

Big summer
book festival guide

John Cale: Lou Reed, Andy Warhol
and finding joy in creativity

Malala:
My new battle

ISSUE 1619 / 10-16 JUNE 2024

£4

'It has given me a superpower'

Emilia Clarke

Fighting back from brain
injury. And why she's
working with Big Issue
to help others reclaim
their futures Page 18



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Richard Lewis sells the magazine in Cardiff. He likes to entertain the locals and potential customers with his harmonica playing. Page 46



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PHOTO: ABHISHEK CHINNAPPA / GETTY



Democracy keeps populism in check

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi is facing a tougher than expected third term after his Bharatiya Janata Party failed to secure a parliamentary majority in the country's general election. Modi's BJP won 240 seats in the staggered, six-week long election – 32 fewer than needed to take the 543-member Lok Sabha, India's lower house of parliament. The BJP's coalition, the National Democratic Alliance, has won 293, taking Modi over the line and giving his supporters cause to take to the streets [left], but meaning that he'll be dependent on allies for the first time since coming into power in 2014. The opposition coalition, INDIA, secured 232 seats and, at the time of writing, had yet to concede defeat.

Modi has pledged to continue as India's prime minister, but his position is weakened, which could have global repercussions: India is close to Russia and seen as a crucial buffer from China by the US. The result came as a shock, with a landslide commonly predicted for Modi's Hindu nationalist party. During the campaign, he attempted to galvanise the right wing by piling on anti-Muslim rhetoric, calling them "infiltrators" and claimed the opposition would redistribute India's wealth to Muslims should they win.

The leader also raised eyebrows by claiming that his birth was not "biological" but that he'd been delivered by God. Might Indian voters' cooling on Modi and the BJP suggest that divisive, populist rhetoric has had its day? The Republican and Tory parties watch with interest...

THE DISPATCH

News, views & miscellany

BIG ISSUE EXCLUSIVE

Two-thirds of Brits think politicians use refugees to stoke 'culture wars', study finds: 'It's time politicians from all sides catch up with where the public is at'

By Sam Gelder

● As Labour, the Conservatives and Reform UK compete to see who can shout “stop the boats” the loudest, new research suggests voters don’t actually want to hear it.

Nigel Farage’s shock announcement at the beginning of the month that he will stand for parliament as a Reform candidate suggests immigration is going to be front and centre until Britain places its vote in the ballot box on 4 July.

But despite the increasingly hardline rhetoric – and legislation – around the issue in recent years, almost two-thirds (63%) of Brits think politicians use refugees as a weapon to stoke the ‘culture wars’.

That’s according to a study by research and strategy agency Eden Stanley, which surveyed 3,000 UK adults back in April. The majority of people who responded (52%) also said they feel sympathetic towards refugees, up from 46% in 2017. And one in five (21%) said the UK should be taking in more refugees than it does.

Farage, who has failed seven times to win a seat in parliament, knows how to get the two major parties and the political media dancing to his tune and has labelled this the “immigration election”. That seems at odds with what the public thinks, according to a YouGov poll last week that found the top two issues on the minds of voters ahead of the election are the cost of living crisis and health, with immigration fourth.

Keir Starmer has also been keen to look tough on immigration. He sparked controversy by saying last year’s “sky-high” 685,000 net migration figure has “got to come down” – and has also angered human rights groups and migrant charities by saying he would, if elected, fund a new ‘border security command’. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants said “deterrent” tactics have never worked and the way to stop the boats is to create safe routes.

Rishi Sunak, meanwhile, has promised flights sending asylum seekers to Rwanda will take off within days if

the Tories win the election. Josephine Whitaker-Yilmaz, policy and public affairs manager at migrant rights charity Praxis, said the study showed how “the British public can see through the smoke and mirrors” of politicians spouting anti-migrant rhetoric.

“We all want to live in a world where people are treated with dignity and respect, and where those fleeing war and persecution can find safety,” she said.

“For far too long politicians have scapegoated people on the move in a tired attempt to hide their failures on the issues that really matter: whether we can pay our bills at the end of the month, or get to see a GP when we’re ill.

“It is time that politicians from all sides catch up with where the majority of the public is at.

“Instead of dreaming up cruel policies targeting people who move, political leaders should recognise the humanity that we all share – whether we are British or not – and get on with addressing the issues that really matter to our lives.”

Joe Barrell, Eden Stanley founder, added: “While the government may have hardened its stance on refugees, our research reveals a shift in public sentiment.

“More than half of the UK population now expresses empathy towards refugees, a significant increase from 2017. It’s clear that the public’s support is growing, not diminishing, even in the context of the highly polarised political debate on the topic.”

Less than a quarter (22%) of people said they are not sympathetic towards refugees at all, a figure that has gone down since 2017.

The government has taken an increasingly hardline stance on migration in recent years, particularly asylum seekers.

In November last year, Big Issue revealed that the number of refugees becoming homeless upon leaving asylum accommodation had tripled after controversial changes to Home Office policy, which gave people less notice of their eviction.

Our coverage sparked a major backlash and the government eventually reversed the changes, claiming they were only ever temporary.

This followed a decision to house asylum seekers on the Bibby Stockholm barge in Dorset, a move labelled “inhumane” by charity Freedom From Torture.

