# Audio file

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# Transcript

Rachel Conlon

So hello everyone again, it's really nice to see everyone for this second podcast. We're here obviously to talk about the ongoing partnership between York St. John Theatre Department and the NSPCC. So just to introduce ourselves just in case you haven't listened to the first podcast, my name's Rachel Conlon. I'm a senior lecturer in theatre and co-director of the It's Not OK project and the new project that we're going to talk about today.

Jules Dorey Richmond

Hello, my name is Jules Dorey Richmond. I'm a colleague of Rachel, senior lecturer in Theatre and co- director of It's Not OK and the new project we're going to talk about today.

Helen Westerman

And my name is Helen Westerman and I'm head of local campaigns at the NSPCC.

Rachel Conlon

Helen, can you just tell us a little bit about what your job involves. I mean, obviously that's quite a large job that you've got.

Helen Westerman

It's a fabulous job, so I've been at the NPC for 16 years, started in role as a local campaign manager and then since 2019 became joint head of the local campaigns team. And we're a team basically, that deliver local campaigns of a safeguarding nature. So that could be on a topic around online bullying. It could be about sexual exploitation. It might be about neglect. It could be youth focused. It could be parent focused. But it's about working with partners and always working with partners to create something bigger than our some of our separate parts that would really influence attitudes and behaviours, and that's what the team have been doing since 2006.

Rachel Conlon

So, the new campaign that we've been collaboratively working together on is looking at a new issue for us in the partnership. Helen, do you want to talk a little bit about what brought you to decide on this new campaign and a little bit about the issues concerned within it?

Helen Westerman

So the the campaign that I'm working on have been working on over in Grimsby is around the prevention of domestic abuse so we know that in parts of Grimsby and North East Lincolnshire that public awareness initiatives haven't really affected the the high rates of domestic abuse that happen in adult relationships, and we were looking at what we could possibly do to try and influence the future attitudes and behaviours of children and young people so that cycles could be broken and children and young people have a different view of what it is to be in an intimate relationship in adulthood. So worked with a number of youth organisations, spoke to lots of young people about their experiences. What did they notice in their school? In their community, what did they see at home? What were older siblings doing? What were the things that caused them concern about what they saw in relationships? What were the good bits? What were the bad? What were the things that were? OK, what are the things that weren't OK and then really talked with young people about how they wanted to hear about this issue. And again very clearly, like last time, it was about not having classroom based lessons on this topic. They wanted to to see and hear about it in a in a different way and. Hence, coming back to Rachel and Jules at York St. John and saying what can you do?

Rachel Conlon

And Jules, tell us a little bit about how we've been working with the NSPCC in the creation of the new script and the new play. Just take us through a little bit about how that process works.

Jules Dorey Richmond

I think we started, didn't we, back when we were all online. So quite a lot of our meetings happened via Zoom or Teams and we were sent campaign documents and research and we spoke through various ideas about how we might move forward. I mean, I think it's important to say that it's a prevent campaign. So the characters that we created had to have a lot of opportunity throughout the characters’ scenarios for young people to intervene and say at that moment if something else had happened, it wouldn't have gone down that road. Initially after we had all the research, we sat down, didn't we, Rachel, to try and write characters? And we started with back stories because the campaign was about the generational abuse and about the the culture within families and communities. We really wanted to embed that into the narratives of each of the characters.

Actor 1

Mum walked out and dad and me when I was in year nine at school. Just remember all the suitcases in the hallway and he stood blocking the door, crying, not wanting her to go. She started pulling my fingers off the door handle one by one. I remember saying.

Actor 2

You don't need me Kean. You and your dad can stay here and play happy families for all I care. Now let me go.

Rachel Conlon

And they're really complex issues. So, Helen, tell us a little bit about how you approached working with Grimsby to prepare for the launch of this new campaign.

Helen Westerman

Yeah, I think just as the it's not OK campaign, we wanted to make sure that people understood what we were trying to do, who it was appropriate for. That it was going to be impactful and that children may need help and support following watching the performance because it could really resonate with them. But I think as as Jules has said, the characters are so well formed that you do develop a a fondness and understanding for their situation quite quickly, I mean the pieces are relatively short, but you do find yourself being sucked in by the characters and they feel very believable. So that has a greater impact on the young people that are that are watching it. We launched our Grimsby Town Football club last April to a group of children and young people from local secondary schools and to start with, there was all the gigglyness of one being at the football ground. But two watching this performance and seeing these actors who really aren't a lot older than the young people watching the piece, very quickly again, the mood changed and we had young people actually shouting out in in the piece because it was so powerful. But at at the end, when Rachel and Jules were asking the questions of the young people there, their comments were absolutely spot on and really, really insightful. Proving that this piece had worked for that audience.

