

COMMUNITY



NSG People

OUR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY
AT NORTHAMPTON SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

SPRING TERM 2021

Respect for self - Respect for others - Respect for learning

The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.

Coretta Scott King

Celebrating the NSG Community



Welcome to the second edition of the NSG People magazine. These pages represent our community as education professionals working at Northampton School for Girls.

The words on these pages are our own and represent the issues that we want to share with each other.

Anyone of us is welcome to suggest themes or content for these magazines which will be published once per term.

This edition of the magazine started out as a focus on technology and all the good things it has enabled us to do at work, especially during the pandemic. We started gathering relevant ideas and news stories, some of which you will find among these pages. As we started working on the content, however, we came to a realisation that although we were focusing on the benefits of technology, the consistent message that came through was one of **humanity**, of **community spirit**, of **finding ways to celebrate and live life, in spite of the circumstances**.

So we proudly give you a celebration of our community, with thanks to those who have contributed and shared their stories.



thank you



Read The Write Way

Starting an extracurricular club for 90+ students sounds tricky. Linking it to the English curriculum across 7 year groups is an even bigger challenge. Doing it in the middle of a pandemic sounds like a fool's errand.



by Poppy Holmes

Somehow, Paige Lucas & Emily Skirrow have managed to pull it off with their podcast, *Read the Write Way*. Using just an iPhone and some basic editing software they have created their own virtual book club, showing how a little technical expertise can go a long way to improving the exposure of our students to engaging literature. They were kind enough to give up their time to speak to NSG People.

NSG People: How did it begin?

ESW: RTWW started as our lockdown book club.

PLS: We were tremendously bored and we needed something to keep us motivated.

ESW: We preach to the kids in the classroom about reading for pleasure; in reality we don't always have the time to do that - but in lockdown we could. Reading became more enjoyable, talking on the phone about it, we realised our girls at NSG will love this.

PLS: The pleasure element is important too.

ESW: Yes, it needs to be low stakes, low pressure. You don't have to associate reading with school, and this helps students to feel included in something, which hopefully brings that element of pleasure.

NSGP: And it doesn't sound forced, the episodes so far sound really natural?

PLS: We have had feedback from students on this and now we've found our style.

ESW: I'd say that by our third one we found our rhythm - I've got questions, you've got questions about this text, let's just talk - and I feel like that was our best one so far.

PLS: It helped that we loved that novel so much - *The Truth About Keeping Secrets*. Now we feel like we can be honest and express our opinions! We've had some lovely feedback from students.

ESW: The originally more reluctant readers now come to me and say "You do realise there are only 4 episodes on there?!"

How It Works

An episode is released every two weeks which focuses on a Young Adult novel that Emily (ESW) and Paige (PLS) have read. Through carefully chosen, spoiler-free extracts, the two English teachers discuss their favourite parts of each novel, focusing on their experience as readers, whilst making subtle links to the English curriculum.

PLS: I think it shows how much they value it - sometimes they ask if we are paid for it. *Everyone laughs at this point.*

NSGP: So who is your audience? Is this just for students? Would you encourage parents to listen?

ESW: Parents follow us on social media!

PLS: They're already listening. We want to promote the podcast to all - both in school via assemblies, posters and teachers sharing it, and externally on social media.

NSGP: You have had a level of recognition from Astrid Scholte and Pencraft Media?

PLS: Pencraft is a writing service that promoted us on social media because we encourage the link between reading and writing and critical style when talking about books.

ESW: Our focus is always on transforming reading into your writing - and we provide examples of that. And Astrid Scholte...we messaged her on Instagram, on a whim, to see if she would judge our competition. We thought it would be more meaningful to have her opinion, and technology makes it so easy to get in touch.

PLS: When the students heard she'd be judging, they were really on it. We had more than 60 entries; Astrid gave comments to the winner.

ESW: We asked for feedback which was really meaningful for our winner. There are moments when we realise the potential of what we're doing, and we talk about getting this into other schools, creating an even wider book club that way.



Read The Write Way

For more information about Read the Write Way, visit the website at <https://sites.google.com/nsg.northants.sch.uk/rtww>

NSGP: You promote the podcast through Instagram really effectively - does it take time?