In March a man who had been housed on the barge gave a sobering interview to Big Issue in which he described people on Bibby Stockholm finding out about a suspected suicide on board via news articles.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
5 PIECES YOU NEED TO READ ON BIGISSUE.COM



1 Benedict Cumberbatch: ‘History judges us on how we treat those who are most vulnerable’

2 White pants, bin bags and a light on injustice: Inside the world’s first Museum of Homelessness

3 Nigel Farage is like poison – why is he still allowed to set the political agenda?

4 ‘Queer women aren’t for the male gaze’: Girl on queerness and why Tories ‘don’t give a shit’ about Gen Z

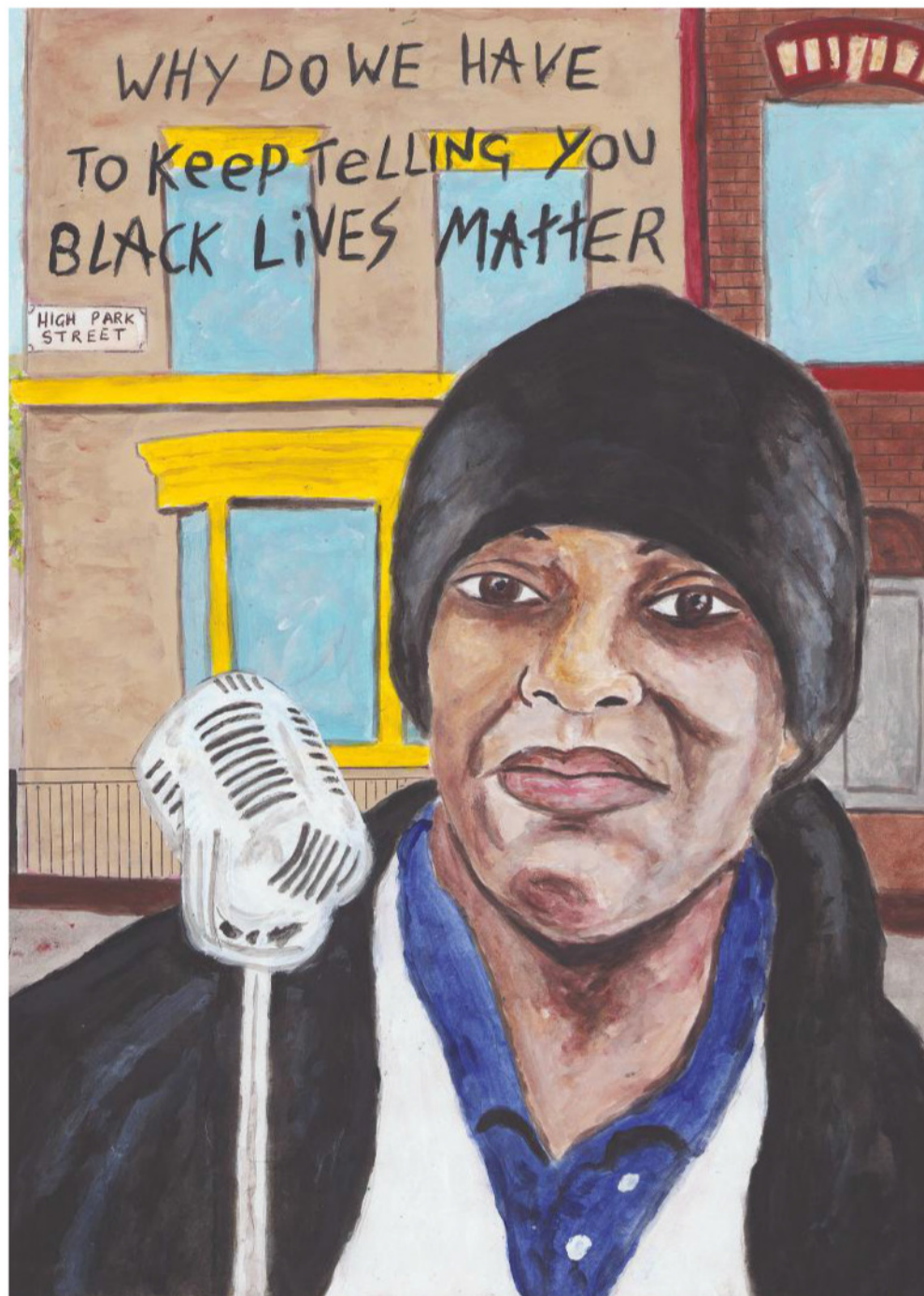
5 Taylor Swift is showing just how bad Edinburgh’s housing emergency really is

THE BIG
NUMBER

3,200,000

That's how many people are only £40 per week away from the poverty line, according to new research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. That's the same as the entire population of Wales not being able to heat their homes, pay rent or buy essentials. The JRF's research also found that nearly one million people, including 200,000 children, were only £10 away from being plunged into poverty, with seven million households across the UK going without essentials like showers, toiletries, adequate clothing and meals. It's why whoever wins the election on 4 July must make reversing this dismal trend a matter of priority.

ART



Powerful portraits by artist on benefits imagines a future without poverty

● A series of paintings by an artist living without electricity in his home is telling the stories and aspirations of people living in poverty.

Dreams & Realities brings together nine acrylic portraits of people struggling to get by in Sheffield, including artist Stephen Martin himself.

