE WERE BASED

The summer school was really successful, and all of the participants got in touch and ask me to carry on. Our first hurdle was to find a base to work from. I naively assumed that since the project was initiated by the Borough Council, we would continue as part of their provision. So, we met weekly in the Civic Theatre.

What a shock at the end of the first term when I got a bill for room hire. However, the Leisure Officer at the time, Peter Floody, explained to us how to set up as a club with a constitution and a set of rules. He said we would then be able to apply for hire costs. We moved to Hazel Wood Youth Centre and put in an application. I quickly realised that this would make the existence of the group dependent on successful fundraising and that we needed a base. I had good links with Corby Trades and Labour Club, and spoke to them about using the empty hall on a Tuesday night for free, as a way of them supporting the community. At the time the club was committee-led, and not all the committee members were happy with a bunch of what they saw as unruly kids running riot once a week. Cory and I were regularly hauled up in front of said committee to explain various misdemeanours. We were eventually asked to leave.

Luckily for us Corby was full of Working Men's clubs and they were all as generous as the Labour Club had been with giving us meeting space. This meant we were also visible to the members of each club, as regular drinkers would be interested in what was going on in the main hall. Each club had a particular clientele, which brought us into contact with different sections of the community. Club 2000 on the Exeter estate had a large ex-Yugoslavian contingent, whilst the Caledonian and the Grampian both catered for the many Scottish folk in the town. We even had a stint in the Bowls hut at the back of the Grampian before finally landing on our feet. In 2004 we were taken on as the resident theatre group in the brand-new Arc Theatre which had been built in the playground of Rockingham Primary School. In return I agreed to run a Junior Shout! at the school.

It was a fabulous clean theatre venue but distanced from the community. I was relieved to return to the Labour Club in 2006. People could see us rehearsing, took an interest and came to watch our shows. I loved introducing theatre and music to a part of the community who wouldn't normally have been aware of the inner workings of plays and concerts. Our Sounds of Home Orchestra rehearsed at the club just before it closed in 2016. I remember the Scottish barmaid saying she was "fair greetin'" (sobbing) behind the closed bar shutters as she listened to us rehearse a particularly poignant section of the music. During our last phase at the Labour Club, we were given an office and storage for our sets, costumes and props.

For the 50th anniversary of the Club in 2013, we managed to attract a £50,000 grant to refurbish the parts of the building we used. It gave the club a facelift and was a morale boost for the members.

It was wonderful to design our own theatre space including Sami's bespoke lighting, sound and projection equipment. It was a dream come true. Meeting in non-theatre

spaces had always affected the way we worked and dictated our style. Here was our chance to develop a more complex style, incorporating projection and enhancing the production with varied and effective lighting states. A great example of how embedded in the community we were was that the first play performed in that space was specially commissioned for the club's anniversary - a play about its 50-year history, of which we were a part.

VENUES THAT WE CALLED HOME



Corby Trades and Labour Club 2014 after our refurbishment



The ARC Theatre

WHO WE WERE

Young people between the ages of 11 to 18 from every secondary school in the town joined Shout! The three original leaders, Paula Boulton, Sami Scott and Cory Gray, were joined by a host of willing adults who offered their skills to run the group, maintain our administrative structures and help with all aspects of production. There were also many members of the wider community who shared their stories with us, providing the material for our plays, not to mention the families and friends who contributed to research.



Letters Home



If Bricks Could Talk - Labour Club

HOW WE WORKED

A typical Shout! session from 6.30 – 9 p.m. on a Tuesday would start with taking the register and collecting subs (£2.50 each) and then getting everyone in a circle, where we would introduce ourselves if there were any newcomers and check in with each other if not. We always said who we were, which school we were at, our age and how long we had been in Shout! and then a random fact like a favourite colour. The choice of fact was made by the newest member.

Then I would update the group about any requests for plays and remind them of dates, and we would set the topic for the evening. That might have been free-style choice or we might have been exploring a theme together.

If we were in the research phase of a play, we might have a visitor to interview as a group or have our findings to share. For example, when we were doing a play about racism, each member was asked to bring in stories they had gathered from their friends at school. This organic and embedded material was much richer than the statistics found in the census or the reports from agencies.

Next, we would do warm-up games and then we would split into small groups and work on devising short pieces or scenes, with me circulating to each group. Some weeks there would be a skill-based session like learning voice projection, or audition techniques. After the break, groups would finalise their pieces, and then we would show our work and give critical but always constructive feedback.

Decisions were made in the group by consensus, and I simply brought the ideas along and facilitated the process. If the group did not want to take on a commission or topic, there was no point in pursuing the idea as they would not have been interested.

The members developed their own “Rulz” and applied them.

SHOUT! Rulz OK!

To join you must be in the seniors and do an audition to show what you can do!

To be a member you have to stick to the ground rulz.

If you break them you get three chances before you get the boot. If it is serious you will be asked to leave immediately!

Ground rulz

The Group is:

1. Non-violent
2. Anti-bullying
3. Against discrimination
4. We RESPECT each other!

To get work done, please:

5. Listen
6. Wait your turn to speak
7. Focus
8. Stay away if you are under the influence of ANY substance

To keep the place nice:

9. Take off muddy/wet shoes
10. Eat and drink in foyer only
11. Respect the building and stuff in it

Stay safe:

12. Health and safety rulz must be followed
13. Lee is in charge of Health and Safety

SHOUT! is a drama group, not a place to mess about

It costs £2.50 a week

If you can't come, ring Paula.

I, agree to the rulz!
Signed: Date:

Signed:
Paula Boulton Director, Shout! Youth Theatre

They were very keen on my insistence that Shout! was a non-violent space and knew that bullying or discrimination of any sort would not be tolerated. They realised that their voices mattered and that they would be listened to. We spent time on ensuring a balance between the noisy and the quiet kids in each group to ensure that they all had space to express themselves. Helping noisy kids to realise how easily they dominated the space, and encouraging them to listen to contributions from the quieter members, was one of our trademarks.

In choosing who to work with, they were also encouraged to build a good team, making them aware of the need for thinkers and doers, creative types and writers, followers and leaders. They also saw which teams produced the best work and would then adapt the following week. Having several “ideas people” in one group would often mean the time was spent debating who had the best idea. If your group lacked an ideas person, very little would happen. This also encouraged self-awareness of your own skills and to know what you had to contribute to a group.

We instituted an audition process where each newcomer was given a four-week trial, during which time they were simply included in our process. At the end of that time the whole group discussed whether the newcomer had any talent at all, what would they bring to the group and whether there were any personality clashes going on. If so, were they able to be resolved?

On their first night one of the group would explain the “Rulz” and then the newcomer would sign a copy as their behavioural contract with the group.

A Shout! tradition was that the first time a new member performed, the most recent addition would instigate a round of applause saying “Let’s hear it for our new Shout! actor/actress!” It was always a memorable moment. We wove people in one at a time.

I did try to grow the group via the schools. I would ask the kids to take in posters or ask their drama teachers to make an announcement about Shout! Then I discovered that most of them wanted to keep their Shout! life separate from school. For many of them it was a retreat from school tensions. Shout! was their escape where they formed new friendships which crossed both school and estate boundaries. We never got round to advertising the group and to this day do not have a logo. So I still have no idea how kids found their way to us.