PLS: Yes it does! It is manageable but it can be really hard to make sure what we post is relevant and engaging for the kids without losing focus.

ESW: We know kids on Instagram look at stories all the time and we notice they love the most unlikely stuff! We post something random and it gets loads of likes and shares.

PLS: Then we showed one with our faces in and it wasn't as popular...

ESW: They will engage most with it at the weekends.

PLS: Creating one podcast takes a whole Sunday.

ESW: Then we make the content for promoting it - we have planned posts in the lead up to a release.

PLS: It's worth it though, we've had feedback about the aesthetic, students think it looks good.

ESW: My Year 11s were looking for something to read, so I showed them RTWW and they were impressed!

PLS: And we know some colleagues listen with their own children and they find it really helpful.

NSGP: Your defined format is that you look at extracts linking to the English curriculum - but it must be tricky to cater for so many year groups?

PLS: We issue a disclaimer at the start of each episode (e.g for sensitive topics, explicit language) but we don't pick any adult novels.

ESW: We only look at Young Adult fiction and the extracts are always appropriate for Year 7 and up.

PLS: This plugs the gap once library lessons end, it brings back the nostalgia of reading for fun. We try to offer something different for every year group to take from it. The older groups benefit from the discursive, critical nature of the discussion, the younger groups appreciate the "story-time" aspect.

PLS: The students like hearing that the feelings they have when they read are the same as what we feel - I'm reading the "write" way! They want to know what they are doing is right.

ESW: One thing we have introduced from feedback on our survey is that students want to hear GCSE tips from what we're reading - we're embedding those more explicitly now.

PLS: We linked to that on Instagram too, and got a really positive response.

ESW: The casual setting is something I think they like. And we know that A-Level students listen too.

NSGP: What does the future hold for Read the Write Way?

ESW: I would like to have different series for the podcast - book reviews, TV vs novel, GCSE sections that are a little more question-focused, maybe with input from the English department.

PLS: Read The Write Way for NLMG, for Anita & Me, during exam time.

ESW: We never set out to make this about GCSE - it is primarily reading for pleasure.

PLS: But if we can make it enjoyable revision around exam time, and make the GCSE text more engaging, that's great.

ESW: I'd say in a year we would want a variety of series and people included - I want it to be cross curricular too. Someone in Science for example, if they want to come and talk about a book that they love - it doesn't have to be about science. Maths teachers, if there's someone who loves crime novels, come and talk to us about them.

PLS: We would like to feature more people - we had Grace Clifford speaking on one of our episodes, we want more of that - her insight on the topic of that novel was really insightful.

ESW: I'd love to know if we have any avid readers in the PE department - we have so many girls who are all about sport, who would love to hear their PE teachers talk about the books they love.

PLS: We'd also love to have our competitions run every half-term, so six in a year, and we would like the number of entries to increase.

ESW: And merchandise! We want to get badges that students can wear on their blazers.

PLS: And they'd be purple!



Shehlnha's Story

We are honoured that Shehlnha has shared her personal story with us, and the theme running through this is one of resilience, survival and success in the face of adversity. Shehlnha's story is inspirational but I recognise that it could be triggering if you have experienced any of these situations. I have kept very carefully and closely to Shehlnha's own words, as she told me the story, and I hope what you find is an account told with warmth and respect.



Sally Tattersfield
HR Manager

Shehlnha's Story

"I'm happy, I'm successful, and I hopefully can be an inspiration to others."



Shehlnha Zafir is Head of English at NSG. She is also an honour crime survivor. Here she shares her story for the benefit of the wider NSG community, for inspiration, to say: ***"If you really believe in something, if you believe you're right, go for it. Don't let others determine your future for you, that is yours by right, and nobody has the right to take it away from you."***

It's the 1980s and Shehlnha is 13, the eldest child in a traditional Pakistani family in inner city Birmingham. She receives a letter from a cousin congratulating her on her engagement to her first cousin, it seems family in Pakistan know about it. Shehlnha is surprised but doesn't challenge her parents about it because, at age 13, she doesn't quite understand.

