

GRAEae *live*  
theatre

# BAD LADS

**PROGRAMME**





# **BAD LADS**

**A new play written by Mike Kenny, created from a story by Jimmy Coffey and the testimonies of the other Medomsley boys.**

**Directed by Jenny Sealey.**

**A Graeae production in association with Live Theatre.**

A story of oppression and resilience.

Bad Lads tells the gripping and devastating true story of the boys held at Medomsley Youth Detention Centre in County Durham in the 1980s. Sold to the public as a “short, sharp shock” for wayward youth, the reality hid something much darker.

At a time when the cry for accountability is louder than ever, Bad Lads demands remembrance and calls for justice for these working-class men.





## A NOTE FROM JENNY SEALEY

I have been living with this play for 5 years, but the Medomsley men have carried this story for a lifetime. When we asked a national theatre paper to publicise Bad Lads, they said 'this is not for us.' That is exactly what the men said to me when I first met them; 'Who's going to want to see a play about what happened to us? We were working class bad lads!' My reply was that living history is a crucial part of the theatre landscape, and that Graeae has never and will never shy away from difficult stories.

I will forever be indebted to Dr Susan O'Rourke (Clinical Psychologist and a catalyst for the project) who introduced me to the Medomsley men for the first time in 2020, in a rehearsal room at Northern Stage, Newcastle. I was armed with post it notes and drama games but all they wanted and needed to do was talk. They had all been at Medomsley at different times, so meeting someone who knew what they had been through was painfully liberating. We met a few more times and talked about the many forms this play could take. I thanked them all for the openness, generosity and the care they showed towards each other and the care they took of me, Mike and my interpreters. I want to thank Jimmy, who has been constant from beginning to end, sharing the intense details of his experience. The men who allowed Mike and I to read their assessment testimonies, thank you too, for trusting us.



# A NOTE FROM JENNY SEALEY

We had an R&D with four young actors, Jimmy and another Medomsley man, who watched as we created scenes from their narratives, ensuring that we were representing them respectfully. Four became two, so it is now a play with one character played by two people, telling not just one story, but the stories of the many. Thank you to Mike Kenny for being by my side once again.



Rehearsal Photos: Becky Bailey



# A NOTE FROM JIMMY COFFEY



My name is Jimmy Coffey, I'm 64, a sole trader, painter/decorator born in Manchester, now living in Wilmslow, Cheshire. I served my sentence in Medomsley from November 12th 1979 to January 1st 1980. I was a kitchen lad for six of my seven weeks there. I first got involved with this project following an invitation via email from Sue O'Rourke, Clinical Psychologist. I had met Sue in 2013 for a mental health assessment regarding my time at Medomsley.

Meeting Jenny, Mike and the other Medomsley men was an emotional time for me. I had already written my story in book form, but never shared it publicly until now. These men were the only ex Medomsley lads I had ever spoken to. I immediately felt a connection. We had a coming together of painful memories and experiences.

I feel privileged to have my story told, and I feel I speak for so many other Medomsley lads from the 1970s and 1980s that suffered but were never heard.



# A NOTE FROM JIMMY COFFEY

I want the audience to understand the injustice of what happened. How these crimes were both organised and calculated. I also hope the audience realise the long term damage caused to so many young men, that just needed time and guidance. A Short, Sharp Shock was not the answer. It only served as a green light to a few evil men.





# CAST AND CREATIVES

**Danny Raynor:** Older Jackie  
**Robin Paley Yorke:** Younger Jackie  
**Signing Jackie:** Craig Painting

**Director** - Jenny Sealey  
**Writer** - Mike Kenny  
**Lighting Designer** - Lucía Sánchez  
**Captioning/Video Designer** - Virginie Taylor  
**Sound Designer** - Roma Yagnik  
**Wellbeing Practitioner** - Dr Susan O'Rourke  
**Voice Coach** - Christopher Holt  
**Movement Director** - Jacob Coleman  
**Audio Description Consultant** - Chris Campion  
**BSL Consultant**- Daryl Jackson  
**Stage Manager** - Katie Bosomworth  
**Technical Stage Manager** - Aliya Edwards  
**Production Manager** - Drummond Orr  
**Producers for Graeae** - Lizzy Luxford & Hetty Shand  
**Producer for Live** - JD Stewart





## **WITH THANKS TO:**

Jane Matthews of Jordans Solicitors, Northern Stage, National Theatre Studios, Dance City and Quaker House Gosforth, Reece Lumsden, Jake Davison Jarrat, UAL film students for documenting rehearsals and the show.

Thanks to rehearsal interpreters; Caz Ryan, Faye Alvi, Chandu Gopalakrishnan, and Access Support Worker, Lindsay Nicholson.



