

PROJECT REPORT

Feb- May 2025

ANTHOLOGY

Poetry in Performance

HIGHLYSPRUNG
THEATRE THAT MOVES

www.highlysprungperformance.co.uk

The Project in PICTURES



WORKSHOPS

31 participants across 4 venues- Rugby Library, Nuneaton Library, Bedworth Library and Nicholas Chamberlain School



CO-CREATIVES GROUP

6 young people from schools and colleges in Warwickshire, taking part in 10 sessions working with professional performers in the rehearsal room



SHARINGS

60 young people as audience across 4 venues- Libraries- Rugby, Nuneaton, Bedworth and Daimler Powerhouse



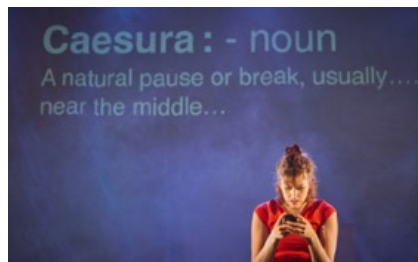
TEST TOUR

395 young people attended as audiences across 4 venues- Daimler Powerhouse, Rugby Free Secondary School, University of Warwick, Barrs Hill School



492 YOUNG PEOPLE

90% had never worked with Highly Sprung
40% experienced arts/culture once a year or less.



QUOTES

"We helped shape something really special. The show wouldn't have been the same without us." -Co-Creatives Group Member.

"The speed at which it pivoted into something quite dark and powerful... Felt very real and powerful. I recognised that feeling so much." - Audience

INTRODUCTION

The Anthology Project celebrated poetry and diverse voices, positioning young people at the centre of performance creation.



Anthology applied Highly Sprung's energetic, impactful, movement led theatre approaches to deliver a project with purposeful and powerful story telling at its centre. Establishing an innovative new creative process, using our style of physical theatre, to build stronger relationships between young people and the process of theatre making. Anthology was positioned to use the creative process to engage young people as directors, choreographers and writers, as part of Highly Sprung's core artistic team producing a new physical theatre touring work for their peers.

The project was delivered across North Warwickshire where young people aged 12-16, specifically those experiencing disadvantage, would have the opportunity to engage with poetry and diverse voices from a new national poetry anthology 'Worlds & Lives'. Partnership was a key feature of the project and saw collaboration with Birmingham's former poet laureate Jasmine Gardosi, alongside Warwickshire Libraries and

Warwickshire's Local Cultural Education Partnership, Shout Out for the Arts, to meet its ambitions.

Anthology delivered an extensive programme of activity in order to meet its aims. Ensuring work happened in ways and places designed to meet the needs of young people living in North Warwickshire and especially engaging those young people experiencing challenges which included mental health issues, socio-economic disadvantage and low arts engagement.

An overarching ambition for the project was fuelled by the statistic that only 25% of young people experiencing socio economic disadvantage are likely achieve 5 or more GCSEs, leading to five times the likelihood of poverty in adulthood. Anthology was developed to go some way towards remedying this problem, building a lasting connection with young people and their education and developing an appetite for artistic activity in North Warwickshire.

Project IMPACTS



“I have learnt to analyse drama, make physical drama & choreography, I just liked making and choreographing it, I know how to do feedback better. Helped with my social skills and communicating.” -CCG member aged 17

EXTEND THE INVITATION

Sharing Highly Sprung’s work to young people in North Warwickshire

Workshops- 31 participants in 4 venues- Libraries in Rugby, Nuneaton and Bedworth and Nicholas Chamberlain School

Co Creatives Group- 6 young people from schools and colleges in Warwickshire, taking part in 10 sessions.

Work in Progress Sharings- 60 young people across 4 venues- Libraries in Rugby, Nuneaton, and Bedworth and Daimler Powerhouse

Test Tour- 395 young people attended as audiences across 4 venues- Daimler Powerhouse, Rugby Free Secondary School, University of Warwick, Barrs Hill School

492 young people as participants and audiences.

