

DSM Foundation celebrates 1,000th performance of 'I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won't Die', which lays bare the potential impact of drug use in young people

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The DSM Foundation is proud to announce the 1,000th performance of the play that tells the story of Daniel Spargo-Mabbs, for whom the drugs education charity is named.

Commissioned shortly after Dan died from an accidental overdose of ecstasy in 2014, 'I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won't Die' bears the title of the last words the 16 year old said to his mum Fiona before leaving home for the very last time. In order to write the work, award-winning playwright Mark Wheeler – well known for tackling tough subjects affecting young people – interviewed Dan's family and friends, emerging with a verbatim play that not only tells the story of what happened on that fateful weekend, but also gives a sense of the young man who lost his life, and the impact the event had – and continues to have – on those who knew and loved him.

DSM Foundation Director, Founder and Dan's mum Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE said: "Commissioning Mark Wheeler to write a play about our precious son Dan was one of the very first things we did as a drug education charity in the early months after he died. We wanted to do all we could as his mum and dad to make sure other young people were able to keep themselves safer than Dan had, and sharing his story with its important messages through this creative, engaging approach has been a lasting legacy of a life full of joy and hope, that ended in needless tragedy. Nine years on from its premier with Mark Wheeler's youth theatre company, Oasis Youth Theatre, we're just in awe that this story has now been performed one thousand times, to hundreds of thousands of young people - as well as being studied as a GCSE drama set text, and in drama lessons around the world.

"The touring version of the play opens and closes with the words Tim and I shared on the first anniversary of Dan's death – 'Our prayer is that through our words, and through the Foundation in his name, the story of Dan will journey far and wide, just as the spinning sycamore seed does, and where it lands will bear much fruit, growing many good things from this very bad thing.' Through this beautiful play, this prayer has been answered many times over."

The 1,000th performance of 'I Love You, Mum' includes those done virtually via a filmed version of the play, productions put on by schools – the work is a GCSE Drama set text under the Eduqas syllabus – and versions put on by theatre companies. The DSM Foundation commissions Theatre in Education companies to perform the play and deliver an accompanying workshop in education settings, with Tie It Up having completed a tour in Scotland in autumn 2024, Ever Unique Productions undertaking the first ever schools tour of Northern Ireland this spring, and Wizard Theatre currently performing in London academic institutions. Since the play's inception, the DSM Foundation has commissioned over 700 live performances, with more than 125,000 young people having seen Dan's story in this way.

Maya Briggs, pastoral coordinator at Queensmead School in Hillingdon, North London – the borough where Dan travelled to for what turned out to be his final journey – which was the location for the 1,000th performance, added: "We have had the DSMF come in to deliver the play for a number of years now and will continue to do so in the future. The play has a clear and strong message which is important for the youth in today's society. The children always thoroughly enjoy the play and speak about it long afterwards showing the impact it has had. Today was brilliant as always."

Feedback from school staff is overwhelmingly positive, with one saying last term: "A really engaging performance of a hard-hitting piece of theatre. It will stay with all of us a LONG time. Excellent workshop – very informative but not too long so pupils stayed engaged. The delivery of both was pitched exactly right for this age group. Everyone felt they were being treated as young adults. Well done!"

Students also comment positively, with some examples being: "it was informative and education... by watching it in action and knowing it is all true, it makes you take it in and think more", and "it educated you without someone speaking at you, the story meant you really listened," as well as "dramatic and hard hitting because it could happen to anyone", plus "it had a huge impact on me" and "thank you for coming into our school and spreading an important message".

Leon Hamilton, artistic director of Wizard Theatre which put on the 1,000th performance, said: "It is a great honour to tell Dan's story and these last 7 years have been incredible. Watching the impact on the young people, teachers and indeed actors is amazing. Producing a true story

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has its challenges of course, but the sense of understanding the audience come away with, is hugely satisfying, genuinely humbling and never ceases to hit home how important this message is.

“To have had a story told 1,000 times is quite an achievement, but to have been performed mostly in schools with all the obstacles that can sometimes involve is another level of success. It is wonderful for Fiona, Tim and Jacob to have Dan’s memory touch so many people, but more importantly target the exact audience it is meant for. I am sure all cast and creatives that have ever been involved will agree, this is so much more than just another piece of theatre.”

David Chafer, producer of Tie It Up Theatre which has toured the play extensively in England and Scotland since 2022, agreed, stating: “Our production has been watched by thousands of young people and we see first hand the incredible impact the play has on them, their parents and staff. It is a privilege to tell Dan’s story and we know that this powerful drama helps to save the lives of young people.”

Playwright Mark Wheeler comments: “It was such an honour to develop this play from Dan’s tragic story. I remain grateful to the energy of the DSMF team who continue to ensure extensive coverage for the play. To reach this milestone of 1,000 performances in such a short time is testament to their work and the power of I Love You Mum. I want to offer sincere thanks to OYT, StopWatch, Wizard and Tie it Up for their performances, all of which fully realised the potency of the verbatim text. The ongoing commitment and proactive support of Dan’s loving family has been invaluable. ILYM is an incredibly special part of my Wheelerplays canon and I am duly proud of the respectful reaction it always receives.”

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation is a drug education charity established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn’t known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity is currently working in almost 750 schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. Educational settings are also able to access “I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won’t Die”, a verbatim play by Mark Wheeler that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan’s story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself (sometimes due to it being a GCSE Drama set text on the Eduqas syllabus), or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education lesson resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to <https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/>.

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk.

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