

THE CHAOS THAT HAS BEEN AND WILL NO DOUBT RETURN (CHAOS)

"I swear if this town gave out a collective breath of exhaustion, buildings would shake across the whole of England".

Set in one evening and unfolding in real time, CHAOS crackles with linguistic vigor which hurls at a rapid pace. Following protagonists VOICE and Lewis, two 16 year olds just out of school, CHAOS aims to capture the beauty of youth against the harshness of the environment. Set against the backdrop of the post 2008 financial crisis, in a time of austerity, depletion in housing and the rise of immigration, we follow these boys on one chaotic adventure that patrols in real time through the underbelly of Luton. Lewis lives with his single mum, a nurse who works nights, and he has ambitions to go to university and give her a better life. VOICE however can't see a future for himself beyond Luton, *"we are about three steps from knocking at poverty's door"*. He is destined to work in his parents garage in order to *"keep a roof over their head"*. All the adults in these boys' lives want to *"live better than this"* but times are tough, and they live in a place curdled by disappointed dreams: *"People round here walk as if they are being held back"*. The future looms large and it's scary, but at the forefront of that journey is a party, the moment VOICE has been waiting for that can only happen if underage booze is secured. A series of madcap events unfold as we dive into this odyssey set in the underbelly of Luton and often underscored by Niki Minaj or Sean Paul. The story aims to capture the beauty and nostalgia of growing up in the early noughties, the discovery of youth from first kisses, to crappy shots of gin, whilst honing in on the celebration of brotherhood between two boys who are desperately optimistic and hopeful about what the future could hold. Their environment however seems to pin them back, which is highlighted in the narrative climax when one of the boys is eventually stabbed at the house party by an antagonist who has been stalking the boys throughout the story. He doesn't die though. He goes on to chase his dreams, whilst his attacker lives in severe remorse for his actions. After all *"no one is built to take a life, it's the environment we are born into that makes us do that, and it's about time that changed"*. It's based on Sam Edmunds' lived experience and the stories of those he grew up with. It's an uplifting tale that uses hope as a radical art.

CHAOS analyses how easily young people can be drawn into challenging and conflicting circumstances, when they are surrounded by issues, such as hostile county lines and personal austerity in the face of a lack of government support. The show simultaneously is an entertaining hilarious evening at the theatre set to an early noughties soundtrack that contrasts the exhilaration of youth to the very real dangers of gang violence and knife crime. It focuses on how a life full of potential and that's bursting with energy, can all come to an end in an instant if the wrong decisions are made. It aims to speak for young working class people across the UK.

The story will continue playwright Sam Edmunds vital work interrogating the pressures young people from disenfranchised communities experience. Following the success of his debut play *Testament* made in collaboration with the charity CALM, Sam hopes to shine a light on a sudden re-ignition of knife crime that



seems to be rising amongst working class communities across the UK, now labeled as a **national epidemic**. As of the latest study into knife crime violence in March 2023, offenses involving knives have risen by 6% totalling to 47,300 cases across the UK, 26% of which took place in/around London alone & 18% of these convictions were for people aged 10-17.

Our aim with CHAOS is to deliver vital intervention work with young people to stop knife violence in working class communities across the UK. It is essential this story is told as a warning of what could happen if we don't take action. The UK Government have recognised knife violence as a serious underfunded national issue, so now is a vital time to be platforming intervention work, not only to support young people but to work with communities to actively lobby for change in their local area.

INTERVENTION / FORUM THEATRE WORKSHOPS

Integrating our outreach programs across this tour is a vital aspect of this project. The play, "The Chaos That Has Been and Will No Doubt Return" doesn't merely exist within the confines of a theatrical setting; it serves as a vessel for vital intervention work across educational institutions & youth groups, to protect young people from the dangers they face in light of knife crime & country lines violence. By engaging with our specific communities to reach marginalised young people, the project aims to foster inclusive discussions, provide a platform for young people to share their concerns/fears, create a safe space for dialogue around the challenges they face & provide them with the vital support network they need. This outreach component aligns with the message of CHAOS, extending its impact beyond the stage and into the very communities whose narratives it seeks to illuminate and empower.