USE OF PHYSICAL THEATRE

Increasing participation and investing in potential

Physical theatre was used as central to Highly Sprung’s delivery of all activity, becoming a vehicle through which young people could begin to access and understand poetry and then in the creation of relevant and engaging performance.

Young people commented on the importance of the use of physical theatre saying:

“The way it is [using physical theatre] means you can’t switch off from it.”

PART OF THE CREATION

Young people creating national touring work for their peers

A group of six young people age 15-19, undertook roles as part of the Co Creatives Group, taking on responsibilities for direction, writing and choreography in the creation of a professional piece of touring work Simile. Their involvement was crucial in creating the performance, ensuring its relevance and ability to engage with audiences of young people. They valued the experience, better appreciating the wider responsibilities attached to creating performance work and the impact this had on their personal development.

Project IMPACTS

*"I've seen how you can love poetry and how it evokes feelings that we all have where someone's found the words to describe it."
- CCG member aged 16*



INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

Appreciating diverse voices from literature

Engagement in the 'Worlds & Lives' poetry anthology was a powerful aspect of the project and an opportunity to introduce young people to poems which represented voices from diverse cultures, introducing new perspectives on how we perceive identity. This was further emphasised through work alongside poet Jasmine Gardosi, who also brought diversity through their work, writing new spoken word with young people for the performance of Simile as part of the creative process.



Duplex: - noun

A poetic form that subverts or is a "mash-up" of older poetic forms.

ROUTES TO ATTAINMENT

For young people from North Warwickshire experiencing disadvantage or deprivation

Anthology had the intention of better engaging young people in understanding and appreciating poetry, which would subsequently increase their engagement with learning in a school context. The project provided travel and food for members of the Co Creatives Group, as well as taking activity to venues that were easier for young people to access in their local area. As a result nearly a third of all young people who participated in the project were from areas ranked the most deprived (1-4 IMD) and predicted lower than the national average grade of 5 in English Literature.



INCREASED ARTS PARTICIPATION

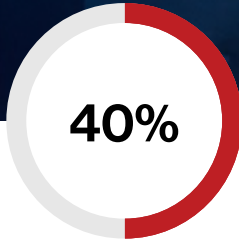
For young people in North Warwickshire, where they are 40% less likely to access seeing or taking part in the arts.

Anthology achieved its ambition to increase arts participation in North Warwickshire, delivering work to young people where 90% had no previous experience of working with Highly Sprung and 40% experienced arts/culture once a year or less than once a year.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

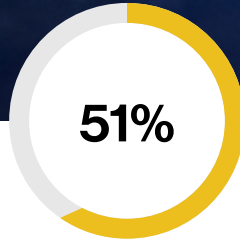
Increasing engagement in the arts and engaging young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

ARTS PARTICIPATION



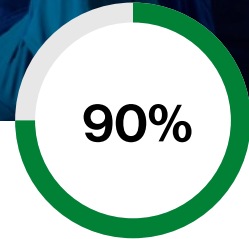
TEST TOUR

40% of attendees had arts/cultural experiences once a year or less than once a year



TEST TOUR

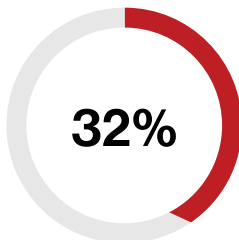
51% had no arts participation with Highly Sprung before



WORKSHOPS

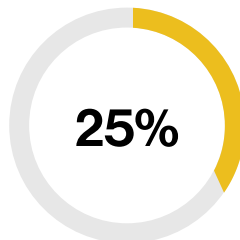
90% of participants had never worked with Highly Sprung before

SOCIO ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE



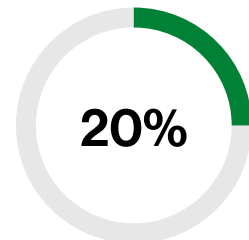
TEST TOUR

32% From areas ranked the most deprived (1-4 IMD)



WORKSHOPS

25% From areas ranked the most deprived (1-4 IMD)



