

# POWERFUL CHOICES



## Knife Crime Prevention Programmes A Case study

*"The workshop addresses some important moral decisions that some young people might have to face. But it is so much more than just that; it empowers children to believe in themselves and make 'powerful' choices every day."* (Penwortham Primary School)

### INTRODUCTION

In Summer Term 2023 Bigfoot were thrilled to have worked in collaboration with the Federation of Heavers Farm and Selsdon Primary Schools to create a new KS2 assembly and workshop programme, Powerful Choices. The aim of the project was to explore an early intervention approach to understanding key messages around the important topic of knife crime and keeping safe.

The project was hugely successful, and we were thrilled to be able to develop the project further to enable us to deliver this important work with more pupils across the country in 2024.

As we look ahead to the academic year 2024/25, and in response to our evaluation and requests from schools, we are extending our work in this area with programme additions for KS2, as well as a new programme designed for KS3 pupils.

Read below to find out more about the origins, approach and content of Powerful Choices, as well as further information about our new programme strands for the year ahead.

### BIGFOOT'S PSHE APPROACH

All of our work and programmes are thoroughly researched and evidenced, in line with the most up to date curriculum guidance and policies. We are members of the PSHE Association and Associate Members of the Anti Bullying Alliance, regularly attending conferences, meetings and training to ensure that the content and approach of our work is relevant for schools and pupils. We regularly consult with specialist organisations to evidence and support our programmes.

Within all our PSHE programmes, we provide clarity for the legal context of issues being explored, ensuring that we promote healthy and safe behaviour throughout our work. We always use factual evidence to support the issues being explored; including statistics and direct quotes from relevant reports and guidance.

Bigfoot's approach is to provide a safe, creative forum in which children and young people can openly discuss their views. The activities used are carefully curated and planned to ensure that pupils are never singled out, pressurised or made to feel uncomfortable.



## BIGFOOT'S PSHE APPROACH (Continued)

Our aim is never to shock or scare pupils, but to stimulate discussion and debate in a safe and supported environment with their peers.

Our workshops provide opportunities for pupils to explore issues in small groups as well as a whole class, and we ensure that pupils are provided with balanced information to help them to form their own opinions.

All of our programmes embrace and celebrate inclusion and diversity and our Educators make sure that bullying and discrimination are not tolerated in any form. Discussions and activities are managed carefully with a non-judgemental approach and ensuring that incorrect or hurtful assumptions are not made.

Every programme is carefully researched, planned, piloted and evaluated to ensure that the range of activities that we use to explore issues have clear aims and outcomes, enabling teachers to clearly see how they enhance their classroom learning and whole school approach to PSHE.

At the beginning of every workshop Educators lay out clear, safe rules and boundaries to ensure that there aren't any inappropriate disclosures or behaviour towards other pupils. The nature of the issues being explored are carefully explained, with guidance for pupils about what to do if they find anything in the workshop upsetting or difficult.

Educators discuss with pupils the support systems within their school, as well as exploring how to identify trusted adults and how to have tricky conversations with grown-ups. At the end of every PSHE workshop we refer to helplines and further support for pupils, ensuring that all pupils are aware of how they access reliable support both inside and outside school.

All of our PSHE programmes use drama techniques and storytelling practice to enable pupils to safely explore and connect with sensitive, complex and sometimes unsettling issues. By using fictional characters and narratives, pupils are free to safely explore their understanding, views and opinions, allowing them opportunities to reflect on what they have seen and heard and how it has made them feel. Such 'distancing techniques' stimulate hypothetical discussion and debate, enabling pupils to engage more objectively with their learning.

You can read more [HERE](#) about our approach to exploring the PSHE curriculum.



*"The children left feeling empowered, informed and that they had been heard...  
The programme gives the children a voice that it is essential for adults to listen to.  
It is informative, sensitive and empowering."*

**St Edmund's Catholic Primary School**



# OUR EDUCATORS



Bigfoot PSHE Educators are experienced facilitators who are trained and skilled in exploring sensitive issues safely. Educators attend induction and training courses and are fully vetted and DBS checked. All Educators regularly attend Safeguarding training and also participate in specialised training to support their delivery of specific programmes, such as the Anti Bullying Alliance CPD training and NSPCC Online Safety training.

Educators are skilled in creating rapport with pupils so that children and young people can have discussions and share their feelings in a safe learning environment. They are practised at engaging pupils in activities which help pupils to explore their values and attitudes and to share their feelings and opinions, whilst also considering those of others.

