

Context and Signposting

Project Overview

Shakespeare on Screen in Prison (SoSiP) is a partnership between the York St John University Prison Partnership Project (YSJUPPP), KPPL Productions and HMP New Hall (a closed category female prison in West Yorkshire). The Donmar Warehouse Shakespeare Trilogy films (*Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV* and *The Tempest*) are used to inspire collaborative, relational and durational drama projects with women residents. The films are set in a female prison, the concept being that a group of female prisoners are putting on these Shakespeare productions and performing them for a visiting audience in the prison gym.

Each individual project sees a new group of up to 20 women collaborate with YSJUPPP theatre makers, York St John University Undergraduate and Masters Theatre and Performance students and Trilogy company members to explore the characters, themes and plot of the films through film screenings, creative writing, performance, movement, song and discussion. The workshops take place weekly across a 6–12-week period, with women also engaging in independent in-cell work in between sessions. Through these creative exercises, the women are also encouraged to explore the connections between the films and their own personal and community narratives. The women explore and perform scenes of Shakespeare using them as a stimulus to create their own autobiographical creative writing and performance work.

HMP New Hall

New Hall is a prison and young offender institution (YOI) in Flockton, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, for women aged 18 and over.

Originally a male prison, the establishment became a women's prison in 1987, which it has remained ever since. The prison has a capacity of 446, is located in Flockton, just outside of Wakefield, and has a nine-bed mother and baby unit, drug recovery unit and a health-care centre.

York St John University Prison Partnership Project

The York St John University Prison Partnership Project was founded in 2013 by Rachel Conlon, Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre in the performance department, in the School of the Arts.

The project was born with a fundamental social justice agenda at its heart, and sought to inspire creativity and social change with women affected by the criminal justice system. It is a partnership between York St John University, HMP New Hall (closed female prison) & HMP Askham Grange (open female prison) where weekly trauma-informed creative arts programmes in prisons are delivered.

The partnership brings together two different kinds of communities - university students & staff and female prisoners & prison staff and enables each community to encounter each other across profound social barriers; not as homogenous groups, but as people & artists. The intention is for both communities to be part of a transformative & educational learning experience that emphasises creative collaboration and addresses issues of social concern.

Merging these two worlds through quality arts engagement to unearth dialogues that explore perspectives & perceptions of women in the criminal justice system, beyond adopted media myth & societal stigma.

<https://www.yorks.ac.uk/working-with-the-community/prison-partnership-project/>

KPPL Productions

KPPL Productions is a theatre and film company run with an explicit social justice focus. Director Phyllida Lloyd and producer Kate Pakenham first worked together on the Donmar Shakespeare Trilogy (2012-2017) which they presented on stage in London and New York, on screen, and in prisons and schools. KPPL continues to work within the criminal justice sector and in educational partnerships. The company's work combines excellent story-telling with dynamic partnerships which enliven audiences towards critical social issues of our times. In Spring 2024, KPPL co-produced the National Theatre's production Grenfell: In The Words Of Survivors, co-directed by Phyllida, in New York. The presentation included an extensive outreach and education offer.

Useful Context

Information Source <https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/research/key-facts.php>

- Women are held in 12 prisons in England.
- Women make up around 5% of the overall prison population in the UK.
- The number of women in prison in England and Wales was 3,641 on 27 March 2020.
- The women's prison population in England and Wales more than doubled between 1995 and 2010, from 1,979 to 4,236 and has since remained around 4,000.
- Most women entering prison to serve a sentence (80%) have committed a non-violent offence.
- Most women entering prison serve short sentences; prison sentences of less than 12 months -accounted for 82% of all sentenced women in the year leading up to September 2019.
- Many women lose their homes and their possessions when going to prison and are consequently released homeless. Nearly two in five women (38%) left prison without settled accommodation.
- Short sentences are ineffective at reducing reoffending: 58% of women are reconvicted within one year of leaving prison. This rises to 73% for sentences of less than 12 months.
- The criminal justice system disproportionately impacts women who Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)
- Prisons do not regularly record whether people have children under the age of 18. However, 57% of women surveyed by inspectors in 2018–19 reported that they did.
- At fifth of women prisoners are lone parents before imprisonment.
- Only 9% of children whose mothers are in prison are cared for by their fathers in their mothers' absence.
- Only 5% of children remain in their family home when a mother goes to prison.
- Seven in 10 women in prison reported that they had been a victim of domestic violence.