CCG

Only 20% from areas ranked higher than 4 on IMD

ENGAGEMENT WITH POETRY		PREDICTED GRADES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
<p>9%</p> <p>Increase in how often CCG are reading poetry</p> <p>100% moved to a better liking for poetry</p>	<p>7%</p> <p>Increase in how much CCG like poetry</p>	<p>33% of CCG- predicted or achieved grades in English Literature: Lower than national average grade 5</p>

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH POETRY AND LITERATURE

Throughout the course of the project, young people engaged meaningfully with the diverse benefits of poetry, literature, and physical theatre. These creative experiences, particularly when delivered outside of the classroom environment, offered new and compelling pathways into understanding and appreciating poetry.

A key insight from the project was the role of digital culture in shaping young people's exposure to poetry. Outside of school, many young people are already engaging with poetry informally through online platforms, especially where it intersects with music and spoken word. However, more than half of participants reported that school remained their only formal point of contact with poetry.

At the start of the project, attitudes towards poetry were mixed. Many students acknowledged a limited or reluctant engagement, identifying school requirements as their primary motivator.

"I only read poetry at school because it is required. I read a bit of a poetry book once but stopped because I found it was not as interesting as novels."

Others struggled to connect with the subject more broadly: *"Poems that I have read are of subject matters that don't interest me or connect with me,"* and *"Poetry can be really confusing."*

Despite these initial reservations, the project saw measurable and positive shifts in young people's attitudes and experiences, especially the young people who engaged with the project as part of the Co Creatives Group. There was a 9% increase in how frequently Co Creative Group participants reported reading poetry, along with a 7% rise in how much they enjoyed it. While all participants began the project with at least a mild liking for poetry, this evolved into a deeper and more appreciative engagement by the end.



A positive result of the project was that most participants reported feeling less sad and confused about the Anthology they were studying. Most felt happier and more confident in their understanding of it. The integration of performance and physical theatre were an important aspect of this change in attitude.

“Studying the Anthology more at school and seeing the lines of the poems within the performance brought the words of the poems to life and made it easier to understand and remember.”

The performance particularly helped to bridge the gap between abstract language and lived emotion:

“Working with Jas and seeing poetry being brought to life made me understand and prefer poetry.”

THE PERFORMANCE BROUGHT THE POEMS TO LIFE *and made it easier to understand and remember.*

However, not all responses were wholly positive. Some participants continue to struggle with elements of formal study, particularly analysis, and expressed frustration with the number of required

poems connected to the English Literature GCSE.

“It feels more meaningful now, but school just makes it bad by having too many poems to study.”

However, there was a consistent recognition that poetry, when approached creatively and collaboratively, can go beyond words on a page.

“I now view poetry as so much more than just words—it’s music, performance, emotion, art.”





“ WE HELPED SHAPE
SOMETHING REALLY
SPECIAL. **THE SHOW
WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THE
SAME WITHOUT US.**

Co-Creative Group Member Age 16

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION: REMOVING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION



Anthology was designed with a clear focus on accessibility and inclusion, ensuring that as many young people as possible could take part, regardless of background, circumstance, or logistical barriers. This commitment was reflected not only in the creative content and delivery, but also in the practical considerations that shaped the overall experience.

Access through Food and Shared Spaces

Providing food at each session played a surprisingly pivotal role in enabling and encouraging participation. For many young people, shared meals were not just about food, but about creating a welcoming, social environment.

“Food was important as it made me more inclined to join the project. The time to eat also allowed us to talk and get to know each other.”

The importance of this support, highlighted how food allowed young people to manage busy schedules or family responsibilities:

“Food was important to me as most of the time I was coming straight from college, so wouldn't have had time to eat dinner.”

“It was really nice having food—as if not, I would have been responsible for cooking for my family.”

These shared moments helped to break down social barriers, foster a sense of community, and ensure that practical issues like hunger or time pressure didn't prevent participation.

Removing Transport Barriers

Access to transport was another vital component of inclusive planning. For many families, particularly those with complex schedules or limited resources, travel to and

from events can be a significant obstacle. By providing transport support, the project made it possible for young people who might otherwise have been excluded to attend consistently.