It is interesting looking back at the videos to realise how many Shout! members over the years have been on the autistic spectrum – especially ADHD or dyslexic. Towards the end over 50% of the group had additional needs. What I regarded as creative high energy was often remarked upon by visitors, who found the pace and noise of small groups of kids working enthusiastically together to devise work too much to cope with! I now realise that this level of intensity was in part due to the neuro-diversity of the group. There were also many who were NEET (not in employment, education or training) and Shout! was giving them an outlet and a focus.

Most of our work was devised and then refined, and finally I would create a script. However, due to the number of people with dyslexia in the group, we developed the ability to improvise the actual words. As long as the gist was right and the character was in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing with the right members of the cast, what they actually said was seldom set in stone. This did make writing the script very difficult. But it led to actors who were incredibly flexible in terms of how they learned. We often incorporated physical theatre sequences into the work and used soundtracks and props as our basic style.

Because we were housed in non-theatre venues for most of the time, our style was not dependent on lavish sets or lighting effects. Street theatre which could be adapted to any venue was the order of the day.

Our first scripts were handwritten and soundtracks were on cassette. By the end, as previously mentioned, we were creating work in our own bespoke theatre with high-tech gear incorporating projections and theatrical effects. Scripts were of course eventually written on a computer and sound was digital. However, assembling the archive has taken us through CDs, minidiscs, and footage from early hand-held camcorders to smartphone recordings. Getting everything digitised has been a massive undertaking.

There were always former Shout! members who stayed on when they got to 18 and got involved as helpers running the group. If there were personal issues going on, we had a mentoring system and the helpers would volunteer to work with a youngster who they felt they could help. On occasion they would cover for me if I was unable to attend, though I could usually arrange for Sami Scott or Emma Boulton Roe to take the session or run the rehearsal in my absence.

After each session we would stay behind to meet, debrief and report back on any problems. The committee was also chosen from the helpers and I trained them in the running of a voluntary group and provided leadership training.

They were in effect my employer, and they learned all the aspects of managing the project, from disciplinary procedures to be implemented if I stepped out of line, to the writing and application of effective policies e.g. safeguarding. They learned and eventually took over the admin and financial systems, learning about applying for funding and preparing bids. Despite our obvious contribution to the life of the town, we never received regular funding, so we had to raise money for each project. Bid writing was an endless process and one that I never learned to love. I had no job security – but we became adept at successful bid writing and also attracted a good number of commissions.

These skills were transferable and used by Shout! members in other projects. It is true to say that our admin systems developed over time from stuff jotted on the backs of envelopes to proper systems.

They were also taught about democracy and we held annual general meetings where the members elected the committee. We had younger members shadowing the chair, secretary and treasurer so that if they wished to stand for election once they were 18 they would already understand the role.

Outside the weekly drama sessions, the Shout! family had a life of its own. We had theatre trips and holidays and memorable creative writing residencies. We ended up with second-generation members from the same families joining.

Many former Shout! members kept in touch once they left. This wider Shout! family was also there to call upon for specific projects or plays where we needed adult characters. But it was also great to have former members drop in when they were in town; maybe home from Uni or in between travels to expand the horizons of the group. For example, one woman, Rachel, was planning a trip to India and came to tell us about it, leading to a fascinating session exploring lone travel as a woman backpacker.

Those who went on to study or work in the arts also drew on Shout! as a resource if they needed performers or wanted to try out ideas. We gave them and others the opportunity to run a workshop or try out their teaching skills, using Shout! as the guinea pigs.

IMPACT

Watching Shout! youngsters in action at conferences always made me proud. They were such good ambassadors for Corby. The confidence they had from performing meant they were not intimidated by formal events, and had no problem challenging the adults on a whole host of subjects articulately and firmly. They had been encouraged to speak out, ask questions and not to accept things at face value.

It is interesting to see what impact Shout! had on their choice of careers and how Shout! values and lessons were incorporated into their lives over the years.

Here is a selection of comments from some former members, showing their occupations.

“Working with Shout! enabled me to hone my skills, and explore myself as a director and as a theatre practitioner. I find I am still giving young people a voice through theatre and have no fear in tackling those difficult subjects.”

Emma Boulton Roe: Course Manager and Lecturer in Performing Arts

“Shout! has enabled me to become more confident in expressing my own viewpoints and gave me the confidence to be myself and not conform to other people’s opinion of how I should be.”

Danielle Skillen: Nurse

“The warm-up games were a great way of connecting and having fun.”

Gary Docherty: Security Team Manager

“Shout! was a really safe environment where I had fun, learned new skills, gained knowledge and made proper friends. It really was a family with Paula and the other leaders at the helm. I look back so fondly on my time with Shout! and all the great shows that I was part of that truly made a difference and gave us kids a voice.”

Lucy Tiwari: Business Optimisation Manager

“Shout! was a fun and educational time in my life. I feel we made a real difference to our community.”

Jennifer Ross: Operations Panel Management Administrator

“Shout! was a great place to meet and share my love of drama with fellow members. It helped me step out of my comfort zone as well as learn about issues that I myself went through at the time.”

Charlotte Hynes: Customer Service Advisor

“Without Shout! I don’t think I would be the loud, confident, outgoing person that I am today. I was a shy child but found my voice in drama, built up my confidence and learned to Shout!”

Dannie Smith: Design and Technology Teacher

“Being a part of Shout! was a fun experience through my teen years. I worked with some great people and made dear memories.”

Linda Kilpatrick: Beauty Therapist

“Shout! was a safe haven as I grew from an awkward adolescent, to an awkward almost-adult. I’ll be forever grateful.”

Jack Roe: Photographer/Writer

“Shout! helped me find confidence in expressing who I was and helped me give others valuable life lessons.”

Phil Jennings: Chef and Manager

“Shout! has a special way of changing young people’s lives, and I am proud to have been part of it.”

Sami Scott: Learning Mentor

“Shout! Youth Theatre was a great experience, as an aspiring actor with confidence issues, Shout! provided me with a safe place to express myself and provided me with an outlet to be creative in multiple mediums; as an actor, a writer, a director and as a facilitator. Surrounded by like-minded people and through the incredible tutoring of the team and specifically Paula, to whom I credit my whole career, I was able to develop new skills, confidence and furthered my love for the arts as well as learning vital lessons in facilitating and production. Since leaving Shout! I was accepted at East 15 acting school (once again helped by the individual tutelage of Paula) – one of the major conservatoires in which I received my Bachelor’s. Since then, I have been lucky enough to work abroad in touring theatre companies, as well as around London; I have worked in adverts, minor film roles and have developed shows in London under my own theatre company, using skills developed from a young age with Shout! I am incredibly proud to have been a part of it and constantly look back with fondness.”

Will Allen: Actor

COMMISSIONS

Although we worked primarily from the central question “What do you want to Shout about?”, we also shouted about what others were concerned about. Agencies would come to us to prepare pieces for them showing what young people thought of a particular idea, which they would then use in their work. We were often commissioned to create work for a conference or annual general meeting.

Northamptonshire Police, for example, were looking for effective ways to get over their messages about online safety. They sent an officer along to discuss it with the group. We spent the session devising, and then ended the evening performing our work to the visitor. She took the ideas away and then came back with a request for me to accompany the police on a tour of the schools to do Shout!-style sessions with kids across the county.