We regularly monitor and assess Educators practice and evaluate their programme delivery to ensure the highest quality of provision.

## ORIGINS OF THE POWERFUL CHOICES PROJECT

Bigfoot has a long standing relationship with the Federation of Heavers Farm and Selsdon Primary Schools in South East London, and we have been regular visitors to the school over the past 15 years, delivering a range of programmes and workshops.

Since 2020, we have been in conversation with the school about doing some more in depth work around personal safety and knife crime, following on from the various Anti Bullying programmes that we regularly deliver to all year groups. The Federation wanted to create a whole school, sustainable approach to responding to the realities of the choices and consequences that their pupils will face as they grow up in their communities, especially as they leave the security of their Primary School environments.

Together with the Federation we quickly identified that, along with exploring choices and consequences of knife crime, a large focus of the work should concentrate on the concept of 'trusted grown ups' and how to have tricky conversations with their peers and adults. It was hoped that as a result of our work together, pupils and staff would have a shared understanding of their worries and concerns, which would establish the foundations for healthy behaviours and relationships as pupils make the move to secondary school.

It was decided that in order for the project to have maximum sustainable benefit, there would be three strands:

- 45 minute assembly for all pupils in KS2
- 60 minute workshops for all Year 5 and 6 classes
- 2 x 90 minute twilight INSET sessions for all staff across the Federation





The aim of the INSET sessions was to give all staff members an insight into the work explored during the assembly and workshops and to enable appropriate and impactful work following Bigfoot's input. This has led to the development of our new Teacher Workshop, which you can find further information about below.

The project was immensely successful and the children and staff responded exceptionally positively to the content and activities. As we began to share the success of the project, it became evident that many other schools were interested in the programme and we began a careful and rollout of the programme, firstly in London and the Home Counties in Autumn 2023, and then across England in Spring and Summer term 2024. The programme is looking to be even more in demand in 2024/25, and we feel privileged to be able to open up these conversations with young people and their teachers.

We are enormously grateful to the Federation of Heavers Farm and Selsdon Primary Schools for enabling this vital work, which has resulted in thousands of young people across the country the opportunity to have a safe, creative forum in which to discuss and debate such sensitive and serious issues that affect their lives.

## **POWERFUL CHOICES – KS2 KNIFE CRIME PREVENTION**

### **Aims, objectives and outcomes**

The overall aim of programme is to work with KS2 pupils and their teachers through an early intervention approach to understanding key messages around the topic of knife crime and keeping safe.

Bigfoot worked closely with the Federation of Heavers Farm and Seldon Primary Schools to ensure that the programme had carefully planned aims and outcomes, allowing pupils to explore this important topic within a safe and supportive framework. We consulted with SLT and teaching staff across both schools, to ensure that the aims and outcomes of the programme are age-appropriate, impactful and in line with the PSHE programmes of study, preparing pupils adequately for their Transition to Secondary school.

The programme supports pupils to:

- Understand how to keep themselves and others safe
- Recognise and manage risk and difficult situations
- Manage friendships and peer pressure
- Understand respect and how to have respectful relationships
- Understand the law around and consequences of carrying knives
- Explore the immediate and far-reaching consequences of knife crime and gang violence on the victim, the perpetrator, their families and the wider community
- Identify how to access support and who can help them





## The Assembly

Bigfoot worked with Josephine Starte, an award winning script writer and member of BAFTA Connect, to create a powerful and impact narrative that uses a sensitive and creative approach to explore the aims and anticipated outcomes.



Pupils participate in a 45 minute interactive assembly during which a narrator introduces them to the fictional story of 11 year old Gabriel, a young person who has recently struggled with making some difficult choices about the friends he is spending time with. He has been feeling pressure to join in on some behaviour he finds uncomfortable, especially as his friends have started talking about knives, and he fears that this pressure will only get worse. Sometimes Gabriel finds it hard to talk about his worries to the grown ups in his life; he doesn't know where to start and he doesn't want to let them down.

As Gabriel considers these decisions, suddenly a Magical Phone appears! It has the power to provide messages and advice from the future; from the important trusted grown ups in Gabriel's life. In one message Gabriel will hear from a future where he chooses to stay in the group, and in the next message he'll hear from a future where he makes a different choice. Will this help Gabriel choose what to do?

The assembly is a safe and creative opportunity to introduce sensitive issues and subject matter and is an excellent starting point for future conversations about choices and consequences. Pupils are encouraged to reflect upon and discuss key issues throughout, working together to explore the various choices Gabriel has to make. The assembly includes spoken word, brilliant character illustrations and voiceovers, bringing the story to life for all UKS2 learners.