## **A SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

**The Medomsley men: Jimmy Coffey, Eric Sampson, Peter Toole, Gavin Knaggs, Stephen McLaughlin, RP & RT and all the survivors of Medomsley and other 'Short, Sharp Shock' centres across the UK.**







## **Short, Sharp Shock in the headlines.**

From the late 1970s through the early 1990s, newspapers around the UK reported on the implementation of short, sharp shock. The majority of these stories paint a picture of a difficult, yet fair, work programme that happened to take place within youth detention centres. These articles regularly referenced the apparent positives of the programme, such as job training in the kitchens, basic decorating, and physical education. What these articles failed to capture was the ongoing impact of systemic abuse occurring in youth detention and borstals throughout the country.



# **Offenders cope with 'short sharp shock'**

The articles mainly focused on visits from government officials, notably Home Secretary Leon Brittan's visit to Medomsley in the Spring of 1985. Brittan's sentiment to the press was that these young men would "cope better with things than they would" if they had not come to Medomsley.

There was a national concern that these facilities would have created fitter and stronger criminals instead of reforming them. Once it was clear that the treatment at these facilities did not improve the chances of reoffending and that the staff were abusing these young men, the tone of the articles shifted. There were calls for the centres to be closed and for the treatment of the boys to be investigated.

This, of course, did not come to fruition for several decades, with the first formal investigation concluding in 2003. The most recent investigation, Operation Deerness, began in 2023 and is ongoing.

## **Abolish the 'short, sharp shock' – call**

# TRAUMA AND PTSD BY DR SUSAN O'ROURKE

## **Content warnings: abuse, mental health.**

When something difficult and traumatic happens, most of the time we deal with it; we may experience a range of emotions: shock, anger, sadness, which change over time. In relation to 'normal' trauma our emotions gradually become more manageable and we talk about 'coming to terms' with what has happened. Psychologists would say we have processed the trauma and it becomes a difficult and sad memory, but something that does not overwhelm us on a day to day basis.

When the trauma is simply too much for us to cope with and you fear for your life or come under severe threat, the body's response can be to shut down and 'freeze' at the time. It is too difficult to think about what has happened and you cope by putting a lid on it; not thinking or talking about it. You avoid triggers which bring the trauma to mind and life can 'shrink' as a result, risking developing an anxiety disorder, low mood or depression. This is a normal response to severe threat, but the opposite of processing the trauma.

This is how PTSD develops when the natural processing of a traumatic event is too difficult. Coping by avoidance, is understandable and works to an extent, but it is not a completely effective strategy.



# TRAUMA AND PTSD BY DR SUSAN O'ROURKE

You inevitably get triggered by the News, by TV dramas, by places, people or smells; when that happens it feels that you are right back there when the trauma happened.

PTSD is not the same as having a bad memory of a difficult or traumatic event. The key feature is that when triggered, you feel that it is happening all over again, with the same level of distress. So many people tell me that it feels like the abuse was last week, not 30 or 40 years ago. They can picture the abuser, even smell him.

## **Key features of PTSD are:**

- Intrusive experiences: flashbacks (images of the abuse or feeling like you are there) nightmares, intrusive thoughts.
- Avoidance: trying not to think about what happened or avoiding people, places, situations that remind you.
- Hyperarousal when triggered: this can range from being upset to having a panic attack. Often people are in a state of hypervigilance; on the alert for threat all the time and easily startled.

## **TRAUMA AND PTSD BY DR SUSAN O'ROURKE**

For some people, particularly those who were abused as children, the impact of the trauma can affect their development and personality, altering how they see the world and affecting later relationships. It is common to cope with alcohol or drugs; a means of avoiding the symptoms and coping with life and of course this can lead to additional problems.

Many of the Medomsley 'lads' continue to suffer with PTSD decades after the abuse. It is not simply a bad memory, but a 'disorder of time' – it feels like it is happening now. Many have said to me "what is the point of therapy, you can't change the past?". That is true, but specific therapy for PTSD can help process the trauma and put it back in the past where it belongs, without the power and hold over the person and without the constant threat of being overwhelming.

If you have suffered abuse or other traumatic experiences and you think you might have PTSD, talk to your GP about a referral to mental health services.

Useful websites including helpful resources:

[www.emdrassociation.org](http://www.emdrassociation.org)

[www.carolynspring.com](http://www.carolynspring.com)

[www.ptsduk.org](http://www.ptsduk.org)



# WELLBEING

**If you need immediate support after watching the show please get in contact with any of the support services below.**

- **Shout: [www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org)**

Urgent and free messaging service for anyone who is struggling to cope

- **Samaritans: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)**

Mental health support

- **Mind: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)**

Mental health support

- **Survivors UK: [www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org)**

(For boys, men, and non-binary individuals)

- **Survivors Trust: [www.thesurvivorstrust.org](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org)**

Sexual Abuse support

- **ManKind: [www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)**

Support for men who are facing domestic abuse

- **We Are With You: [www.wearewithyou.org.uk](http://www.wearewithyou.org.uk)**

Support for those going through addiction

- **Revolving Doors: [www.revolving-doors.org.uk](http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk)**

Break the cycle of crisis and crime





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show and Graeae.**

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