Martin has lived without electricity for 10 years after circuits blew at his house, and lives off an income of just £340 a month. That's represented in his self-portrait, which shows him clutching a wellbeing journal in front of a black background.

Each picture shows the subject, something that depicts their economic reality, and something

that represents the dreams and ambitions they would pursue if they were not held back by poverty and unjust systems.

"Just being on benefits, I feel the pinch come the end of the month," said Martin.

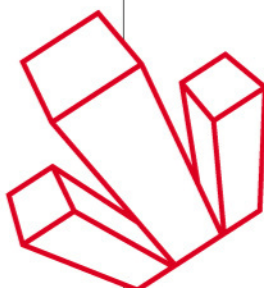
Other subjects include Wayne (pictured), who is experiencing homelessness and supporting those affected by the cost of living crisis, and Ukrainian refugee Liudmyla, who dreams of teaching English.

Dreams & Realities was recently on show at St Mary's Church in Sheffield before embarking on a nationwide tour as part of Church Action on Poverty's Let's End Poverty campaign. For more, go to letsendpoverty.co.uk/latest/events

GENERAL ELECTION 2024: HOUSING

BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

Building more social housing could save private renters, NHS and DWP billions – and add even more to UK's economy



● The Big Issue's Blueprint for Change is demanding that political leaders build more social housing. And now, new research has shown it could not only help private renters but also boost the economy by billions.

Research from housing charity Shelter found private renters could save thousands of pounds a year if they lived in the social sector.

Meanwhile, economic analysis from leading housing associations calculated that England's social homes generate £78 billion a year for the economy with benefits to the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions and the police.

The study, led by Sheffield Hallam University honorary professor Jim Clifford, estimated the loss of 1.4 million social homes since 1979 costs the country £25bn a year.

Researchers based the savings and benefits analysis on more than 220,000 homes provided by The Hyde Group, A2 Dominion, The Guinness Partnership, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing, Platform Housing Group and Sovereign Network Group.

Like the Big Issue, Shelter has long been campaigning for more social housing to end the housing crisis.

"The housing emergency has been wilfully ignored for too long. All the signs point to one solution and it's the only one that works," said Shelter chief executive Polly Neate. "Now that a general election has been called, we cannot afford to waste any time. All political parties must commit to building genuinely affordable social homes – we need 90,000 a year over 10 years to end the housing emergency for good."

Head to bigissue.com to sign the open letter and demand a future free from poverty



OPINION

What next for rental reforms? All parties should join Big Issue in calling for a no-fault evictions ban

Tom Darling

campaign manager at the Renters' Reform Coalition



● Private renting in England has reached a crisis point – we spend a higher share of our income on housing here than almost anywhere else in Europe, with houses that are smaller, older and lower quality.

The symptoms of our broken housing system are nowhere more evident than in the appalling levels of homelessness we are seeing. Soaring evictions have forced unprecedented numbers of people into temporary accommodation. Against this grim backdrop, the response of policymakers has been maddeningly inadequate. At the 2019 general election, all the major parties offered renters a better deal and the end to section 21 'no fault' evictions. In the last five years, we campaign groups watched in horror as these reforms were delayed, diluted, and – finally – ditched, as the government called a general election and failed to pass the bill on parliament's last two sitting days.

So what do renters need to hear from politicians at this election?

First and foremost, an end to no-fault evictions immediately. Big Issue's Blueprint for Change is right – no-fault evictions are at the heart of our broken renting system. We also want a Renters Reform Bill in keeping with the scale of the emergency we face. That means closing loopholes that would allow landlords to continue no-fault evictions by the back door.

Big Issue founder John Bird rightly observes that "the time has gone for a light-touch approach". Tinkering around the edges won't be enough, a weak, watered-down Renters Reform Bill will not fix our broken system.

@RentersReform.Co

Why building social housing is vital to help private renters and the wider economy



Private renters in England pay **£828** a month on average more on housing costs than social tenants

That gap rises to **£1,400** in London, compared with **£730** in the South East and **£630** in the east of England

More than **6,000,000**

social renters could not afford to live in their local area without a social home*

England's **4.2 million** social homes contribute at least **£78 bn** a year to the economy

Increased employment through social housing saves the DWP an estimated **£2.4bn** in universal credit claims

Workers in social housing generate an additional **£35bn** for the UK economy

Children are more likely to attend school, offering a **£2.5bn** education boost

Social housing also prevents **£218m** of personal debt annually



Social housing saves the NHS

£19 billion

a year due to improved mental and physical health and fewer GP and A&E visits

IN NUMBERS

The grim state of the UK's housing crisis

An estimated **3,898** people were sleeping rough across England on a single night in autumn 2023 in the official rough sleeping snapshot

10,053 rough sleepers were counted in London between April 2022 and March 2023, according to London Chain figures