- 53% of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse during childhood.
- 31% women in prison have spent time in local authority care as a child.
- 81% of women in prison were unemployed in the four weeks before custody.

Signposting

A list of useful links and organisations for further learning, context, support and connections

York St John University Prison Partnership Project-<https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/working-with-the-community/prison-partnership-project/>

Clinks- <https://www.clinks.org>

National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance- <https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk>

Prison Reform Trust- <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

Women in Prison- <https://womeninprison.org.uk>

Clean Break- www.cleanbreak.org.uk

Geese Theatre Company- www.geese.co.uk

Open Clasp- <https://www.openclasp.org.uk>

Synergy Theatre Project- <http://www.synergytheatreproject.co.uk>

Imagine If Theatre- www.imagineiftheatre.co.uk

Reading List

Baim, C., Brookes, S. and Mountford, A. (2002) *The Geese Theatre handbook: drama with offenders and people at risk*. Winchester, Waterside.

Baldwin, L. (2015) *Mothering justice: working with mothers in criminal and social justice settings*. Hook, Waterside Press.

Balfour, M (2004) *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice*. Bristol, Intellect Books.

Balfour, M. (2016) *The art of facilitation: Tain't what you do (it's the way that you do it)'. In: Applied theatre: facilitation : pedagogies, practices, resistance*. London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, pp. 151–164.

Boal, A. (2002) *Games for actors and non-actors*. 2nd ed ed. Abingdon, Oxon, New York.

Boal, A. (2008) *Theatre of the oppressed*. New ed ed. London, Pluto.

Clifford, S. and Herrmann, A. (1999) *Making a leap: theatre of empowerment: a practical handbook for drama and theatre work with young people*. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Dixon, D; Plant, J (2019) *National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance Enhancing arts and culture in the criminal justice system*. London, Clinks. Available:

Dorothy, H. (2009) *Drama as a process for change*. In: *The applied theatre reader*. London, Routledge, pp. 200–206.

Freire, P. (2009) 'Pedagogy of the oppressed'. In: The applied theatre reader. London, Routledge, pp. 310–313.

Hepplewhite, K. (2016) More than a sum of parts? Responsivity and responsibility in applied theatre practitioner expertise. In: Applied theatre: facilitation : pedagogies, practices, resistance. London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, pp. 165–188.

Hogan, C.F. (2002) Understanding facilitation: theory & principles. London, Kogan Page.

<https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Enhancing-arts-and-culture-in-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf>

Hughes, J. and Nicholson, H. (2016) Applied theatre: ecology of practices. In: Hughes, J. and Nicholson, H. eds. Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–12.

McAvinchey Caoimhe (2018) Applied Theatre: Women and the Criminal Justice System Bloomsbury.

Nicholson, H. (2005) Chapter 1. In: Applied drama: the gift of theatre. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–16.

Lucas, Ashley (2020) Prison Theatre: Performance & Incarceration. Methuen Drama

Preston, S. (2016) Applied theatre: facilitation : pedagogies, practices, resistance. London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

Schon, D.A. (1991) The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action. Aldershot, Ashgate.

Thompson, J. and Schechner, R. (1988) Why 'Social Theatre'? The Drama Review [Post-print], 48 (3), pp. 11–16. Available from <http://yorksj.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.4488567&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Thompson, J (1998) Prison Theatre: Practices and Perspectives. London, Jessica Kingsley.

Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (2009) Representing the other. In: The applied theatre reader. London, Routledge, pp. 86–206.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**