With straightforward commissions the commissioners had a say in the content and would visit as the work developed to see progress. This process usually worked well and it was good for the kids to build up a relationship with whoever was asking their opinion. They would warmly welcome visitors and just accept them into our circle and expect them to go along with our way of working. The visitors were not used to casting aside their power and status, and not necessarily comfortable with it either. I well remember one night when the visiting policewoman was mortified at being expected to divulge her age and favourite colour in a warm-up game. The kids were clearly more at home in themselves than she was. They understood power structures but were never in awe of our visitors. Nor were they aware of our visitors’ status or importance. They used to refer to them as “The man from the Council...” or “The woman from the Police...”

One occasion when this went wrong was when a visitor arrived mid-session and misread two young people having a shouting match – part of the play – as bad behaviour. There had been no introduction, and they listened to a newly-devised piece which they thought was a finished article. The jokes in the piece were deliberately provocative to make the audience react. The visitor went back to his boss and reported that we were unruly and that the material was offensive. Our part in the event was cancelled amidst concerns that the kids would not know how to behave, and on the basis of our content!

Through our interaction with the various agencies, the group learned about the interconnectedness of service providers and how society works: I always explained who was who and how they fitted into the bigger picture.

We also had repeat commissions from certain sectors: for example, our annual piece for Domestic Abuse Awareness Week. That was usually street theatre. One year a brother and sister played the roles of a teenage couple having a row. He was nasty and vicious towards his “girlfriend”. We repeated the “scene” in Asda several times. It resulted in very strong reactions from the shoppers and staff. Indeed, one shelf-stacker was so outraged at what he witnessed that he leapt over a barrier at one of the checkouts and grabbed the boy, pinned him up against the wall and told him in no uncertain terms to stop treating the girl so badly. He took some convincing that this was only acting.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

It is true to say that we were an established group and voice in town – part of the social fabric. However, that was not necessarily obvious to incomers. When the new theatre opened in 2010, we had been given assurances that we would be housed there as the town’s existing Youth Theatre group. Sadly, that never happened. In fact, the opposite did. They set up new Youth Theatre sessions at the same time as us.

Our place in the Youth Service provision was interesting. We were the contentious outside voice but well connected with the Youth Service locally. We did work for them, e.g. a comic strip about drugs and a film about Corby. In return we would call in their trainers to deliver drugs awareness training. Sometimes we used Youth Service premises and we immortalised the Connaught Centre in our *Look Both Ways* film.

We joined the local Association of Youth Clubs initially for cheaper insurance, but we then became part of county youth provision and had access to residentials and a support worker, who we persuaded to take part in our last play.

As a music and dance teacher I also had several other groups to draw from, which meant that some projects combined dance and music – as happened in our very first show – and led to a healthy cross-fertilisation. One piece, *Caged*, prepared for the county dance showcase, involved actors from Shout! and my dance group, whilst in 2012 Shout! members joined my Complaints Choir. Our final project was in fact a music project. *Sounds of Home* used music as a vehicle for community dialogue, inviting interviewees to share the music that reminded them of home.

WHAT WE CREATED

Over our lifetime we created more than 50 pieces of theatre. As our story continues you will find out why and when we wrote what we did and get to read a selection of our favourite plays.

All of the scripts are available on our website www.shouttheatre.org , making sure that they are accessible for future performances.

The young people who came to the first Shout! Summer School were individuals with their own unique set of personal circumstances. The things that they wanted to shout about were often things they kept hidden and were not lifestyle choices they had made. Exploring these topics allowed them to work through some of the attendant issues, whilst also lifting the lid on some very uncomfortable subjects and raising awareness. For example: domestic violence, abuse, rape, mental health, disability, and eating disorders. It is testimony to the safe and confidential environment that we provided at Shout! that the young people felt able to share and work through some of these difficult personal issues.

Some of the plays we did on those subjects were:

1998	She's got the look 1 in 4 (From Shout! In 1998 Pages 35-36, 53-57)	<i>Body image, Bulimia Rape</i>
1999	Don't Pick The Flowers	<i>Child sex abuse</i>
2002	It Wasn't Meant To Go This Far	<i>Domestic abuse and impact on children</i>
2011	CRAZY!	<i>Mental health stigma</i>

SEX AND SEXUALITY

Week by week the young people attending Shout! were all growing and changing. Naturally the issues to do with growing up were always present. The topic of sex education and relationships was explored afresh every few years as newcomers arrived.

This is a two-part transcript of an interview in 1999 where we asked the group to tell us what they thought of their own sex education.

Sex Education transcript 1

Cory: We are discussing what sex education is like in school.

Danni: I have always been to Catholic schools and I was never taught sex education.

Fraser: Why not? They teach it at Kingswood school. If the school aren't going to teach you, then you will go out and experiment, won't you?

Cory: How do you feel about the type of sex education you get in school?

Danielle: I think it was OK, but I think that was more to do with the teacher rather than the content.

Cory: What do you feel about what you learnt so far? Do you feel you have learnt anything?

Danielle: I think it's wrong that we have learnt the biology of it. You learn that the sperm goes to the egg and how you get pregnant, but you don't know how it happens.

Danni: They don't teach you positions.

Cory: Danni, do you feel that the school should teach you more about what's going on?

Dannie: Well, I've never had any sex education at school. I only heard about it from my Mum or listening to my friends, and what my friends were saying turned out to be untrue. I learnt the most when I was here doing the Sex Education show. I have always gone to a Catholic school and they frown upon sex before marriage and contraception.

Cory: Do you think the students know more about sex education than your school thinks?

Danielle: Well, they don't teach you how. You learn how from your friends.

Danni: Or by doing it.

Cory: Where did you learn how? Was it from your friends, parents, or schools?

Danni: All I knew was that grown-ups did it, and that it can be called putting the pencil in the sharpener or parking the mini in the garage.

Cory: Lesley, do you feel any relevance to what Danielle and Danni said?

Lesley: In schools, they don't teach you much about it, they think we will get the wrong opinion; but we won't, we need to learn about it and know the facts – what to look out for.

Danni: I didn't know about any of the diseases till I came here. No schools teach you about gay sex. It's stupid.

Danielle: It's to do with that article 6 or something, isn't it?

Danni: It's not like I am going to become lesbian but you still need to learn about it. One in ten people are actually gay, but they come out of school not knowing what to do.

Danielle: I think if we were taught about it, we would be OK with it and not become homophobic.

Cory: What about you, Samantha?

Samantha: The most I have learnt was from the Sex Education show I watched.

Gary: I go to the same school as Danielle and we were taught nothing. It was rubbish. When we were taught something, it was in a boring way.

Cory: Was that your first experience with sex education?

Gary: Yes, it was. I mostly learnt about it in the playground with my mates.

Danni: You learn a lot about it from porn, or reading the poems on the bike sheds.

Cory: Martin, what do you feel about it?

Martin: These days schools suck when teaching sex education. That's basically it.

Danni: You learn a lot about sex if you watch the Playboy Channel.

Lesley: You usually get it from your parents.

Cory: Craig, how about at your school?

Craig: I haven't had it at Kingswood seniors yet. I got taught it in Danesholme juniors.

Cory: How do you think it could be improved? Do you think it's not taught because of the legal limit in this country? Do you feel that there are a lot of younger people experiencing or wanting to experience what goes on with your body and how to manage their emotions?

Danielle: I think it's unfair because when you are in school they think you're too young to know it, but by the time you get older they assume you already know it. Sometimes you do but you weren't taught it by the school. There are still some blanks – so what happens then?

Danni: They used to teach sex education in the primary school but then they just stopped teaching it.