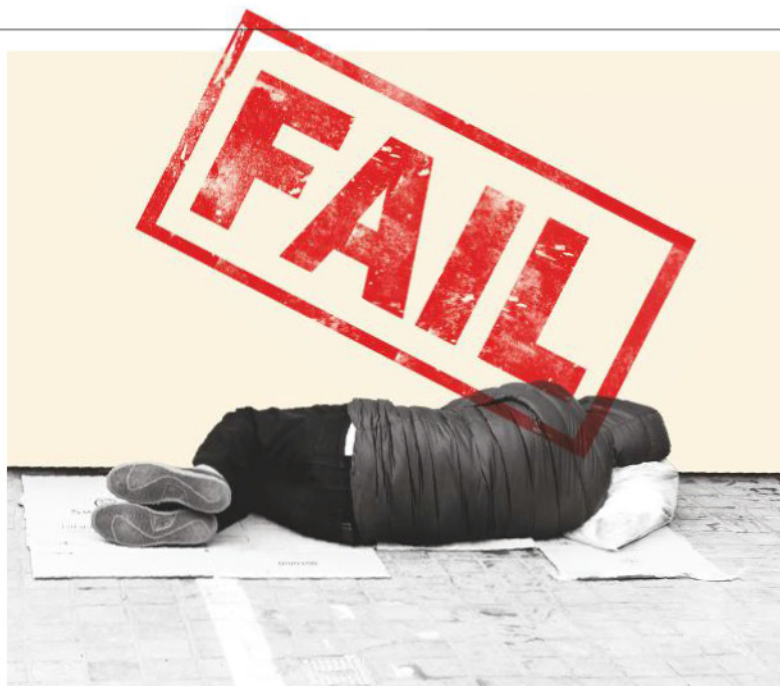
An estimated **133** individuals were sleeping rough in Wales in March 2024

112,660 households were in temporary housing in England at the end of 2023

5,700 households were in temporary housing in Wales between April and September 2023

15,625 households were in temporary housing in Scotland between April and September 2023

Rents rose **8.9%** across the UK on average in the year to April 2024, reaching £1,293 a month in England, £730 in Wales and £952 in Scotland (ONS)



ROUGH SLEEPING

The Tories categorically failed to end rough sleeping – here's four things the next government needs to do better



● This was supposed to be the year that rough sleeping ended in England but, as we now know, it didn't happen. Far from it.

In fact, the official rough sleeping snapshot shows the number of people on the streets more than doubled since 2010 – while the Tories came to power – despite their 2019 manifesto promise to make it a thing of the past.

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan is the latest politician to put a date on ending rough sleeping, promising to tackle the issue by 2030. The Big Issue's Blueprint for Change is calling on the next government to apply that deadline to the rest of the country.

Here are three reasons why the Tories failed in their bid to end rough sleeping and what the next government needs to do better.

Slow on rolling out Housing First

Housing First is often spoken of as the solution to ending rough sleeping, most notably due to its impact in Finland.

Giving someone who is sleeping rough a home and wraparound support to keep it is a proven model for helping some of the most vulnerable people off the streets for good.

The Conservative government has been running three pilot schemes in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the West Midlands – but they remain pilot schemes, despite being in operation for years.

Lesley Howard, the national homelessness lead for charity Change Grow Live, said: "We know that Housing First works. It absolutely works and it's been proven. But you've got to have the properties to put people in."

It's impossible to tackle homelessness without homes

Successive governments have failed to build enough homes to keep up with the UK's rising population, leading to sky-high rents and house prices.

The Conservatives set a manifesto target of building 300,000 homes per

year by the mid-2020s and have managed to deliver more homes than recent Westminster regimes with a peak of 234,400 in 2022/23.

The trouble is that very few of these homes were for social rent – the most affordable housing tenure.

Mark Allan, chief executive of homelessness charity Jimmy's, said: "While renting and buying is expensive and accessing social housing is almost impossible, people are going to end up homeless."

Has the political will to end rough sleeping been there?

Delivering Brexit, the Covid pandemic, the cost of living and the levelling up agenda have dominated politics since 2019 with housing and homelessness taking a back seat.

The pandemic handed ministers a golden opportunity to end rough sleeping through Everyone In and they demonstrated what is possible when all hands are focused on the issue.

But, since then, things have declined and the chopping and changing among housing and rough sleeping ministers hasn't helped matters. There have been 16 housing ministers since 2010.

Some stability from the next government will go a long way

Alicia Walker, head of policy, research and campaigns at Centrepoint, said: "The political mess means that vulnerable people as a whole are always going to fall through the cracks."

This is not an exhaustive list. For more in-depth analysis, head to bigissue.com/news/housing/tories-rough-sleeping-target-fail-homelessness/





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EDITOR'S LETTER



Don't be swayed by election deceptions

In Northern Ireland, they're arguing over crisps. Stay with me, this is going somewhere.

While it may be a massive leap forward from armoured cars and tanks and guns, an argument over crisps, on the face of it, is a curious one. And it's not even about the best flavour. There is a stooshie brewing because a flavouring additive needed to create smokiness in smoky bacon crisps (and presumably other smoky-related items) is being banned under EU regulations. There are toxicity concerns over eight of these flavourings. And due to NI's position as agreed within the Windsor Framework, that thorny post-Brexit legal agreement between the EU and the UK, many EU rules still apply in Northern Ireland. There is a flipside benefit to this as it allows Northern Ireland access to the EU single market for goods, unlike the rest of the UK.

An issue with the flavouring hoo-hah comes with Tayto, the crisp manufacturer, a company with semi-mythical cult status in Northern Ireland. Tayto is an engrained part of the identity, like Irn Bru or the Grand National. Every schoolkid growing up waited for the day they'd get a trip to Tayto Castle.