Shehlnha's family are not strict Muslims; her mum is a strong practising Muslim but her father is not, but it's not about faith, it's about the traditions that have created the situation that she finds herself in.

"It was something that was close to normal. I didn't really question it until I was a little bit older and started to realise that I wanted a bit more out of life than just to get married when I leave school."

Shehlnha sees other family members go through this, it is her mother's family tradition to marry young. At age 15 Shehlnha's peers at school are starting to think about what they are going to do next, going on to college, etc. Those options are not open to Shehlnha so she challenges her family on this, she feels ready for the fight. Being the eldest daughter she is responsible for looking after her younger siblings, and for much of the cooking and cleaning. As long as she maintains everything at home, her mum agrees to allow her to study A-Levels part time, over four years rather than two.

At college Shehlnha is still within a community and social circle where everyone is going through the same so she assumes that this is normal, she doesn't realise - yet - that her childhood is different from other people. Shehlnha is still quite accepting of the arranged marriage, knows that it will happen but is putting it off as long as she can.

Gradually, Shehlnha comes to realise that she doesn't have to accept an arranged marriage as soon as she's finished college. Shehlnha applies for university in secret, forging her parents' signatures.

"If my parents had found out that I was applying it would never have been allowed to happen."

Shehlnha's choice of De Montfort University is based on Leicester being a place where no extended family live. A week before starting university, Shehlnha tells her parents she is leaving.

"Things got ugly, but I said, I'm going. Even if I have to phone the police, I'm going."

To save face, Shehlnha's parents say that it is their choice to let her go. Shehlnha absolutely loves being a student, discovering all sorts of freedoms and aspects of Britain that she never knew existed. So much so that she almost fails her first year because she is having too much fun.

The prospect of returning to Birmingham after a failed first year is enough motivation for Shehlnha to apply herself to her studies. She returns home in the holidays each year and her parents are perfectly happy that she is living a decent life.

Towards the end of her degree Shehlnha meets the man who is now her husband and this changes everything for her. By Christmas of the same year they have moved in together and Shehlnha decides to tell her parents at Christmas that she has chosen her partner and wants to be with him.

"And that's when everything kicked off. So, it happened in January, it was recorded in the local press and in the Guardian, my 15 minutes of fame. They planned to kidnap me."



Shehlnha's Story

It is near New Year and Shehlnha is enjoying a meal with her partner's family.

A knock at the door.

One of the local men who 'knows about Shehlnha' says somebody wants to see her.

Shehlnha goes outside, is taken, grabbed, beaten, knocked unconscious, shoved into the back of a car. She still has a scar on her forehead as a constant reminder. Shehlnha is taken to a remote house in Birmingham and kept for three nights. Among her captors, her uncle and her father.

"My father abandoned me to my fate, whatever they were going to do to me. They were going to 'teach me a lesson' and say, well you know, if it was sex I really wanted, why didn't I go to one of them? Why did I have to go to a Sikh man? [My partner's religion] was a sticking point for them. Nothing happened to me, nothing terrible, it was just molesting, that was as far as it got and I managed to survive that."

Within the three days of captivity Shehlnha's university friends contact the police and tell them what is going on, they are really instrumental in helping her get out of the situation. Her partner also gives vital information to the police. The police are pointed towards the people in the community who are involved, taxi drivers in Bedford, who want to protect the honour of the Muslim community.

"And it's got nothing to do with religion, what they did. But that's how they got involved."

After three days, with the perpetrators aware that the police search is closing in on them, Shehlnha is instructed that she must tell the police that she is in Birmingham of her own free will, that her partner has been holding her hostage, and that these people have rescued her. Shehlnha finds herself at the police station confused, unsure who is on her side, who might get in trouble. She has been out of circulation for three days, mostly unconscious.

"And it was then my friend Sian advised me to tell the truth, exactly what had happened. And that was the boost and the confidence I needed."

The police take Shehlnha's statement, photographs of her injuries, and she is allowed to return home. Shehlnha's family is told to stay away from her. Her father, uncle and brother are arrested. It had been her brother holding a knife to her throat, threatening to kill her if she didn't comply.