“Transport was really helpful. I've got a single mum with two kids who both do activities. So she can't pick both of us up, it made me able to go.”

“Transport was extremely important as it made it accessible to come on nights when my mum was busy.”

These comments underscore how small logistical support can have a powerful impact on access and inclusion, particularly for young people balancing school, home responsibilities, and other interests.

Reassessing Venue Accessibility: Schools vs. Libraries

The project took a flexible approach to where engagement happened. While public libraries were initially considered key venues, it became clear that they were not as accessible or relevant to many young participants as expected.

“I sometimes use my college library but public libraries aren't used by me or my friends and family.”

“I think libraries are important, but they are definitely fading away.”

“I rarely use libraries.”

In response, the project team adapted by bringing workshops directly to schools, such as at Nicholas Chamberlain School, and by facilitating visits from one school (Barrs Hill) to another creative space (Daimler). This proactive approach met young people where they were, reducing reliance on locations that may have felt unfamiliar or less inviting.

SUSTAINABILITY

Highly Sprung share a quarterly sustainability update on our blog with our learnings, actions and challenges, which we also share with the wider sector through LinkedIn. As *Simile* is now planned to be toured in 2026 and beyond, the show will reach wider audiences. *Simile* has been designed to fit into one LWB crew van, along with the cast & crew, to reduce emissions on tour, as well as choosing durable materials for the set for longevity and to enable use to reuse for a variety of other performances.

We have surpassed the target for reuse, with 100% of set and costumes to be stored for reuse and future tour, and the large-scale wooden boxes purchased already in use as part of the Physical Fellowship set, although not quite achieving TGB Basic for sourcing costume and set (sourcing 14% of

costume and 21% of set & props second-hand).

Carbon data for the whole project was gathered and calculated, including artist travel and accommodation, as well as the costume and set, the carbon footprint of the Anthology project came to a total of 1004 kgCO₂e.

We have arranged Carbon Literacy training for two of the core team, one of our associate artist team and our regular set and costume designer to give them all 'an awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.' - <https://carbonliteracy.com>



CO CREATIVES GROUP

The Co-Creative Group (CCG) formed a vital creative core as part of the Anthology Project, bringing together 6 young people with diverse experiences to collaborate, co-create, and lead aspects of a professional theatre-making process. The project prioritised inclusion, relevance, and voice, ensuring each young person was not only present but listened to and felt pivotal to the process.

Feeling Heard, Valued, and Empowered

CCG participants consistently described the experience as one where they felt respected and creatively empowered: *"We were always listened to."*

"It didn't feel like I was just filling a place—I was there for a reason."

"We helped shape something really special. The show wouldn't have been the same without us."

The project offered many of the young people a new perspective, moving them from being performers to creators: *"We usually make movement and get handed a script—but this time, we were part of shaping it from the start."*

"Being involved from the early drafts was so different—we never see that bit usually."

This shift in role gave them the opportunity to take ownership and feel part of something larger and more meaningful. It challenged what they thought they were capable of. *"You saw that I struggled with choreography and still gave me the opportunity to learn and grow."*

Relevance and Resonance

Feedback from the CCG demonstrates that the project felt personal and relatable.

Young people identified emotionally with the material and process:

"This character is me. It's written for me."

"It was really cool because the process felt familiar—but this was a whole new side of it."

The content of Anthology, its themes, structure, and creative decisions, spoke directly to CCG participants' experiences, both in and out of education:

"I've done stuff like this in college, but not like this—this felt real, and we were changing things."

"It made sense to us, because we were part of building it."

Co-Creation and Decision-Making

The CCG project placed co-creation and youth agency at the heart of its design, ensuring that young people were not just participants, but active contributors in shaping both the creative process and its outcomes. Through a model that encouraged collaboration with professional artists and space for independent expression, the project offered a meaningful platform for decision-making, skill-building, and self-discovery.