Jules Dorey Richmond

Going back to the young lad that shouted out, you know it was such an amazing moment, wasn't it? Because up on stage there was a moment of of violence. And he just shouted ‘no, stop’. And it was by stander in action, it really modeled how to be a bystander, how to not just watch and you know, let this happen. But to say something, it was incredibly powerful.

Rachel Conlon

And he knew that that that behaviour was not OK, absolutely.

Actor 3

What you trying to do to me out there with that lad? Honestly, what do you think?

Actor 4

What are you doing?

Actor 3

No, no. Shut your mouth. Listen to me. I want something to say you didn't - get off my hands. Listen to me. Listen good, right? That lad out there talking to him. Why? What are you doing to me?

Actor 4

It's fine going on.

Actor 3

What do you mean, talking to him? I've seen what you were doing and I know what you're doing and all. You're trying to get back at me.

Actor 4

Mean what?

Actor 3

You're trying to get back at me for early on before we came out. That's it. Whatever other little thing before we came out, I said I didn't like what you were wearing. Did I,said it weren't appropriate? You know, I said get up them stairs get changed and put something more appropriate on didn’t I?

Actor 4

I said I'm sorry. Didn't I see I said I'm sorry and nothing else is happening. Nothing's happening.

Actor 3

Shut up and let me finish. Granted, you went upstairs and you got changed, but what you did before you got changed. You took a photo of what you were wearing. You took a photo of what you wearing. You stuck it on your Instagram. Don't you dare even try and lie to me. Cause Josh said that you did.

Actor 4

I'm sorry.

Actor 3

I'm sorry. No, no, you're not getting it. Are you, Jen? Listen, if you're actually sorry about how you behave now, you just made me look out there. You're not like that, wouldn't you? You're acting. Acting like a little skank.

Actor 4

Like a skank. Why do you always have to come in here and act? like a psycho.

Actor 3

I can't believe you just raised your voice. To me like that.

Jules Dorey Richmond

And if there was any other young people in that audience that didn't know that was not OK, he outed something there in that moment. That then led to a really interesting conversation at the end.

Rachel Conlon

 Helen, the issue itself around interpersonal domestic violence, is that something that the NSPCC is seeing as a rise in society? I know this is a prevention campaign, but just tell us a little bit more about what you're observing within the organization as to what might be need to be explored with young.

Helen Westerman

Yeah, I think when I first came to the NSPCC, we were very much focused on adult relationships and domestic abuse, you know, happening within that, that adult sphere over the last few years and, and obviously including the use of social media we've seen young people's relationships, which obviously over history, have been sometimes toxic and not appropriate, but I think norms have been challenged and young people through watching pornography, listening to certain people certain influencers online have come to have quite skewed views, some sometimes of what being in an adult relationship means, and the gender imbalance, etc. So we're being asked for and seeing much more of the need for preventative work around relationships, looking at what's healthy, what's not healthy, and the issue of consent too.

Rachel Conlon

Yeah, which is a massive issue in in in all areas of of society, absolutely in in just going back to the tour because obviously we did the launch at Grimsby Football Club and then we did a a short kind of tour in in Grimsby. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

Helen Westerman

Yeah, I mean, it was we had a week long activity for some schools, some youth organisations and a group of young people who had also experienced exploitation themselves, and it was really to get a sense of does this land well? So Rachel and Jules had spent a long time trying to make it fit for the local environment. The local references were of Grimsby and that was really, really spot on.

Actor 5

Tired. I'm absolutely knackered. I’ve had football practice every night this week got my mocks coming up. We've been looking after Ryan for the last two weeks. Mum's been doing night shift. I just. I don't think she realises how much I've got on my plate, you know, just how under pressure. I feel cause she's so busy herself all the time. Sometimes I’m just saw angry, you know, like I can, I can feel the frustration bubbling up inside me and then before I know it, my fists start to clench up and that's when I lash out. I'm so guilty whenever it happens because I can see how disappointed she is in me. I hate that I make her feel.