Meanwhile, the situation for Shehlnha is really tense. She gets married for safety and protection, despite her partner's family also being opposed to the union.

"Then I went to court and testified and the only thing that got me through it was sheer anger. I was so angry with all of them, how dare they think they can do this to me? I was completely honest in court and the sentences given were a result of my testimony."

Shehlnha's brother is not charged, she does not find out why. Her uncle is given a three year sentence and her father a six month suspended sentence. The local taxi drivers are sentenced, some for six months, some three months, others suspended, depending on their level of involvement.

Afterwards Shehlnha discovers that the police cordoned off around Bedford, checking all taxis; they had her photograph at Birmingham, Heathrow and Gatwick Airports. Shehlnha's passport had been forged and tickets purchased to fly her to Pakistan. It had all been planned out.

"The police were absolutely brilliant, they couldn't have supported me more. As soon as I was able to come back to Bedford they had a panic alarm fitted in the house so that if anything happened they would be there within minutes."

After the sentencing Shehlnha's family disown her, refuse to talk to her. Sadly, both her parents die without her ever having the chance to see them again or talk to them; to show them her life, to say:

"Look, I'm successful. I've sorted myself out, I didn't need an arranged marriage to move on with life."

Shehlha's Story

"I've always let my story be open. If I can help anyone I will, even just by listening, even just by saying it's okay to forge a signature."

Shehlha goes to her father's funeral and is threatened with a knife by her uncle who makes it clear she is not welcome. She cannot even see her father's body. She is able to see her mum's body in hospital but not to go to the funeral. There is never any acceptance or forgiving, ever, in the family or the community. Her brother denies her any contact with his children, she is seen as a bad influence.

Shehlha accepts that the biggest blow is that her chosen partner is Sikh. She thinks her parents may have been happy with anybody else but, given her mum's family's traumas through partition and the stories of that time that Shehlha grew up with, marrying a Sikh was the worst thing she could have done. Despite this:

"He's been brilliant, we've been married 28 years in February, so it's been a successful marriage, I have a successful career, I have worked hard to get where I am now."

After her parents' deaths Shehlha contacts her sister and she remains her only contact from the family. She sees her sister and her sister's children regularly and Shehlha is perfectly happy with this. Shehlha's actions even paved the way for her sister to choose her own partner and, in turn, for her sister's children to have the right to make their own choices. That's quite a legacy.

Shehlha is very open about her story and, where appropriate, refers to it in conversation with her students, e.g. linking it into the context of Romeo and Juliet. Shehlha's experience is why she believes so strongly in education, especially the education of girls.

"I'm not afraid to talk about it, nor am I ashamed, because I'm not a victim. I see myself as a survivor, and a successful woman of colour."

"Education gave me the freedom and independence to follow my own path, which is why education is synonymous with freedom for me."

Are you - or someone you know - affected by these issues?

Would you like to learn more about honour-based crime in the UK and the signs to look for?

The organisations below offer vital information, training, and support around this issue.

Karma Nirvana <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/>

True Honour <https://www.truehonour.org.uk/>

Halo Project <https://www.haloproject.org.uk/>



KARMA NIRVANA
Supporting victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage

Help is Available

- Are you made to feel like you have brought shame?
- Do you know someone being pressured to marry?
- Have you been shamed because of your sexuality?
- Do you feel you're stuck in an abusive marriage?
- Are you afraid that you have nowhere to go?

These are signs of honour-based abuse. Karma Nirvana provides support, will help you leave an abusive home and advocate on your behalf.

Helpline
0800 5 999 247
support@karmanirvana.org.uk

karmanirvana.org.uk

Pop. Charity 1019477



If you want to lift yourself up,
lift someone else up.

Booker T. Washington

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING

Through the ups & downs of the last year, our community has rallied to support each other and those less fortunate. We couldn't fit all the fundraising efforts on this page, but well done to everyone who gave their time, energy, expertise, and sometimes their sheer grit, to raise money for charitable causes.



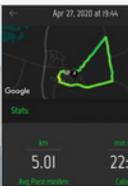
The @NSGalerts PE department will be taking part in the 2.6 challenge. Over the next week we will all be completing our own individual challenges. We have chosen 5 charities to donate to and if you are in a position to do so we would love for you to donate too. Thank you!!!