Nigel: Lesley, was it a male or female teacher that taught you? Do you have any preference?

Lesley: It was a male and female teacher. We were separated and the girls were taught by the woman and the boys were taught by the man.

Martin: That happened in my school. We were taught by our headmaster and the girls were taught by a female teacher. All that happened was we watched a video showing all the positions, and the week after that we watched another with a woman having a baby.

Nigel: Could they have done it any better in school?

Everyone: Yeah!

Nigel: Did anyone else watch videos, or wish they were shown videos?

Danni: We were shown a book with pictures in, and that was it. But everyone just laughed looking at naked people and pubes. We also saw one about reproduction in plants, but that didn't help us much 'cos we weren't planning on doing it with a plant!

Nigel: Craig, did you have any videos?

Craig: Yeah, we had two. One was a woman giving birth, and one was showing you a dick going into a fanny.

Nigel: Did anyone *not* have videos in school?

Adam: I was taught sex education when I was ten. They didn't show us what sex was. It was all plants and animals having sex. We were also separated into girls and boys.

Danni: But then the boys don't learn anything about periods and stuff.

Adam: When I went to secondary school, we learnt about how a baby was made. As soon as I got to 15, I started to get more into it. I was getting dirty magazines and reading them, and I was asking my parents about it and my Dad taught me. Now I'm 17, I've grown out of it – well, not having a porn mag – but all the school stuff.

Cory: Fraser, do you think it's not explicit enough?

Fraser: I am 19. I have to disagree with all these because I learnt about it in Child Development, and they teach you about periods, sex and labour. We were taught about penetration.

Danni: You can't disagree with me, because we went to different schools and I've never had it. I came down screaming when I started my period and there was blood, I thought I was dying.

Danielle: A lot of boys don't know about menstruation and are confused. We don't understand what they learn. Because we get taught separately. They probably learn about masturbation or something.

Lesley: The problem is that you are only taught it once, and that's at the end of primary school. They don't teach it any other time.

Nigel: Do you know anything about Clause 28 that they are trying to repeal?

Danielle: Yeah, it's a law that prevents teachers from saying that it's OK to be a lesbian, or gay. It says that teachers can mention that people are gay but they can't favour or disagree with it. They're not allowed to teach about it either.

Dani: My RE teachers think it's sick that two gay guys wanted to adopt a child. I don't see what's wrong with that.

Fraser: I think a lot of people want to have sex, not just to find out what it's like, but because it's illegal and breaking the rules and they want to experience it.

Cory: Do you think that the topic of sex would no longer be a taboo subject if the age limit was dropped?

Everyone: No.

Cory: Would you say that the actual age of experiencing sex is lower than the legal age?

Everyone: Definitely.

Danielle: An example is Holland. The legal age for sex there is twelve, and they have a lower number of teenage pregnancies. They are taught about it properly – about contraception, and get put on the Pill straight away. I thought condoms were the only form of contraception till I read the book here about penguins!

Sex Education transcript 2

Craig: It would be good if we were taught what it is like to have sex; so, you will know and understand it more by making it more realistic.

Samm: They said it was sex education, but it wasn't. It only spoke about periods and dicks. We were also separated, and I think we should do it together with a male and female nurse.

Caitlin: We don't need nurses. We need more experienced teachers.

Beth: I go to primary school and haven't been taught about it yet. I asked the teachers what we do if a question comes up in our SATS in the science subjects about it, and she ignored it and said we will learn about it after SATS.

Paula: Do you think you should already get started learning about it?

Beth: Yeah, the teacher is behind on teaching us.

Liam: I don't think kids need to be taught how to have sex, but I think it should be compulsory to learn about health and social care. How to raise a child and how much effort it takes to raise a child. I think that would make kids a bit more wary about sex.

Pete: I think we are too reserved about sex education in this country. When you look at other more liberal European countries that have lower age limits, their teenage pregnancy rate is lower. Not necessarily saying we should lower it, but just pointing it out.

John: They should have teenage Mums and Dads come in to explain what it is really like to be a parent. If they are taught that in school, they might be put off from having unprotected sex and will use contraceptives properly.

Jen: I think we need to be taught about erogenous zones and lubrication – because a study showed that a lot of women have a traumatic first time, because they don't understand the importance of being lubricated, so it hurts.

Paula: So, explaining how to make sex work properly.

Lisa: I think the best way to discuss sex is by talking with a nurse or doctor. It can be difficult in Corby as the doctors and nurses can be judgmental when you ask about it or ask for the morning-after Pill. There is Green Door round the corner, and Bodywise where you can talk about what's happened to you, but there should be a place that's open on weekends to go and get advice. At the moment they are open school hours, so if you go to school to go and see them and your Mum finds out, you are in trouble. There should be leaflets in school about where you can go to find out.

Sean: I've never been taught about the risks of sex, like the diseases. Only AIDS and HIV. If this was taught in school then it could help.

Claire: I was taught everything by my Mum. They should teach it and test you and make sure you know it and focus more on the relationship side. That is more important than gonorrhoea.

Mary: We should learn about both parts of sex education. Girls need to know about wet dreams and boys need to learn about periods. We may be more sensitive to each other.

Lucy: We should be taught more about oral sex in schools, not just sex.

Marie-Tress: And how to pleasure each other without having sexual intercourse. I think we need to be more informed about the pain of losing your virginity or how uncomfortable being pregnant is.

Dan: In other European countries like Holland and Sweden, they are much more upfront about it and they teach about contraception from a really early age. Like what we get in year 9 and 10, they get in year 5 and 6. Their rate is a lot lower.

John: They should teach about oral sex, 'cos when a man and a woman are having a sexual relationship it can bring them close and lubricate the areas.

This research was used in a variety of plays, as in 1999 Corby had the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the country. This was definitely something we needed to shout about and investigate.

1999	Teenage Sex Shock	<i>Sex education, teenage pregnancy</i>
2000	A Boy's Eye View	<i>The boy's view of teenage pregnancy</i>

TACKLING TEENAGE PREGNANCY STORY

Whilst developing the previous two plays with Shout! I decided to write a full-length play about teenage pregnancy with my performing company, Parallel Universe. The idea was that as adults we would be able to challenge the other adults involved in preventing and supporting teenage pregnancy.

I secured funding from the Health Improvement Programme to do extensive interviews with stakeholders, young people and townsfolk in the street. The new play – *Tackling Teenage Pregnancy* – was first performed to Shout! and friends in 1999.

Despite the disappointment of losing funding which we had been promised for a schools tour, we were determined to get the play's message out there. Over the next three years the material was used with Shout! Three different casts rehearsed and then performed the play to stakeholders and the public, professionals and users of Pen Green Family Centre (which housed the teenage pregnancy support team), and then for an audience made up of users of the Youth Centre.

Three of Shout's original leaders – Sami Scott, Cory Gray and I – were in Parallel Universe, and the other three actors, Liam Fleming, Pete Kennedy and Maggie McCall, all helped with Shout! over the years. It was great for Shout! members to have a company to watch and move into once they left Shout! In 2003 Shout! took on the play as their own and were recorded by the BBC, who considered the play an excellent script for radio. That cast included two teenage Mums who had been interviewed for the play back in 2000.

In 2004 that same cast were invited to perform for the midwives at Kettering General Hospital, the local hospital, as a training event. What empowerment that was.