Young people highlighted a wide range of skills developed through their participation, from creative and technical abilities to interpersonal and reflective skills:



"I have learnt to analyse drama, make physical drama & choreography... I know how to do feedback better. Helped with my social skills and communicating. I don't feel as judged when performing now."

"I have developed better communication skills and learnt how to give constructive criticism. I better understand the director's impact and the writing process... re-joining arts projects after this project has helped me to find more confidence within myself."

These reflections reflect the value of a co-creative approach that supports both artistic development and broader life skills.

Shared Ownership and Creative Voice

Young people as part of CCG consistently described how the project gave them a genuine stake in the creative process. They were not passive recipients of direction but were listened to, trusted, and invited to shape the work itself. This sense of agency was critical in establishing motivation and belonging.

This collaborative approach led to

deeper engagement and ownership, especially in emotionally resonant moments like original writing tasks:

"I have also enjoyed seeing the behind-the-scenes, technical aspects of a professional show."

"I discovered that I could create meaningful work with some basic stimulus and an open mind."

This hands-on experience with professionals helped bridge the gap between education

and industry, giving participants not just inspiration, but concrete understanding of how creative careers work in practice.

The CCG aspect of the Anthology project demonstrated the power of co-creation and decision-making in empowering young people. By centring their voices, giving them meaningful roles, and providing authentic collaboration with industry professionals, the project equipped participants with skills, confidence, and a renewed belief in their creative potential. For many, it was not just a project—it was a formative step toward future participation in the arts, whether as professionals or as confident, creative individuals.

GETTING THE CHANCE TO TAKE THE LEAD AND HAVE A VOICE amongst professional performers.

"I found writing the poem 'Tell Ya Face' challenging, however I loved doing it, it was emotionally tough but felt really needed."

Understanding Professional Practice
The project also made the creative industries feel more accessible by offering insight into a professional artistic processes. Participants were exposed to the full process of performance development, from early ideation to final performance, through direct interaction with creatives and technical staff. This visibility made the creative industries feel more accessible and real:

"I learnt more about the process of creating a show from the very, very start."



Skills and Future Readiness

The CCG gained a wide range of transferable and industry-specific skills through the project:

- 100% of participants felt they had gained skills that would be useful to them in the future.
- 60% reported gaining skills specifically related to creative industry careers.
- 60% said they aspire to work in the creative industries.

"It definitely helped rebuild my confidence."

The experience of the project provided the chance to understand professional creative processes more deeply: *"I've seen Highly Sprung work with professionals before- but being part of it myself was different. We always knew what was going on."*

Who Took Part

The Co-Creative Group reflected a diversity of experiences and backgrounds:

- 25% identified as having mental health challenges.
- 50% were neurodiverse.
- 33% had predicted English Literature grades below the national average of grade 5.
- 83% lived in areas ranked in IMD 4 or below.
- Arts participation prior to the project was low: 17% engaged less than once a year.

Would They Do It Again?

"Absolutely."

"I've already told friends about it—it's a chance you don't get often."

"If Highly Sprung got more funding to do this again, I'd be there in a heartbeat."

Young people spoke enthusiastically about encouraging others to join future opportunities, recognising the project's value and wanting more people to benefit.



SIMILE: THE CO-CREATED PRODUCTION

As a main outcome of the Anthology project and Highly Sprung's collaboration with young people, Simile was created as a result of co-creation in practice- an authentic, high-quality production that speaks directly to the lives of its intended audience. Developed with the Co-Creatives Group, who worked as choreographers, producers, and directors, Simile blends professional artistry with lived youth experience to address the complex realities of identity, connection, and mental health in the techno verse.

About the Production

Simile is a 60-minute original piece of physical theatre aimed at 13–16-year-olds. It combines poetry, movement, dance, and spoken word, the performance explores what it means to be young and lost in today's world. Set the night before three friends take their GCSE English Literature exam, the narrative dives into issues of smartphone addiction, online influence, toxic masculinity, and peer pressure, using a highly physical performance style and spoken word as its structural framework.