Tayto, if the smoky flavouring story is correct, would have to work out another way to make their smoky bacon crisps. (Incidentally, this should be no hardship. Smoky bacon is far from the best Tayto flavour.)

You'd imagine a pause on a food-stuff over toxicity concerns was a good thing. You'd be wrong. Jim Allister is furious. Allister is leader of the TUV (Traditional Unionist Voice), a party for whom the DUP is too wet and liberal. Jim is venting. "EU micro-managing and interference knows no limits when it reaches as far as dictating that Tayto in NI must stop producing smoky bacon crisps," he thundered. It's down to what he calls the "iniquitous protocol". That's the Windsor Framework, which, remember, allows people in NI to have the best of both worlds. A good thing. NO! says Jim. "The fact that the

government and its dud deal with the DUP does nothing to address such madness underscores the stranglehold that the EU is allowed to have over a proclaimed part of the UK."

Jim is something of the Farage of NI politics – born of the establishment, but projecting as anti-establishment, raging about anything vaguely related to the EU, keen to bring down the bigger right-wing, pro-Union party. In fact, the TUV and Farage's Reform have an electoral pact. There's another similarity. While both trade on broad-stroke anger, both suffer under scrutiny.

In this case, it isn't clear if Tayto actually use any of the banned list flavouring. Jim is tilting at crisps, unnecessarily. But I suppose, for some in the political game, it doesn't matter, because as we see increasingly in election time, noise and attention is more vital a political juice that truth and clarity. Which makes it ever more important that we stand up and challenge.

Jim and his crisps are a MacGuffin, a device employed in many films to make us think initially they are important but really they're of decreasing consequence, and are duping us as the real focus is propelled forward. Frequently we get caught in the MacGuffin, but we need to stay alert and ask questions and demand better.

I don't believe every politician is the same. I don't think, to use that angry phrase, they're all as bad as each other.

But I do think every politician should be scrutinised. And if they stand up to it, if their plans are real and deal with the issues so many bruised and battered people feel – particularly in terrible outcomes in housing or health – then those hammering hot with their MacGuffin can be set aside. Let's see how that goes in the next few weeks.

Incidentally, the best crisp flavour is clearly Tayto cheese and onion. Put that in a manifesto.

Paul McNamee is UK Editor of Big Issue

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An argument over crisps, on the face of it, is a curious one. And it's not even about the best flavour



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OPINION

Ending poverty's relentless grip must be a priority for the next government. Here's how.

Cass Francis

Campaigns co-ordinator, Southend Foodbank

● We're already more than two weeks into this election campaign, yet the silence around poverty has so far been deafening. At the time of writing, no party has even mentioned the issue, let alone put forward policies to support the ever-increasing number of people who are struggling to get by.

I can't understand this. We know that 79% of the UK public agree that poverty in the UK is a big problem, with almost three in four believing it's the government's responsibility to change it. In my day-to-day life, I couldn't agree more. I see people coming through the doors of the food bank because they are living in a state of deprivation. They haven't got enough money (because their income is too low) to afford even the essentials like food, heating and toiletries. Luxuries like having a holiday are a million miles away from their reality.

Unfortunately, the palpable apathy that political candidates and the main parties are showing at the levels of poverty in the UK suggest that they consider concerns around the cost of living to be temporary. The cost of living payments, while gratefully received, were not enough to cover the rising costs of food, fuel and rent over the past few years, and our food bank numbers prove it. And without even these payments in the coming year, I fear life will get even harder for the people we support.

In Southend, we've seen food bank need increase at a rapid rate, especially in the last few years. In 2019/20 we distributed 6,525 emergency food

parcels, and this rose to 20,491 over the last year – that's a 214% increase in the past four years.

The tide needs to turn quickly before more people are pulled into poverty, and that's why the next government needs to prioritise urgently reforming the social security system so it provides better protection from having to go without the essentials. In the longer term, we need to be working towards an Essentials Guarantee, ensuring that universal credit at least covers the costs of essentials. That is the best shot we have as a nation at ensuring that people on the lowest incomes have a chance of coping with the core costs of life.

Reforming social security would mean people would have the dignity of being able to purchase their own food. They would be able to afford the bus to a medical appointment, and a school uniform that fits their kid. And they would no longer be burdened with the relentless stress of an unexpected bill plunging them deeper into debt. It would also mean that we would

likely see a reduction in the number of people we are supporting.

No one wants to visit a food bank, but for many people it is their only option. If you are in a job that doesn't pay enough, or have caring responsibilities that prevent you from working, or you don't have family or friends who can support you, food banks like mine are the last resort.

The people I meet at the food bank aren't being given the opportunity to lift themselves out of the situation they've found themselves in. Every person in our society has the right to a basic standard of living. We are all part of society: children, pensioners, people with disabilities that prohibit them from working are as much a part of society as a working-age person with a well-paid job.

Every single penny in the pockets of the people I meet is accounted for long before it even comes into their bank account, and that is why our team at Southend Foodbank are there. We provide emergency food, we provide advice to help people access the financial support they're eligible for, we provide so much all in one place so that people know they've got somewhere they can turn to and trust. However, charitable food aid is not the answer in the long term.