In preparing the play we decided not to focus on sex education in schools, because everyone told us how bad it was, and the schools were already in discussions about how to improve it. Instead, we decided to try to make a difference to the services that young people used. We talked a lot about contraceptive choices, hoping to influence our audiences to think things through, make good decisions, and to help lower the rate of teenage pregnancy in Corby.

There were big changes taking place during the lifetime of the play: certainly in sex education and at the Women's Centre. A nurse from the teenage health clinic Bodywise was seconded to the Women's Centre on Tuesday afternoons and was able to prescribe emergency contraception, meaning that girls did not have to go to their doctor.

A health clinic was rolled out under different names in all schools in Corby, and the *A Pause* sex education programme – which was shown with its teething problems in the play – was introduced to all the schools, even Pope John, the Catholic school. So there was a lot of progress. I like to think our work had an impact on the situation. When we revisited the subject in 2005 with the new cohort, they were less interested in the sex education aspects of the subject and more interested in relationships.

1999-2004	Tackling Teenage Pregnancy	<i>Contraception, Abortion, Teenage parents</i>
2005	To Do Or Not To Do	<i>Sex education, relationships, teenage pregnancy</i>

In 2009 the Department of Health put out a call for projects which would explore the subject of bisexuality in young people, because they had no information upon which to base service provision. Sami Scott applied for us and got funding for the *Being Bi In A Straight World* project. This led to a play called *Look Both Ways*, which was well received and then given further funding to tour the county. Again, multiple casts were involved. Finally, we were approached to turn it into a training video for the county mental health services, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. The young people at Shout! decided they wanted to expand the project. They re-wrote it as a screenplay and made a two-hour film. This was later made into five-minute units for use in school.

2010	Look Both Ways	<i>Exploring the lives of Bi, Lesbian and Gay young people in Corby.</i>
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EDUCATION AND BULLYING

The young people were spending their days at school, which proved to be one of the richest sources of material and raised many issues for them to shout about, especially bullying and belonging.

Though Shout! was initially mainly Kingswood School pupils, over time that changed, especially once Sami began working at Lodge Park as a learning mentor. She would actively support shy kids to come to Shout! to build their confidence. At one point we had members from all the Corby schools, and it was interesting to see school loyalty and realise how different they all were.

They also had very clear ideas about their education and were under no illusion about the appallingly low educational standards in the town.

We did several pieces on these themes.

1998	A to Z Mad Hatter's Peep Into My Soul If You Tolerate This... (From Sketches from Shout! Pages 37, 40-44, 51-52)	<i>Literacy</i> <i>Bullying</i> <i>Bullying</i>
2003	Different But The Same	<i>Social Exclusion and Bullying</i>

In 1999 the Education Action Zone initiative was set up in Corby to try to raise educational standards, and to help with the merger of Beanfield and Queen Elizabeth Schools into the new Corby Community College.

Shout! was approached and they were asked for their views on their schools and education. They really took it seriously and believed that those in power would take note. 18 young people aged from 12 to 19 years old sat for 74 minutes and took it in turns to express their views. They honestly thought they would be listened to. So did I. How naïve. And how disappointing when a uniformed group was used instead for the showcase about education. They certainly did not say anything challenging or contentious. Here's what Shout! youngsters had to say!

Discussion about Education for Education Action Zone, 24 October 1999

Eighteen young people from 12 to 19 years old. Four had left school at 15 after exclusions and low marks. Two girls were currently excluded. Four were known to be dyslexics. Three had ADHD.

Italics denote excluded and/or additional needs (50%).

Marie-Tress, Zoe, *Danni T*, Caitlin, Amanda, *Laura*, Kayleigh, Tara, *Nicky*, *John*, Michael, Lee, Scot, Gary T, *Gary D*, *Chris*, Ben, *Martin*, *Fraser*.

Marie-Tress: The teachers need to not shout as much and be less stressy 'cos it's annoying.

Dannie T: How can you have discipline without stress?

Kayleigh: I think the teachers should give you more respect.

Chris: They don't give you no respect at our school.

Martin: I think the teachers should have more patience with the pupils that can't really cope and help us out a bit more.

John: What Martin says. I know exactly what he's going through. I had dyslexia when I was at school and the teachers were right – well, I won't swear on camera, but if the teachers weren't as bad as they are, bullying the kids and things, I think more kids would be there.

Marie-Tress: Another thing is, I think you should be able to choose who you are with in your forms, because some people aren't happy with the people who are in their forms 'cos either they don't get along with them or they are just not happy.

Ben: I think teachers should be more sociable and help us with our work in different ways instead of discipline. They should look through our eyes instead of their own.

Nicky: I think more kids would go to school – I personally would go more often – if there were more choices available for kids to do. I mean I know you can't get your choices till year 9, but you should be able to have choices about what lessons you do and don't do outside the national curriculum that is already set.

Laura: I personally think that teachers should speak about the work more, rather than just jotting it on the board and leaving us in a test.

Fraser: Would you go back to school, full stop?

Dannie T: I think a lot of people have left school because of how they feel in school and 'cos they've been excluded and things, and I think if the teachers were a bit more friendly towards the pupils and were able to treat the pupils like equals, they'd get a lot more respect. We are all choosing to be here tonight and there is not even our usual leader here and we are all doing OK. So...

John: Kids like these – Nicky and Martin would probably go back to school if the teachers weren't taking the piss.

Martin: I did go to school last year.

Dannie T: Yes – but how many schools, Martin?

Chris: But how old are you?

Martin: Fifteen.

Chris: You could have stayed on at school another year.

Martin: No thank you.

Fraser: When I left school, I wished I could go back to it 'cos of how badly I did, 'cos of all the people that were there.

Marie-Tress: I think another reason kids leave school and don't go back is 'cos the teachers bully them and so do people in their class. If they get questions wrong people laugh at them and everything.

Dannie T: If they get it right, sometimes they laugh.

Kayleigh: The teachers should just sort that out.

Fraser: You must agree that if someone else in the class got the question wrong, you'd probably laugh too.

Ben: I wouldn't.

Laura: I only laugh at people if they are being stupid. I don't laugh at them if they get a question wrong – I think that is sick.

Nicky: When kids laugh at boffs, they are thinking inside that it's funny, 'cos they can't even do it in the first place.

Fraser: So – would you go back to school if school totally changed for the better?

All: *(General yes, nodding of heads enthusiastically.)*

Laura: I'm permanently excluded, right, but if I had a chance to get back into school I would definitely take it. And I would do more better. Kingswood secondary school that I was at ain't gonna have me back and they're not gonna give me a second chance.

Fraser: I got excluded from there about 15 or 16 times. They were supposed to give you three times and you were out.

Chris: I was excluded once for carrying a knife.

Fraser: They give different people different rules, which ain't right.

All: *(General nodding and assent:)* That's so true.

Dannie T: Can you put your hand up if you are 16 and over?

John: Well, I'm 17 and if could have the chance to go back to school I would. Would you?

Lee: *(emphatically:)* NO!

Dannie T: Why not?

Gary T: ‘Cos we all went to Pope John’s and didn’t like it.

Dannie T: If it changed for the better though...

Lee: How could they? We’d need different resources.

Dannie T: What would you want them to change?

Lee: Everything.

Fraser: If the teachers changed but the school stayed the same – had the same policies – would you go back?