Chalk Line delivered pilot versions of these activities in 2024 with Bedsveru, working with over one hundred young people in Luton schools. The feedback collected with these young people, has now been used to devise a longer term programme to support marginalised young people across the UK. Together with Beds Veru they have also created essential resources to provide to young people, directing them towards support networks, professional advice & helplines. They will also collaborate with Dramatherapist to support young people's welfare across the project.

Format of Workshops

1) Devising Stimulus

To kick start each session and instill creative discussion, workshops will begin with students participating in devising exercises, taking the shape of drama games to begin political conversation. For example students will be asked to devise tableaux imagery based on newspaper headlines of current events in their community or create mini scenes dramatising these headlines. This is about idea generation - how do you take an issue and start to analyse through a creative lens or take an issue and start to give it life in a dramatic form. This will then lead into looking at CHAOS itself, and discussing how the issues tackled in the play affect young people today, collecting responses to the text from their lived experience.

2) CHAOS discussion/ Dramatherapy Check In

Following the initial discussion of the play, the students will be given the story of CHAOS in point form, along with some scenes from the play. Together with the workshop leader they will elicit the themes of the show, focusing on their comprehension and analysis skills. Our resource sheet created with Beds Veru will then be shared, guiding participants through the implications of these themes. For example, where did the characters go wrong in the moments of violence? How could they have avoided the conflict? What steps could you have taken to not end up in this situation yourself? Dramatherapist will then work with our workshop facilitator, alongside this resource, to answer any questions the students may have that arise from these discussions and provide the vital supporting steps needed to realise how to tackle these issues and discuss any personal connection to them.

3) Devising their own scene

Based on the themes discussed the students will be divided into groups to create an original scene together that highlights one of the themes that emerged from CHAOS or to recreate one of the scenarios previously discussed from the play and find an alternative positive ending for it. This will encourage their creative skills and allow them to learn how to use other works of art as their inspiration in devising, whilst also implementing the political discussion in how they choose to tell these narratives. They will be guided by the workshop facilitator throughout the process and they will then get feedback from their classmates. The Dramatherapist will be on hand to support the students with any difficult subject matter they choose to address.

4) Forum Theatre

Forum Theatre was created by Augusto Boal, where theatre is used to achieve social aims. It is a simple process where students read a scene once, then afterwards discuss the key action in the scene that needs to be changed in order to create a positive ending. The scene is then acted out again but this time a student shouts 'stop' and takes the place of one of the other students, improvising a new ending to the scene. This then happens several times, with different students stepping in, with the workshop facilitator guiding the improvised action happening. After having spent a large proportion of the session interrogating the themes of CHAOS & how you can re-write the play to avoid conflict, in light of the intervention resources, our session will then end with the students playing forum theatre. This then tests their acting and improvisation skills, but also acts as roleplay, letting them use their learnings from the intervention work and trying them out in 'real-life' conversation. The Dramatherapist will again support this process, maintaining the safeguarding of the students, and guiding them through difficult sessions. The Dramatherapist may even step into this exercise to help navigate difficult topics. This work tries to go beyond the academic and use role-playing as essential learning for how to use communication to avoid conflict. Our workshop facilitator will facilitate different scenes/scenarios, allowing multiple students to try this technique. Roleplay is also an essential practice in Dramatherapy which allows young people to express their emotions in non-personal scenarios.

5) Reflection/ Dramatherapy Check Out

Via a Q&A our workshop facilitator will then reflect with the students about their experience of forum theatre, the intervention resources & the re-writing of scenes, identifying what the students have learnt. This might be things like: what actions might you take to prevent a hostile situation? How do you remove yourself from danger? What steps can you take to avert danger away from you? How do you support a friend in a moment of crisis? Why shouldn't you carry a knife?

Chalk Line and Beds Veru will have a checklist sheet to measure intervention impact. The Dramatherapist will support this process by guiding the young people through a check out process that allows them to distance themselves from any hard material and learn how to protect their wellbeing.

Students will gain vital creative skills to support their education & engage in civil discourse surrounding knife crime dangers in order to provide them with a vital support network; supporting their welfare. Through the dramatherapy they will gain safe and essential tools to talk about difficult subject matter and learn how to express their concerns in a safe way.

This transformative project, enables the amplification of underrepresented voices, fostering inclusive dialogues, and empowering marginalised young people to speak about important life changing political issues. Ultimately bringing CHAOS across the UK, extending its impact far beyond the theatre curtains.