We need our next government, and the opposition, to take urgent action to turn back this tide. Reform universal credit. Improve support for disabled people and speed up access to disability benefits. Strengthen workers' rights so a job really means someone doesn't need a food bank. Build more social homes so people don't end up at a food bank because their rent is unaffordable or they've been made homeless. We need MPs to shout loudly from back benches about the changes needed to better support their constituents.

If they don't prioritise addressing poverty and commit to long-term solutions rather than short-term sticking plasters, my fear is that food banks will begin to be seen as the new normal. And there is nothing normal about people not being able to afford something as essential as food. The generational trauma I have witnessed of seeing a grandma, a mum and her daughter from the same family, sitting in a food bank together, waiting for food they didn't get to choose for themselves, is horrifying.

Our next government needs to give us hope. We know what needs to change but we need the decision makers to take action. And only when that happens will I be able to close our doors for good.

Cass Francis helps run Southend Foodbank, but wants political action taken on poverty so that people won't have to rely on them in future



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BIRD'S WORDS



There's no debate - the cult of personality serves no purpose

How impolite do things have to get before we can get to the so-called truth? I watched the Starmer/Sunak debate last week and realised that it was fraught from the start. You can't ask two professional politicians who are seriously ambitious about the next election to debate coolly, when among the audience are many who have been injured by the political and economic processes of the last dozen years or more.

That adversarial kind of TV is a joke anyway, an extension of the joke that you have in the Commons at Prime Minister's Questions. The contest of the shouting mouths. If we were sure that we needed to elect shouting mouths – talking and disagreeingly mocking leaders – then 'Combatants' TV might be a good way of establishing the skills necessary for that leadership. If you were watching the Rugby World Cup last summer you could have seen the fore-runner of last week's first debate when the New Zealand All Blacks came out to mock and threaten the opposing side with their warriors' ritual. But there was of course a true purpose to these insulting gestures and sounds: to demonstrate their prowess ahead of the game. I didn't see political prowess or any kind of transferable skill shown on last week's piece of theatrical TV. No one, as my Irish mother would have said, "came off handsome" – that is, impressive.

Last week's debate doesn't get you very far down the line to understanding what these two leaders have planned for us if they get the levers of power again, or for the first time. The incumbent defending their record whilst the aspirant defends their ability to take the country somewhere new. An insulting few weeks are before us. But will we at

the end be any the wiser in our decision making? Abraham Lincoln, in the early days of trying to rise from being a dirt-poor local politician, would I believe wrestle with political opponents; and in those rough-hewn days never lost a contest. It probably did him no harm as he rose to become the 16th president of the United States. Last week's wrangle was a variation on that theme. But the world has got more serious since then, and the fate of the UK will not be decided by big mouth over small mouth.

What will decide our future together in these isles will be who looks out for our security, laying down defences against world events. And who will address the appalling waiting lists for hospitals while we face a bigger demand for health provision than ever before. We have more sick, more old, more depressed and more poor than we can cope with. 'More of the same' seems to have disappeared as a viable option some years ago. It seems to be a question, not of being able to stay as we were, but of a future of increasing troubles. If only we were seeing 'more of the same' then we could at least arrest our decline. But we

THIS WEEK JOHN WILL BE

Reading:

Endgame 1944 by Jonathan Dimbleby

Listening:

Visions by Norah Jones

Doing:

Finishing my new work 'Westminsterism is a big issue'

Watching:

Nothing

Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak's first televised election debate got heated, but ultimately lacked real substance



are not. I think the debate has become so passionately angled because the Liz Truss meltdown really did add new fears for all of us. Could such a piece of political ambition by a new prime minister create such havoc in the money markets that it did actually create more poverty? Instant poverty? Are we that exposed? How much of our future is tied up in political personality? Shouldn't we actually encourage such crap debating as last week's TV debate to show the underside of who we're voting for? So rational decisions can be made because we've seen what a personality does to money markets and therefore to savings and cost of living increases.

Boris Johnson, defeated by his own personality, was replaced by another personality who led us towards economic meltdown. We need a new personality to replace the existing one; or simply stick with the existing one. So it seems that the cost of living crisis grew out of political ambition. Out of a 'choosing the right personality' contest. So the TV squabble may have served a purpose. Let's find out how rational a person is, so to say, by bombarding them with questions from an injured audience and then over-talk them. Yet what is glaringly obvious is that the NHS is overwhelmed by the sheer volume of sick people in society. And that behind it all is the fact that there are too many people in poverty and that poverty is the biggest cause of illness.

And we have a political elite running a governmental machine that does not address the elephant in the room: the continuation and duplication of poverty in people's lives. Robbing society of poverty by spending on the prevention of inherited poverty, and on curing poverty, rather than on maintaining people in poverty, would lead to the most productive change in our society. Yet there is precious little discussion about dismantling poverty. Or that poverty is the big bad wolf in our economy.

The UK needs to move towards a serious politics that recognises the depth of poverty and how it thwarts government plans and destroys government budgets. Our schools and our hospitals and our community are left to pick up the costs of poverty and the damage it leaves in its trail. I suggest the candidates don't allow themselves the mockery of another debate. Start honing your poverty-dismantling skills and exposing them to us all.

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LETTERS

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Bird watch

Lord Bird is right about dismantling 'Westminsterism' [Issue 1617, 27 May-02 June]. His toponymic description captures the perennial blight of government. It's a phenomenon that has long neglected the voices of those living outside the M25.