Total raised so far
£1,265.25
Total plus Gift Aid: £1,517.31

Target
£1,000.00
Raised offline: £0.00

Mr Kowal completing 2.6km run in 26minutes! @NSGalerts



London Marathon

With a twist for 2020

Newcomers to the parish, **Lindsay** and **James Shenton**, are taking on this year's unusual London Marathon Challenge

James and I moved to Horton in July and are keen to explore with our five children and two dogs. We have both completed the London Marathon twice before in 2018 and 2019 and James was due to run again in April. Obviously the cancellation meant that it was postponed and is now running this year as a virtual event (it is 40 this year). I couldn't resist the chance to do it one more time and as it is virtual the rules are a little different to usual. There are 24 hours to complete it – from midnight until 23:59:59 on Sunday 4th October. As I have only run a 2 mile distance since Christmas I fully intend to walk the full 26.2 miles. We are planning to walk a good section around Salcey Forest in the early morning, but are hoping to walk the last ten miles in the surrounding villages – we may call into the pubs for a swift half! I may even do a mile or two in fancy dress.

Lindsay Shenton

TRIATHLON

We're taking a moment to celebrate the achievement of Paul Smith, Assistant Headteacher, who completed his first triathlon on an unseasonably cold day in September 2020 and successfully raised £600 for the UNHCR effort to help Yemeni refugees. When things got tough, Paul used this fundraising as a motivator, to put into perspective the challenges he was facing compared to the people of war-torn Yemen. **Well done, Paul, this is inspirational!**



Swim Leg

Cold & choppy!

"Swimming is my weakness. I didn't learn to swim properly till I was a teenager. I just never liked it, I don't know why. I still don't like cold water particularly. I also like to see the floor. The triathlon was in a local reservoir where you can't see the floor, in fact you've got weeds all around, and on the day the water temperature was about 9 degrees. The end of September felt like November!"



Bike Leg

Thawed out after cold transition

"I was so cold by the time I got out of the water and I was pretty much near the back. I knew I'd be slow on the swim but I assumed that once I got on the bike, once I'd thawed out, I'd catch up and overtake people but unfortunately, taking off a wetsuit and being ready to get on a bike took a bit more time than I thought. By the time I got on the bike, there weren't many of us left, my dream of catching people up on the road didn't happen because it took me half the bike ride to thaw out."



Run Leg

Relieved!

"I didn't beat my friend, which is devastating. I knew he would beat me on the swim and I was supposed to beat him on the ride. Previously I didn't think he was much of a runner but I think he must have done some secret training. It turns out that after a swim and bike ride I couldn't run faster than him. Afterwards he was absolutely buzzing, messaging me for days about doing the next one. I was thinking, I've ticked that box."

Even after being placed in the top 10% of fundraisers in the month by JustGiving, Paul seems pretty determined that he won't be participating in another triathlon, he has his sights set this year on playing more cricket. But watch this space, because once he gets an idea in his head...!





NSG currently has fifteen governors. We are part of a national group of hundreds of thousands of school governors, sometimes described as the biggest volunteer force in the country. There is nothing mysterious about school governance, but it is not always as visible as we would like.

As a standalone Academy Trust, NSG is both a company and a charity. Governors take on two sets of legal responsibilities: to direct the running of the company, like a board of directors; and to control the charity, like a board of Trustees. We are ultimately in charge of ensuring that NSG is legally compliant and financially well managed as well as setting the strategic direction of the school.

Since we are all volunteers, the role of governors usually takes place outside normal working hours, so it is not always seen by staff or students. During the pandemic, all our meetings are being held virtually, which hides our work even more than usual.

But the rapidly changing lockdown rules for schools have created important governance issues, so our commitment to NSG has never been more important.

Throughout the past year, we have been astounded by the resilience of both the teachers and associate staff at NSG. You have dealt with new ways of working, always prioritising the needs of our students and simultaneously looking out for one another. Please rest assured that even though you cannot always see us, NSG's governors are well aware of the hard work each of you has undertaken to maintain our school's success and we appreciate it more than you know.