Nicky: Yes. At the moment a lot of the teachers at my school – which is the new school – Corby community college – there’s a code of conduct - but teachers don’t follow it, so like they’re meant to give you two warnings, then put your name up on the board for the third time. But they don’t. Some skip from one and give you a half hour detention and some don’t give you any warnings at all. There is no consistency in the punishments.

Ben: I’m sure most people will agree with me here. Education is more valuable than gold. If you have to go back to school, you have to go back to school. Everyone’s saying about you get called a boff – well, the boffs are the ones who go university, they’re the people who get paid more than us. The people in the class who are the jokers are gonna sit in factories packing sandwiches or putting cream on top, or bits of bolts together.

Nicky: So, Michael wants to work in McDonalds, right?

All: *(General discussion all at once, about good jobs and menial jobs.)*

Laura: There is no point in giving us detentions and that, ‘cos we are not there to learn how to behave, we are there to learn. It makes us more angry and we are just gonna keep doing it.

Chris: And then they exclude you and you get a holiday.

Kayleigh: It is to waste your time when you’ve wasted theirs. It’s ridiculous and hardly anyone ever turns up for detention anyway.

Fraser: Say you finish school with Gs and Us and poor marks. Would you want to go back to get better grades?

All: (*General cacophony, all blurting out opinions.*)

Fraser: One at a time please.

John: The remedial schools do AQAs instead.

Kayleigh: Can we do Drama now – this was only meant to be five minutes?

Nicky: I think more people would go back to school if they do stuff like this. I have got to go back next week and I have the arrangement that if I go in three days and behave myself and do all my lessons, and I'm not gobby to the teachers or nothing – on a Thursday and Friday I'm allowed to go to watch Paula rehearse and help direct the *Count Me In* play. Like, if I'm good, I get to do that and if not, I can't. So the school are trying to help me get back in so that I can get an education. They want me to go back, but they want me to do it on my terms as well as their terms at the same time.

Fraser: Has anyone got a sensible point about one good thing at school? Hands up.

John: Technology teacher. He was the best teacher in the school.

Fraser: The school, not the teachers!

Laura: At the end of the day, you go to school to learn, and at the end of the term, no matter how bad you did, you have an education and can go and get a job, and that's the whole point of it anyway.

Nicky: I think the good thing at my school is – because it's not the best school in Corby I'll admit that! But a lot of the kids don't judge you on what end of Corby you come from, or what estate you come from, or whether you can afford to buy named clothing or not. They just judge you on what sort of person you are, and what sort of personality you've got at the end of the day. So they'll come together to be a community rather than be a battleground.

Tara: I'd like to come to your school.

Dannie T: If all schools were like that, this place would be heaven

John: Isn't your school the Corby Cabbage Centre?

Nicky: People say that about my school 'cos there is a lot of bullying and fighting and whatever.

Dannie T: But that doesn't go with what you just said –

Nicky: The fighting is because of the two different schools that have come together, 'cos there's certain people – about five or six out of nearly 1,000 pupils in the school that decided they want to fight between themselves because they say it is QE property, but Beanfield say it is more their territory 'cos there are more pupils from that school. But the rest of the school, they're willing to come together, like my best mates all come from QE and I didn't know them till September. And I am the only Beanfield girl. We don't class each other as QE or Beanfield anymore. We just class each other as CCC.

Dannie T: You're lucky like that, to have friends who do that but, in my school, I get judged for the way I look, for the make-up I wear, for the trousers I wear. I mean I wear combat trousers and big clompy shoes. For that I get judged.

Marie-Tress: What is wrong with that?

Dannie T: Exactly – that is the clothes I choose to wear. Yet I get judged. As soon as I walk past someone, it doesn't matter if I know them or not, they shout "grunger" at me. Fair enough, I am a grunger, but why shout that at me, you know? I know that I am – why do I need told? But I get judged on it. I get called a tramp – just 'cos I decided that having someone's name on my clothes isn't the way I want to dress. I mean I don't think that is right.

In 2003 a new 12-year-old joined us and wanted to shout about being bullied as a "boff". Others shared their experiences of being bullied as children with dyslexia. The resulting play, conceived by Jack Boulton Roe, was snapped up by the library service and became another of the plays that kept being re-made for different settings. One performance was alongside the children's author Kevin Brooks, who was visiting Corby Library to read from one of his novels. We were the support act. Another performance was to launch the new teenage area.

We performed to school groups, and the workshops afterwards explored the themes from the play and were led entirely by the cast. It was a very successful example of peer education in action. Jack played the boff character who said at one point "I want to be an author when I grow up!" Well, he did. *What If I Died In A Bookshop?* is his first collection of short stories and his novel, *Strangetown*, is doing the rounds of publishers as I write.

2004 RACYTILE

Bullying of dyslexics and boffs,
poor literacy

RACYTILE FEEDBACK

Here is a letter, and two articles, from Sue Moore, the librarian who worked with us on the project, followed by feedback from the children who took part in the after-show workshops.

Dear Paula,

We are writing to thank you and the cast for your brilliant performances of *RACYTILE* at Corby Library.

Thank you for your energy, enthusiasm and dedication and for making the play special for each audience. I certainly enjoyed coming along to each performance to discover what new changes had been made! The play was thought-provoking, powerful and a joy to watch. The music was also brilliant. Please pass on our thanks to each and every member of the cast, who are so professional and skilled at acting.

We know from the feedback that we have received how very much the children from the different audiences have enjoyed the play. We are pleased that new contacts have opened up for you as a result of performing at the library.

We are sorry that there will be no more *RACYTILE* performances – Thursday lunchtimes and afternoons just will not be the same! However, we hope there will be future opportunities to see you in action at the library.

Wishing you and the crew every success with your future work. Many thanks for all you have done.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Moore
(Team Librarian: Reader Development)

It's a Librarian, but Today it's OK to SHOUT

Peering out of the windows of Corby library, we watched a line of ten-year-olds hastily heading towards us, a look of eager anticipation on their faces. Once inside, the 27 polite and respectful children from Exeter Junior School made themselves comfortable and awaited the performance by the Shout! drama group. None of them had seen the play before and did not know what to expect.

As usual, the actors had evaluated the play after their previous performance and added a few changes. We were delighted to see a new character – a male librarian. Those of us in the profession know this is a minority species, but discussions with the cast beforehand revealed that they believed it was positively extinct! They thought they were really being novel in creating such a character and suggested we get some real ones actually working in the library. (I think we need to get Kenny and Dennis along to the next performance and even round up some of our guys from the other areas! They are obviously in demand.)

The male librarian, played by the same young man who also plays a very strict teacher in an earlier scene, decided to make it obvious that he was a librarian – not so much by pushing a trolley – but by wearing a huge, tasteless, bland-coloured and boring jumper. (Hey librarians – we really *have* got to work on our image!) He played the part brilliantly.

The play is about literacy, bullying and libraries, with a very clever title – *RACYTILE*, which is an anagram for literacy. The children were enthralled by the performance, the range of accompanying music and the sound effects. Splitting into discussion groups afterwards, each one led by an actor, it was obvious that they were really thinking about the play and had taken it all in. Some of their thought-provoking responses were amazing.

Sue Moore

(Team Librarian: Reader Development, North Area)

The Last SHOUT!

Thursday 10 February was a sad day, it being the last performance of the Shout! drama group's *RACYTILE* play at Corby Library. Twenty-one Year 8 Corby Community College students arrived, making a somewhat loud and boisterous descent into the chairs in the exhibition area.