In all the schools we have visited, we have been overwhelmed with how maturely and carefully pupils respond to Gabriel's story, offering thoughtful suggestions about the choices Gabriel could make.

### Bigfoot Adrian evaluates that:

*"The reception from the young people to the assembly and workshop is phenomenal; how quickly they invest into the main characters journey but also in discussions afterwards about how they would help themselves and others make positive choices for their own futures. Programmes dealing with these issues have traditionally been targeted at teenagers and of course that's important, but having a programme like Powerful Choices that talks directly to younger people in an honest but sensitive way is a crucial part in reducing the problems connected to knife crime."*





## The Workshops

The assembly is followed by up to 4 x 1 hour workshops for Year 5 and 6 pupils. The workshop gives pupils the opportunity to explore the key issues raised in the assembly in more depth, consolidating their understanding of the laws surrounding, as well as consequences of, knife crime.

Pupils work together to explore some of the situations raised in the assembly, using various drama skills to consider character choices and consequences. Activities encourage pupils to explore how to have positive, respectful relationships with their peers, as well as how to have difficult conversations with adults. They will also learn how they can access and receive support, especially as pupils prepare for their transition to Secondary school.

## Planning and Research

Bigfoot put together an experienced and skilled team of writers and Educators to realise the aims and intended impact of this project. We liaised with the Federation at every stage, sending drafts of scripts and plans for edits and approval, to ensure that the pupils and staff would have the most beneficial experience possible. We carried out extensive and thorough research from key organisations including Fearless, The Ben Kinsella Trust and Childline, to ensure that content was appropriate and relevant.

As the programme has developed, we continue to engage in training, research, policy and the wider conversation around knife crime and personal safety, updating the programme's content appropriately.

## The Resource Pack and Sustainability

We view our PSHE programmes as an opportunity to open up a conversation between pupils, classes, teachers and the wider school community. We encourage pupils to use their voices to share with their peers and families the work they have explored and created in our sessions.

Powerful Choices is accompanied by a comprehensive resource pack, which enables staff to continue the work with the pupils following our visit and ensuring that the programme's impact is sustainable and long lasting.

It includes the workshop plan, the story synopsis, detailed information about the law surrounding knife crime, gangs, helpline information and further information and links to a range of information and organisations. A range of follow up activities are provided that can be implemented in the classroom to consolidate and further learning, as well as printable spoken word extracts and visual character templates.

*"I think all Y6 children who are about to make the transition to secondary school should be equipped with the information this workshop delivers. They have a better understanding that not all challenges they face in life are black or white, there are many grey areas to consider."*  
**The Winns Primary School**



## WHAT DO SCHOOLS SAY ABOUT POWERFUL CHOICES?

We evaluate our work thoroughly and are exceptionally proud of the outstanding feedback that we regularly receive, enabling other schools to gain a greater insight into the value of our work.



The response from schools and pupils about the impact of Powerful Choices has been overwhelming, and the real impact the programme is having on pupils' experience is clear.

More recently, we have noticed a common theme in the feedback schools give us about their Powerful Choices visit; the programme has allowed teachers the opportunity to listen to the realities of children's opinions and experiences, with often surprising and shocking outcomes.

For example, St Edmund's Catholic Primary School told us that:

*The children left feeling empowered, informed and that they had been heard...The programme gives the children a voice that it is essential for adults to listen to. It is informative, sensitive and empowering....*

and Christchurch C of E Primary said that:

*Our children have so many questions which often go unanswered because they don't open up to the facilitator. This was not the case at our workshops... Pupils asked questions and made comments that they had not made in previous workshops with other companies. This workshop really met their needs. It has created an ongoing open discussion which will continue long after our workshop leaders have gone.*

By giving teachers a creative lens through which to listen to their pupils worries, thoughts and feelings, they are then able to identify areas for further work and targeted support both within and outside of the classroom.

## WATCH POWERFUL CHOICES IN ACTION



You can read what schools have said about Powerful Choices in our programme feedback [HERE](#).

*"Let's share our experiences. Let's use our big voices. Now that we're choosing life, Making powerful choices."*



### \*\*\*NEW FOR 2024/25\*\*\*

As outlined, Bigfoot's current programme for KS2 pupils consists of a 45 minute assembly plus follow up workshops for Years 5 and 6. Moving forward with our work on this important and necessary topic, and in response to conversations with schools, we are pleased to now offer schools the opportunity to enhance their work with us through three new initiatives.

