

## Barnsley's Spoken Voices:

Barnsley's Spoken Voices exists to give Barnsley writers a platform to record and perform their work. It's a support network, it's a loose, organic community, it's a launch pad, it's a hub, it's a safe place to share ideas, explore, learn, educate, and heal.

Individually we write and record, often in the comfort of our own homes or another safe place. Our work is recorded utilising the same laptop, microphone and free downloadable software. Tea and conversation is also essential to the process. It is uncomplicated, very lo-fi.

Together we promote live spoken word gigs and sell compilation CD's of our work that hopefully pay for the next project. We have currently recorded Barnsley's Spoken Voices volume 2, it's launch will be on the 20<sup>th</sup> October at the Old School House in Barnsley. Our first CD duplication was very kindly paid for by a local arts charity organisation EnRich, the cover wonderfully illustrated by Lewy, a local artist and supporter of the arts in Barnsley. Volume 2 is self funded from the sales of volume 1 and illustrated again by a local artist and friend Kezia Parsons.

Performing doesn't come naturally to some of our number, but they are encouraged and passionately supported by the rest of the group. Our gigs are safe, we ensure we target an audience that know they are coming to a spoken word gig and understand our ethos. Many audience members attended their first spoken word gig through Barnsley's Spoken Voices, some audience members have become writers and performers.

We support other venues and ventures and many of our group have become regulars on the local and regional open mic scene. Some are now promoting their own shows and spoken word events, and one members poem features in training for NHS staff in Derbyshire. There are other stories of journeys.

We were recently asked to become involved with the Our North programme through The Civic, Barnsley. Following the same format as previous recordings we were asked to write something relating to 'Our North' or perhaps 'Your North'. This presented another challenge for some as they had never 'written to order'. One member said 'I don't seek words for my ideas, they find me, sometimes at the most inconvenient times'. Another learning opportunity identified and embraced.

Thinking about the future of the group, we would like to develop and deliver workshops that explore writing and performance techniques further. Not necessarily to make us better writers or performers, indeed if it leads a member to the West End or prime time TV then all well and good, but ultimately if it continues to offer a place and space to engage, explore, express and invest in our wellbeing then bloody wonderful.

There is no planned end game or ultimate goal for Barnsley's Spoken Voices, it remains an organic, grassroots, DIY carry on. Its membership continues to grow and we are chuffed that more people are getting in touch and becoming involved.

It is what it is.

Thank you for reading, I hope you found this higgledy piggledy insight into Barnsley's Spoken Voices interesting.

You can find most of our group on Facebook, look for 'Barnsley Spoken Word Page'

Jeff 'Jethro' Platts Sept 2019.