Helen Westerman

That way so that week went really well, children and young people liked it, but also the practitioners and teachers working with the young people also saw its relevance and so much so on the back of that, the NSPCC has gone to a funder that has funded our work for a long time, The Catherine Martin Charitable. Trust and they've agreed to fund a much bigger tour in 2023/24, which is really exciting. So what we're wanting to do is bring this production and the workshop element to all year, year 7 to 9 across NE Lincolnshire so that every young person has the opportunity to see this. And explore their own thoughts and feelings around what makes a healthy or unhealthy relationship.

Rachel Conlon

Which is hugely exciting, Jules. I mean, how does that feel in terms of taking out a tour that is gonna go across for a whole working year? And the idea that we might be reaching all those young people in the Grimsby area and beyond.

Jules Dorey Richmond

I agree, it's really exciting. You could talk about the film as.

Rachel Conlon

Well, yeah, we've we've been also working with a company in London called Tea Films who actually worked with us to make the digital resource for the It's Not OK campaign. They are a fantastic company of film makers that specialise in working with theatre makers in how you translate a live theatre performance into a film, and that doesn't mean you just record and film the actual performance. It means actually, how do we translate that script into a really kind of personalised film, which we've done and that's been really exciting.

They've come up and we've filmed the work up here in the North of England and it's been a great opportunity for our, for our alumni actors to have that opportunity of not only doing live performance, theatre performance, but also working to camera and seeing that process of how we translate from from theatre to film, which has been fantastic for us and that collaborative process again is very much like the relationship we have with the NSPCC. It's it's non-hierarchical. It's about us as experts as theatre makers, them as film makers. How do we make the very best that we can make forthe NSPCC for this to go out to, to particularly to to young audiences. So we, we work really well together and it's very intense process, but hugely rewarding. So that digital resource with a series of films will be on the NSPCC website again so that the reach can go far, far broader and wider than just the area that we're concentrating on at the moment. But the other exciting thing is, is that we're looking to potentially take the work into Leeds. Helen, do you want to tell us a little bit about the work that's happening in Leeds and what might come of this?

Helen Westerman

And I think because we've got a bit of a track record of working with each other and the campaigns really landing well with audiences. So whenever a new project now is is is coming about and colleagues, internally and externally, we'll say, well, can we have a piece of it which is brilliant. But also creates some challenges. So, we have a new Leeds hub within the NSPCC and are really committed to really embedding our offer into Leeds. So what better way to do that than bring this new healthy relationships play to Leeds which we did back in October? For professional audiences to see and again really to test the water, so does this fit? Does this resonate? Does this land well, in in Leeds, would it talk to a local context? And just this week we're going to be working with a range of different stakeholders from a variety of audiences in Leeds to come together with myself, Rachel and Jules to look at how we tweak the play that was designed for young people in Grimsby and and make it work for an audience in Leeds with the hope of being able to take that out to a wide variety of children and young people across the city. So that would be great, but we've also had requests from places as far as Kent and down in Devon. So that that feels great too. But that's where our digital resource may come to the fore

Rachel Conlon

So I mean, really exciting times ahead and we're we're also really lucky in that we are hopefully having a member of staff from the NSPCC come and do a a masters degree with us collaboratively, really exploring and testing out and asking questions about the efficacy of the work and is this work working? How is it landing with the young people? What's the learning that they're taking from the play and the digital resource? And what's the future learning? We want those young people to hopefully remember those key messages, not only in their lives, but when they maybe become parents themselves, that they instill those that those kind of key messages and thinking and and to recognise within themselves what feels OK, what feels safe and what doesn't feel safe, and actually it's OK not to do something that someone's asking you to do that you don't feel you want to do. So that intergenerational aspect is is hugely rewarding for the project that these messages will hopefully live on for, for generations to come and like we said about the actors and the students that are learning about this at the university, they will take those messages out into their lives, but also into the jobs that they might do and to look at the the possibility of the arts being a really effective and exciting and engaging tool for discussing complex, issues of social concern. So thank you very much everyone today for talking again about the rich work that we are collaboratively doing together and we hope that you found this podcast interesting.

Jules Dorey Richmond

Thank you.

Helen Westerman

Thank you.