#### 1. **Peer to peer devising sessions for targeted pupils**

This day long programme is designed for a selected group of up to 15 pupils, identified by the school as being particularly vulnerable and who will benefit from a more targeted intervention. Together they will work with a Bigfoot specialist to devise and create a peer to peer piece of informative drama, educating their peers about issues surrounding Knife Crime. At the end of the day, if appropriate, they could share the work they have create with other groups of pupils and / or parents and carers.

#### 2. **Teacher Workshops**

Following our Powerful Choices work with pupils, at the end of the day we will work with staff from across the school in a 60 minute twilight Teacher Workshop. This will enable Educators to feedback their experiences of working with the children; highlighting their responses to the work and suggesting follow up work and targeted support. This will allow the school to adopt a whole school approach to building on the work explored in our programme and improving the outcomes of pupils ahead of their Transition to secondary school.

#### 3. **Follow up Workshop for Year 6 pupils**

This new workshop is designed for Year 6 pupils who participated in our programme when they were in Year 5. It will reflect on their participation in the initial assembly and workshop, exploring issues on a deeper level with a view to their Transition to Secondary school. Alternatively, the follow up workshops can be booked to give pupils an opportunity to further explore the issues at any point following our initial visit.







## Performance Workshops

Groups of up to 60 pupils will participate in an interactive performance workshop during which a narrator shares the story of 14 year old Marcus, a young person navigating the threat of knife violence and the pressure he and his friend, Jay, feel to carry knives. 'Cut Out' is a piece of applied theatre which employs fictional storytelling and dialogue with the audience, encouraging conversation around what they would if they were in this situation, with an open ending that they construct together. Whilst Marcus's story is fictional, it is inspired by real life stories and events...

As Marcus's story unfolds and he is confronted with increasingly difficult decisions and threats, the narrative is paused at key moments to ask the audience what they think Marcus should do. Pupils are provided with salient statistics, facts around knife crime and the law, as well as details of helpful services, supporting them to share their views and opinions, whilst also encouraging them to reflect on how the material relates to their own lives.

Marcus's story is told in part by the Narrator, and in part through voice notes that Marcus has sent his older cousin Nathan, who the audience learn is an experienced, trustworthy person that Marcus can talk to and who might be able to offer some advice.

As the performance workshop draws to a close and the audience learn about a shocking twist in Marcus's story, they are encouraged to consider whether there is an ending that offers a glimmer of hope. How can young people think positively about their future and what can their school communities and wider society do to make life easier for people like Marcus?

**Bigfoot's KS3 Knife Crime Prevention programmes provide an early intervention approach to understanding key messages around the topic of knife crime and keeping safe. The programmes will provide pupils with a creative forum and safe space in which to have open discussions and respectfully listen to and challenge differing viewpoints. Included will be opportunities for schools to gain an insight into their pupils' views and concerns in order to identify areas for further work and targeted support.**

All programmes support pupils to:

- Understand how to keep themselves and others safe
- Recognise and manage risk
- Manage friendships and peer pressure
- Understand respect and how to have respectful relationships
- Understand the law around and consequences of carrying knives
- Explore why carrying knives can increase rather than decrease danger
- Identify how to recognise when a situation is escalating
- Consider strategies for keeping safe in dangerous situations
- Know what to say and do if someone they know is carrying a knife
- Explore the immediate and far-reaching consequences of knife crime on the victim, the perpetrator, their families and the wider community
- Identify how to access support and who can help them
- Have difficult conversations with their peers and adults



## Additional Workshop Options

### 1. Peer to peer devising sessions for targeted pupils

This day long programme is designed for a selected group of up to 15 pupils, identified by the school as being particularly vulnerable and who will benefit from a more targeted intervention. Together they will work with a Bigfoot specialist to devise and create a peer to peer piece of informative drama, educating their peers about issues surrounding Knife Crime. At the end of the day, if appropriate, they could share the work they have create with other groups of pupils and / or parents and carers. This is available to KS2 and KS3 pupils.

### 2. Follow up workshop:

This workshop is designed for a maximum of 30 pupils who have participated in the performance workshop. The workshop will pupils the opportunity to explore the key issues raised in more depth, consolidating their understanding of the laws surrounding, as well as consequences of, knife crime. Activities will encourage pupils to explore how to have positive, respectful relationships with their peers, as well as how to have difficult conversations with adults. They will also learn how they can access and receive support.

**For more information about our programmes or to discuss how your school can work with Bigfoot Arts Education please visit our website [HERE](#) or email us [HERE](#) or call us on 0800 448 0864. We'd love to hear from you!**