Thank you all.



Clare Bottle
Chair of Governors

Supporting our people

NSG offers an Employee Assist line to all employees, available 24/7, via Health Assured. Below are just some of the reasons you may want to make contact and find support via this service. Contact details available from HR.



I have money problems



I had a break in



I had an issue with my neighbour



I had problems with my children



I have an issue with my partner



I just felt really tired and low

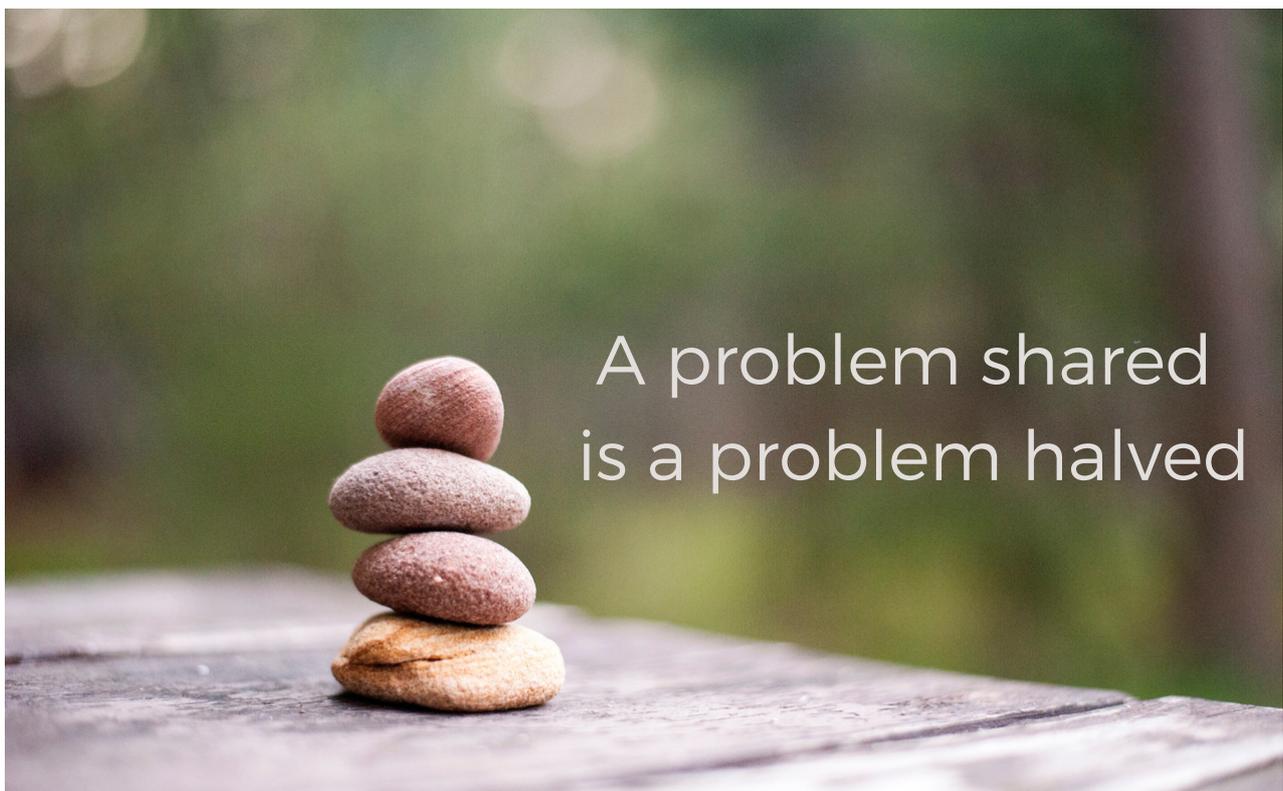


I am very anxious when walking into work



I am a carer and finding it hard

health  assured





@NSGalerts | @NSGPeople | @NSG_Hub
@NSG_PE | @NSGSixthForm |
@RTWW_NSg | @Mathsnsg



@Northampton_School_For_Girls
@NSGifted | @nsgdrama |
@nsgsixthform | @RTWW_NSg



@NorthamptonSchoolForGirls