Devolution was seen as the solution, but it's pushed rural councils to financial collapse. Homelessness has skyrocketed and poverty has returned close to pre-pandemic levels. The effect has been an obscuring of accountability at a time when trust in politics is at an all-time low.

Given the impending general election, the time for radical systemic change is now to begin dismantling 'Westminsterism'.

Seth Dellow, Somerset

Public enemy

It is private schools that have destroyed the state sector, not Labour's new plans. The suggestion that taking away 'charity' tax status from the schools that breed the likes of Sunak and Johnson, and cream off some of the more academic would-be state school pupils, while using different exams to the state system to get their not-so-bright pupils into the best universities, clogging up our cities with their SUV-driving parents – is ridiculous. The 'public' schools were set up to train the bureaucrats for the empire – and the idea that these are precious institutions to be preserved is preposterous in the 21st century when we quite rightly have no empire.

Every child deserves a good education – this should not be the luxury of the privileged few, and these 'public' schools should definitely not be classed as charities. They are a throw-back to a past the rest of the world and the country should be trying to move on from. Colonial bureaucrats and corrupt politicians should have no place in our society. Any policy to raise money to improve education for all gets my vote.

@joozyboozy, Instagram

Relatable Robin

Many of us will feel for Robin Ince, who had mistaken the date of an event [Issue 1616, 20-26 May]. This can happen to more or less any of us, regardless of one's condition.

It's always wise to check and recheck dates; time moves on so quickly! Still, it's good to know that Robin was there in time and it seems that the event went well.

It's also a good idea to remove numbers from your phone if they are not needed.

Juliet Chaplin, Sutton

Weller said

In last week's cover interview [Issue 1618, 03-09 June], Paul Weller claimed Keir Starmer was a "slightly softer version of the Tory party".

Labour aren't perfect, but they are not the Tories and to say they are risks creating a dangerous state of apathy, where voters think there isn't any point in voting at all. They are pledging to renationalise those public services that are currently privatised. You'd never hear a Tory pledge that.

I find Starmer unsatisfyingly ambiguous but we live in a less obviously left vs right political landscape than we did in the '70s '80s or even the '90s and that's probably why we have a more opaque Labour Party. I would love to see a return to old Labour but I think the world has moved on sadly. I would still choose Starmer over Sunak.

@amandarussellpictures, Instagram

ISSUE 1618
Paul Weller's
never lost his
roots - such
a great fella
and musician.

@chrismachargrave



State of denial

I am incredulous that our so-called incumbent government (I use the term loosely) dares to claim benefits are a lifestyle choice.

Carers, single parents, and those with mental health and physical health issues need governmental support, and not the cynical attitudes permeating now!

This bunch of loonies has no idea of the reality for many, who face evictions, ever-increasing costs and low wages. Despite the increase in the minimum wage, many unscrupulous companies use this as a benchmark of what to actually pay workers, a constant erosion of workers' rights, poverty is the legacy of this government.

We need to get this horror show out of Number 10 and replace it with a government for the people, by the people!

AC Zacharski

Paul Weller said "this country is run by idiots and fools" in our recent cover feature. He is sceptical about Keir Starmer as PM

Rented out

I'm a landlord, I'm selling my properties as and when my tenants give notice and leave (voluntarily). I'm doing so because of the red tape and government hostility towards landlords. I've always been a caring and responsible landlord dealing directly and quickly with all my tenants' requests.

I've never evicted a tenant, so why is everyone so against me and those like me, and leaving me no option but to sell up? There are thousands of landlords doing the same, so there are going to be no homes to let in the private sector soon.

Kevin Parsons, York



An URGENT appeal to Big Issue readers

In just **one day**, people can lose everything and become refugees...

MAKE TODAY THE DAY YOU DECIDE TO HELP.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, exists to protect refugees. The number of people needing protection is growing rapidly, leaving UNHCR's lifesaving humanitarian work seriously underfunded. Recent years have seen multiple emergencies where, in just one day, people's lives have changed forever as they were forced to flee their homes and become refugees.

On **24 February 2022** Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, displacing millions of people. Tatiana, from Kharkiv, describes the scene she woke to:

"We looked out the window and saw smoke, fire, explosions. In an hour or two there were tanks under our windows. We realised we had to leave but had nowhere to go. We didn't know what to do. We didn't know where we were going."

On **6 February 2023**, a series of earthquakes killed over 55,000 people in Türkiye and Syria, and destroyed tens of thousands of homes. UNHCR teams on the ground sprang into action, providing items such as 31,600 tents, 45,000 sleeping bags and over 100,000 thermal blankets in Türkiye.

Just two months later, on **15 April 2023**, the escalation of conflict in Sudan saw millions forced to flee in fear of their lives. UNHCR's emergency response teams welcomed refugees at Sudan's borders, providing them with shelter and lifesaving essentials.

Türkiye/Syria and Sudan were amongst 43 emergencies declared in 2023. Many, such as Sudan, are continuing to force more people from their homes. That's why **UK for UNHCR is asking Big Issue readers if you will make today, the day that you take action to help refugees.**

A gift of £96 today could provide a family of four with a lifesaving Emergency Rescue Kit containing the essentials they need to survive far from home.