The play has a brilliant script and is about libraries, literacy and bullying. One of the boy characters is bullied because he loves reading and takes part in school lessons. He says, "I wish I was stupid, but then I might not be able to read. And I love reading, escaping into the world in the pages. I want to be an author when I grow up."

As well as giving very serious messages, the play also contains some very humorous lines, e.g. one of the girl characters suddenly remarks about the above character, in a moment of realisation, "He looks like Orlando Bloom."

"Orlando" is a great supporter of libraries, helpfully telling his classmates: "There's a lot more to libraries than books, you know. There's magazines, a listening station and computers." In one scene, he encourages a girl who is dyslexic to go to the library with him, as she dare not go on her own. She had explained to him how the words look – "The words move about on the page and do a dance." He realised that this means she has problems with reading all sorts of things – books, timetables and even goods in the supermarket. She really struggles with so many things which we all take for granted. Whilst at the library, he starts reading part of a book to her, so she can be included in the world of books.

The girl who plays this character actually used to be dyslexic herself when she was younger. After a lot of help, she no longer has these problems. On learning about this afterwards, the other actors were amazed as she is such a good reader and speller.

Each time I go to see the play, I'm eager to find out what is new and different about it – after every performance, the actors decide how it can be improved and made more authentic. As usual, they had evaluated it after their previous performance in January, and had decided it is important for people to understand that the girl who bullies others does so because she herself has trouble reading, and she now comes into the library and asks for help with reading.

There was a little bit of acting up now and again from the more troublesome members in the audience. However, the main culprit was also the one that asked interesting questions. So, it was a very worthwhile experience for all concerned. Questions included “How did the plays start?” and “Were you a bully (in the play)?” – this question was addressed to one of the actors, who replied that “No, her character was not a bully – she had just been chatting to the bully”. And she was covering her back, as she knew she would probably get picked on herself by the bully later. The audience was obviously interested in the way the characters were behaving, and working it out for real. After the questions, the students split into small groups, each one led by an actor, and discussed what they thought about the play and the library.

A few of the children thought the actors were really like the characters. We had to explain that they were playing a part – they were not really dyslexic or bad at spelling, they could read and they were not bullies. I think this is also a credit to their great acting skills.

This event was funded by SRB. Many thanks to Ingrid Mercer, Gillian Hamilton, Bob Florez and Sharon McHarg for their help on the day. And to Tricia Adams and Liz Billett who came to watch the play and support us.

Children’s feedback

About the play

1. What are the bits of the play you would change?

Liked the whole thing. I liked the word / alphabet bit and the football bit and the music. The play was good and was mirrored real life.

2. What was it about?

The play was about bullying. The boy with the curly hair was a victim. He was a good reader. They thought he was a boff, a goody-goody. You could tell who the teacher was and he was the same person as the librarian. The play was about bullying, reading and literacy. Stealing a book from the library. One kid did a presentation on the library.

3. Do you know anyone like any of the characters?

Felt sorry for Jack. I know people like him who like reading and writing stories. Yes.

4. Can you guess what *RACYTILE* means?

(This was quite difficult for this age group, but after lots of thought, and a few clues, they got it – LITERACY.)

About books

5. Bob likes escaping into the world he finds in the pages of books and wants to be an author. Do you enjoy books and writing stories?

I like reading and writing stories. Books for the Imagination.

6. What is your favourite book?

Jacqueline Wilson. Roald Dahl. Comedy. Survival. Horror. Goosebumps. *The Simpsons*. *Captain Underpants*. I don't like reading. Funny / joke books. Comics. Jacqueline Wilson. *Goodnight Mister Tom* is good. *Harry Potter*.

7. Why do books matter?

Help you learn. They help you with things and you can get information for homework. Books help with homework and writing stories. Non-fiction is good for research.

8. Steph says: why read the book when you can watch the film? Do you agree?

Prefer the film. Prefer watching films instead of reading books. The film misses some stuff out. I prefer the book. Sometimes the film changes the book's story and that's not right, e.g. the first Harry Potter film differs from the book. You can create scenes in your head. You can pretend it is happening. Films are better. You can just watch DVDs.

About the library

9. Do you go to the library?

Yes! Most kids use the library.

10. What do you like?

Computers. Places to sit. Listening station. Different types of books. Computers are good. Computers are the best bit.

11. What would you change?

Want more computers. Better decoration. More children's books and places to sit. Nothing. It's big. Change the layout every year where the books are. Hardly any walls. Bright colours – white. Speakers on computers. Need quiet in a library. Too quiet. Everyone listens to music or TV when doing homework. More computers. More listening stations. Longer opening hours. Different colour paper.

About Bullying

12. What happens in your school?

You're teased if you can't read. There's some bullying. You tell the headmaster who it is and why. There is bullying in school and children can be taken in, told off, excluded and get detention. There are "golden rules." I've been bullied. I have been a bully. I bully because I don't like the person. I get angry and punch people. The person in the play bullied because she didn't like boffs; the boy she thought was a boff always got rewards and she was jealous. There is bullying. Mentors. Chill-out room. You can get excluded.

13. Do you help children who can't read well?

No. The school helps the kids with reading. Yes, I help others.

Things to do

14. Make up your own word list of the way you would feel if you were bullied for not being able to read. (A-Z list)

Angry, annoyed, bullied, bad, boisterous, cautious, cross, counted out, defeated, dangerous, dreadful, excluded, extinct, extinguished, exhausted, empty-hearted, frightened, furious, fearful, fight back, friendless, grumpy, gutted, harassed, humiliated, hurt, heartbroken, invisible, ignored, ignorant, injured, isolated, jumpy, judged, jinxed, kicked, left out, laughed at, lonely, lost, mad, moaned at, missed, misunderstood, nobody, nauseous, nasty, occupied, out of it, overlooked, outraged, overwhelmed, prisoner, paranoid, pushed, petrified, quitting, quadrant of pain, raging, run down, rocked, sad, small, scared, shouted at, shamed, stupid, set off, tormented, terrified, troubled, tangled, terrorised, upset, unloved, unrecognised, under attack, unnoticed, violated, victim, victimised, vicious, vengeful, worried, watched, wary.

Abducted, attitude, bullied, confused, called names, concentrate, dilemma, dumped, dumb, excluded, endangered, frustrated, forgotten, gonna, geek, hated, hash, ignored, irresponsible, interrogated, intimidated, idiot, jealous, jammy, jerk, kept out, kept away, killer, lost, loser, lonely, mad, miserable, nobody, nasty, opinionated, peer pressure, peed off, questioned, queer, racism, ripped, stupid, toad, underestimated, vicious, violence, weirdo, wimp, yellow.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Not once did a Shout! member ever ask to shout about drugs/solvent abuse or alcohol. These were some of the challenges that we as adults knew young people have to navigate growing up. We were often approached by agencies concerned about these issues, wanting us to develop drama which would reach out to other young people to educate, raise awareness and stimulate discussion.

The group was always happy to oblige and we got rather creative with the topic of drugs. We proudly won the trophy for the local Drugs Awareness competition – ACT UP – for two years in a row.

We were commissioned to write a play for the launch of the solvent abuse charity Solvit, and also asked to create work for two conferences about alcohol abuse in young people.