Drawing inspiration from the AQA GCSE "Worlds and Lives" poetry anthology, Simile weaves in text from poems by Roger Robinson, Liz Berry, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, grounding

the piece in literary education while radically reimagining how students engage with poetry in and beyond the classroom.

Feedback confirms this ambition was realised:

"I can clearly see the poems in the piece and the links to the anthology."

"Poetry really worked coming out of the real and into the abstract totally through the use of poetry, movement and audio."

Co-Creation at the Core

Young people from the Co Creatives Group were integral to the development of Simile, working alongside Artistic Director Mark Worth and Birmingham Poet Laureate Jasmine Gardosi to shape its narrative, language, and emotional tone. Starting from the question of how poetry resonates with young people "whose lives are lived on their phones," the Co-Creatives Group brought personal insight and urgency to the work.

"I have enjoyed being listened to as a young person and seeing our thoughts being applied and appreciated."





This deep involvement didn't just influence the content; it transformed the form. The piece's seamless fusion of spoken word and movement was a direct result of this iterative, collaborative process, creating a theatrical language that felt natural and alive to its audience:

"The moving and talking made it easier to understand how they were feeling."

"I don't think people feel the difference between spoken word and dialogue—it flows naturally."

Impact and Reception

Simile was met with exceptional feedback from both young audiences and their adults. The most commonly used word to describe it was *"relatable,"* reflecting its authentic connection to the everyday challenges faced by young people. Other frequently used terms included *"emotional," "engaging," "informative,"* and *"thought-provoking."* Audiences repeatedly emphasised the piece's resonance, emotional truth, and the power of its message:

"It made me want to cry. I recognise that feeling so much."

"The speed at which it pivoted into something quite dark and powerful... Felt very real and uncomfortable."

"Young people feel like they're never off from judgement... I hope they will see this in the piece and maybe help navigate those difficult experiences."

Professionals and educators responded positively, recognising Simile's educational potential and cultural urgency:

"As an educator myself, I feel every teacher, student, parent/guardian, policy holder, DfE member should watch this. Truly an amazing piece of art!"

"What's next? Plan of actions? Are you taking Simile to the House of Parliament? Minister of Education and cabinet? How are these issues being addressed?"

Simile is far more than a youth-focused theatre piece. It is a collaborative, artistically ambitious production that gives voice to the emotional and social realities of young people. Through a co-creation process that embedded youth input at every level, from script and choreography to thematic framing, the project empowered participants to create work that not only reflected their world but challenged audiences to better understand it.

"By blending educational content with creative innovation, Simile offers a model for how youth-led co-creation can produce powerful, professional, and politically relevant theatre. It demonstrates the profound value of trusting young people as cultural contributors and the transformative potential of art when it is made with them, not just for them."

Sarah Worth, Executive Director - Highly Sprung

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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 Rugby Free School
 Barrs Hill School

FUNDING FROM..



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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



FOYLE FOUNDATION

CREATIVE TEAM	
<p>Project Director: Sarah Worth Writers: Mark Worth & Jasmin Gardosi Performers: Luis Dun, Colleen Hedley, Emily Robertson Choreography: Stefania Catarinella Composer: Tom Haines Set & Costume: Nicola Richardson Film: Greta Zabulyte Images: Andy Moore Digital Content: Jon Randle Lighting: Arnim Friess Co-Creatives: Sam, Fern, Lottie, Ollie, Alexandra, Willow</p>	<div data-bbox="991 1453 1302 1590" data-label="Text"> <h1>492</h1> </div> <div data-bbox="948 1619 1370 1695" data-label="Text"> <p>Young People taking part as participants or audience</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1085 1762 1190 1895" data-label="Text"> <h1>8</h1> </div> <div data-bbox="873 1904 1449 1982" data-label="Text"> <p>Performances of Simile as part of work in progress sharings and the test tour</p> </div> <div data-bbox="911 2038 1418 2078" data-label="Text"> <p>www.highlysprungperformance.co.uk</p> </div>



**THE ANTHOLOGY PROJECT-
POETRY IN PERFORMANCE**

Email: team@highlysprungperformance.co.uk

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