Larchfield Estate Christmas Fair raises £24K to bring a powerful play that highlights the risks of drugs to schools across Northern Ireland

Monday 9 December, 2024

In November the Larchfield Estate in Lisburn hosted their annual Christmas in the Barn, and this year it raised £23,938.28 for drug education charity the **Daniel Spargo-Mabbs (DSM) Foundation**. This will enable the charity to fund a new production of their powerful commissioned verbatim play, 'I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won't Die' by Mark Wheeller, which will tour schools across Northern Ireland for two weeks in Spring 2025. The incredibly positive response of schools to the offer of performances for pupils has seen the tour rapidly booked out, with additional days needing to be added to meet demand.

All of this is being promoted and supported by Sandra Larmour from County Armagh, who was delighted to receive a cheque on behalf of the DSM Foundation from the Christmas in the Barn team, Lucinda Kinnaird and Sarah Mackie. Sandra's daughter Jeni sadly died when she was 18 on her first day at Newcastle University having taken ketamine. Sandra has been working closely with Fiona Spargo-Mabbs, Director and Founder of the DSM Foundation and Dan's mum, as fellow bereaved mums both determined to prevent the harm that happened to their own children happening to anyone else's.

'I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won't Die' is a verbatim play that tells the true story of the joyful life and tragic death from MDMA of sixteen-year-old Dan Spargo-Mabbs, whose loss left his parents with a passionate commitment to prevent any harm happening to anyone else's child, and led them to start a drug education charity in his name. Ten years on they are now well established across England, growing rapidly and successfully across Scotland, but not yet working in Northern Ireland.

The DSM Foundation has commissioned Ballymena and Coleraine-based educational theatre company, Ever Unique Productions, to create a new production for Northern Ireland schools, based on the highly successful production their two youth theatres performed in 2023. The play had such a profound impact on their young cast members, as well as their audiences, that Ever Unique Productions co-founders and co-directors Hannah Reilly and Martina McAfee, were keen to bring it to more young people in Northern Ireland.

Donations to cover the remaining costs of the tour can be made here https://fundraising.dsmfoundation.org.uk/fundraising/northern-ireland-drug-education

Sandra Larmour, mum to Jeni Larmour, said: 'Whilst I will never condone drug use, I fully support and endorse this important work that Fiona and her team are doing in educating and supporting school children giving them insight and knowledge that can only be of benefit to them in making future choices'.

Sarah Mackie, co-owner of the Larchfield Estate, said: "As parents we feel the need to equip our children with the knowledge to make informed decisions in the life choices they will make as they grow up. When I came across Fiona's book 'I Wish I'd Known', the tragedy of Dans death resonated and we hope that the funds raised by the 2024 Larchfield Christmas Fair will both raise awareness of the sadly essential need for drugs education in schools in Northern Ireland, and springboard funding to be able to deliver this to help protect children across the region."

Martina McAfee, Ever Unique Productions co-founder and co-director said: "Getting to perform the Irish premier of the play was something our young people welcomed with open arms. They truly became invested in telling Dan's story. Additionally, all the drug education workshops we did around the play inspired them to be more open and honest with their peers and parents about the topic of drugs.

We knew as soon as our project was over that we weren't ready to finish shouting about Dan. He had found a place to live in our hearts and he wasn't going to be leaving anytime soon. We knew this story was not just one that needed to be heard by our young people but indeed, all young people across Northern Ireland."

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, DSM Foundation Director, Founder and Dan's mum said: "We're delighted that Larchfield's event has raised such a fantastic sum, which will cover much of the costs of bringing this new production of our play to schools across Northern Ireland. We're also bowled over by the incredibly positive response from schools - the tour has booked up more rapidly than we've ever experienced with any of our previous tours elsewhere. This is a great encouragement as we explore the potential for our wider drug education programme to equip young people in Northern Ireland to manage

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decisions about drugs and alcohol more safely. In all of this, Sandra and I remain united and committed to do what we can, as two bereaved mums, to keep other young people safe from harm."

Information for editors:

DSM Foundation/ Ever Unique Productions 'I Love You, Mum' NI tour dates: Monday 24th February to Friday 7th March 2025

Showcase performances:

- Monday 3rd March 2025 10.30am – 1.45pm Theatre at the Mill, Newtownabbey
- Tuesday 4th March 2025 1.15 – 4.30pm Portadown Town Hall

Community performance: Tuesday 4th March 2025 7.00 – 8.30pm Portadown Town Hall - open to local families and community youth organisations.

Sandra Larmour Mum to Jeni Larmour from Co. Armagh who tragically and undeservedly lost her life on 3 October 2020 during her first night at Newcastle upon Tyne University having taken ketamine given to her by another while under the influence of alcohol. Jeni previously attended The Royal School, Armagh, was an A* student, and Deputy Head Girl. Sandra's one aim in telling Jeni's story is in a hope to educate the young people of NI to make informed choices socially to prevent other families experiencing a similar loss.

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 around 750 schools, colleges and community organisations across England and Scotland with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff. Educational settings are also able to access "I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won't Die", a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan's story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself, which is 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 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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