1999	Oh Come All Ye Dealers	<i>Drugs</i>
1999	A Mother at 15	<i>Drugs leading to risky behaviour and unplanned pregnancy</i>
2003	Flower Power	<i>Drugs</i>
2003	Solvit	<i>Solvent abuse</i>
2008	Stop! Think! Don't Drink	<i>Alcohol abuse</i>
2011	Consequences	<i>Alcohol abuse, domestic abuse</i>

CORBY LIFE

Shout! members were Corby kids with a specific and unique history in this particular community which shaped their lives. They created or took part in several plays about their town. There were short plays about hopes and dreams and opportunities and the challenges of living in a run-down town. And there was the feelgood story, *Heart of the Willows*, made as a film about the action group who took over the failing Civic Complex and turned it into a thriving and much-loved Arts Centre.

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|------|---|---|
| 1998 | Millennium Wannabees
(From Shout! Show Pages 45-47) | <i>Factory work and dreams for the future</i> |
| 2002 | The Bad Apple | <i>Improving life on a poor estate which has a bad reputation.</i> |
| 2004 | Heart of the Willows | <i>The story of the successful takeover of the theatre by community volunteers to avoid closure</i> |

CORBY HISTORY

There were joint projects with Corby Women's Theatre Group and friends, which told the town's history. Most notably *Women of Steel*, which was a truly unique experience. The first version of *Women of Steel* was a site-specific production at the local countryside park which housed the remnants of the Steelworks. It was an unforgettable event, complete with a "visit" from Maggie Thatcher who "blew up" a model of the Works, and a re-enactment of a protest rally with some of the actual men who had been in the ROSAC (Retention of Steelmaking at Corby) campaign, making speeches 25 years after they did it for real. When the play was rewritten for indoor theatre and subsequently filmed, they also took part. This play has already been published and reprinted and is available from all major book sellers "Women of Steel: A Living History of Corby by Paula Boulton.

Some of the group got involved in *Heritage*, which told the history of Corby in 1911, playing the grandchildren visiting the Heritage Centre.

And then the whole group got involved in *If Bricks Could Talk*, the telling of the history of the Trades and Labour Club where the group was based. So much learning took place as a result of their involvement in this play. This was the second joint project and they loved it.

Afterwards they asked me whether we could change the constitution to allow us to work with the older generation permanently, as they had all gained a lot from working alongside the adults. That is when we became Shout! Theatre as opposed to Shout! Youth Theatre. These joint productions have not been included in this collection but can be found on our website.

2006	Women of Steel	<i>History of Corby told by women and children</i>
2011	Heritage	<i>Corby in 1911</i>
2013	If Bricks Could Talk	<i>Life inside a Working Men's club and the founding of the Trades and Labour Club in 1963</i>

CHANGING CORBY

In 2003 there was a lot of talk about regeneration. Shout! was asked to be involved, as a way of establishing dialogue with the community. The town began to change physically, with the demolition of housing on poor estates and the building of mixed-tenure housing. The compulsory purchase of properties destroyed established communities and there were tensions which needed resolved.

To quote one of the Steel Kids in *Women of Steel*, "Some of our houses are being knocked down, so rich and posh people can come to our town."

The *Squareabout* film was actually funded by Bee Bee Developers, who had no organic link with the town and needed us, as insiders with established community connections, to ensure that the physical upgrade they were making to the town was well-received.

2003 **Deeds Not Words**

Effective community consultation

2007 **Squareabout**

Integration of new communities into a run-down estate by introducing mixed-tenure housing

Then from 2004, the demographic of the town began to change as well, with the arrival of workers from the new EU countries. This led to a rise in racist attitudes in the town, so Shout! was approached by Northants Racial Equality Council to see if we could have a community-wide conversation about the issues. This led to the play *Foreigners, Bloody Foreigners* which was researched by the young people themselves collecting the stories from their "foreign" friends in school and their families. We also interviewed a Polish barmaid at the Labour Club where we were based at the time, and she became a central character.

Shockingly on the night of the Labour Club performance, some racists graffitied the ladies' toilets and left a knife. The performers had to be escorted home for their own safety.

Several Shout! performers also joined Corby Women's Theatre Group in their play *About Her...* which compared and contrasted the lives of a random cross-section of women in the town who were from all over.

2007 **Foreigners, Bloody Foreigners**

Racism; immigration

2010 **About Her...**
(Avaliable on website)

Women in Corby; where they came from and why

GLOBAL CITIZENS

Though much of our work was about the personal lives of the children and their town, I always encouraged them to be global citizens and they responded. Issues that affected children the world over or in specific places were eagerly taken on. In 1999 we were asked to create a short film, *Children and AIDS*, to explore the topic and present it on World Aids Day, since that year the focus was on children.

We also worked with Sheila Royce, a human rights activist in the town, who had links to a charity called Casa Alianza, which supported street children in Central and South America.

Every Holocaust Memorial Day we would workshop the topic and were asked on several occasions to prepare pieces for local HMD events.

1999 **Children and AIDS**

Children and AIDS

2003 **Silence of the Whores**

Street children in Guatemala

2006 **The Holocaust Play**

*Examining how people allowed the
Holocaust to happen*

MIXING THE GENERATIONS

From 2013 onwards, as the renamed Shout! Theatre, the group began to explore themselves in relation to older people and that led to considering history, and thinking ahead: how things were, how they are and how they will be. Fascinating conversations, research and sharing took place across the generations.

Comparing and contrasting means of communication led to *Letters Home*, a play which explored how soldiers communicated during WWI versus Skype calls home from soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan nowadays.

Looking to the future, *Go in, Stay In, Tune In* grew out of a discussion about the Blitz and imagining how we would cope nowadays in a serious power cut – and considering the impact of climate change as we approached “peak oil”.

We were spoiled for adult groups wanting to work with us. I was running an over-50s drama group at the town’s theatre called Arts Alive. We did a play together, looking at what each person was doing when they were teens, and the young people had to imagine what they would be doing when they were old. We also had links with dArts – a company of over-60s who had all studied at Dartington Hall with Joy Elizabeth, a member of Corby Women’s Theatre Group.

They brought their play *We Are Still Here* to show us, and asked if we would develop it with them by adding the young people’s views.

Finally, we pulled together a unique integrated cast from all the groups to create and perform a play about the impact of stroke, which was commissioned by the Stroke Association. We even had stroke survivors and their family members joining in.

2013	Go In, Stay In, Tune In	<i>Peak oil, power cuts</i>
2015	Letters Home	<i>Letters from WWI and communication in wars since then. Effective, meaningful remembrance.</i>
2015	Shout About Stroke	<i>Attitudes and experience of stroke</i>

Apart from the subject matter mentioned so far, we explored contemporary issues like elections or the Iraq war as they happened. Using the Shout! research methods to look at an issue from all sides was a good way to teach critical thinking. Each play would have characters representing all sides of a debate, and the kids were used to playing a role which did not match their own opinion. It is difficult to stay wedded to an opinion when you have had to express the opposing viewpoint convincingly, having entered into the emotional world and motivations of your character.

In between specific projects we had free-flowing sessions which dealt with whatever was happening for them personally, and we kept a video diary of these sessions. We also had fun weeks, with Christmas pantomimes and endless game shows. Once we had our own lighting and sound equipment, we had a skills-based project called Upskilling Shout so we could learn all aspects of play in production.

We also provided opportunities for social work students at Northampton University to practise on us before they went out into the real world. The role-playing was so effective that we were asked to make a video to be used in training youth and community workers.



The cast of Look Both Ways at Castle Theatre Wellingborough