When bombs are falling and bullets flying, people often escape with only the clothes on their backs. Your support today can ensure that the next day people are forced to flee, UNHCR can be there to provide the humanitarian aid that could save their lives.



A UNHCR team member leads Rohingya refugees to safety after they were forced to flee their homes in Bangladesh to escape violence.

£96 could help provide a family of four with a lifesaving Emergency Rescue Kit, containing essentials such as warm clothes, shoes, bottled water and high-energy food.



GIVE TODAY visit unrefugees.org.uk/oneday-bigissue

Call **0800 029 3883**, or fill in and return the form below

I would like to give: ☐ £96 ☐ £192 ☐ £288 ☐ Other £ _____

☐ I enclose a cheque made payable to **UK for UNHCR** OR

☐ I would like to make a donation by debit/credit card

Card no. _____ Expiry date _____ / _____

Signature _____ Date _____ / _____ / _____

☐ Tick here, if you don't want to receive an acknowledgement by post P24ODABI1

Title _____ First name _____ Last name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Provide your details below to receive updates by email and/or phone on the impact of your support and how you can donate and help in other ways.

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Phone _____

Please return this form along with your cheque to:

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Increase your donation by 25p for every £1 you donate

☐ I would like UK for UNHCR to claim Gift Aid on this donation (currently 25p for each £1 donated), as well as any donations I make in the future and have made in the past four years to UK for UNHCR, until I notify you otherwise. I confirm I am a UK taxpayer and I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand that council tax and VAT do not qualify. If your circumstances change or you have any questions, please contact our **Supporter Care Team** on **0800 029 3883** or email supportercare@unrefugees.org.uk The Gift Aid claimed will be used to fund the whole of UK for UNHCR's work. *giftaid it*

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A minimum of 75% of your gift will directly help displaced and refugee families, funding Emergency Rescue Kits and other humanitarian interventions

United Kingdom for UNHCR is a registered charity in England and Wales (1183415).



Make today the day you help save a life. Scan now to give online.



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency
United Kingdom for UNHCR

P24ODABI1

Interview: Isabella McRae, Big Issue Senior Reporter

Photography by Louise Haywood-Schiefer for Big Issue, London, 29 May 2024





Emilia Clarke asked doctors to let her die when she had her first brain injury.

She thought she would never work again. She had aphasia which affected her speech, and if she could not speak, she could not act. If she could not act, she could not live.

"I didn't see any point in carrying on," the actor admits. It was the beginning of 2011 and Clarke had just finished filming the first season of *Game of Thrones*, the epic fantasy series which catapulted her to fame in her 20s for her starring role as Daenerys Targaryen, Mother of Dragons.

It was the first of two brain aneurysms which almost killed her and changed her life.

We meet in her small London office with its big wide windows and light pouring into the room. Clarke has deep eye contact beneath those beautifully expressive eyebrows, and an enormous smile.

Beyond *Game of Thrones*, she has starred in films including *Me Before You*, *Last Christmas* and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* and had stints on stage. From an outsider's view, she is living her dream and seems to adore life and the people around her.

So how does it make her feel that she wanted to give it all up?

"I get it. That was what it felt like at the time. I think if someone said to me

One of the biggest things I felt with a brain injury was profoundly alone

today that I won't be able to communicate, I would probably say the same thing. I can feel empathy for how I felt in that moment."

Her mother Jenny, sitting beside her and quietly listening to what must be painful words from her daughter, points out that many people have wonderful lives after losing their ability to communicate through a brain injury. Clarke agrees passionately.

"My entire job is reflecting life and humanity. In that moment, I felt that



CASE STUDY →

SAME YOU

The charity set up by Clarke and her mum supports people like Eddie

● **Eddie Burgess, 64, from Burnley, suffered a stroke last year. He works with adults with learning difficulties, mental health issues and those with challenging behaviours. Eddie enjoys his job but has been told after an independent assessment that he is not able to return to work for the moment.**

With my job, you definitely need to be attentive. You need to be alert. You need to be able to respond quickly if needed and you need a



good memory. You also have to be physically fast sometimes. For my job, I need to be well.

Before the stroke I had a brilliant memory, I could remember dates and it was like a set of drawers in my head. I could just open the drawer and I'd know where all the information was. Now, it's not like that. It slips, you know. The drawers are broken, let's put it that way.

A nurse was appointed from an outside agency to do an assessment. They decided that I'm not fit for work at the moment, but they can't decide when I will be fit for work. The nurse said from her experience, that she expected that the organisation I work for will want her to give a date, but she couldn't do that. She said recovering after a brain injury isn't straightforward.

I'm not 100%. Your world changes in a moment, you can't just suddenly go back.

I've got a really good manager and she's mentioned a phased return.

They said, just come back when you're ready. You know, that kind of support.

But I also feel pressure. I think it's my own pressure, really. I'm worried about finances. But then I'm a worrier, a constant worrier.

But it's having that financial back-up to be able to go back into work knowing that you have support if anything goes wrong. There's no clear information out there.

I've been fighting, scrambling about the internet, trying to find out what I can do.

I am close to retirement. I'm only a year and a half away. But before I had the stroke, I didn't want to retire. I enjoy work, as much as you can. When I first went there, I drove into the complex and I thought I want to work here, before I had even spoken with anyone.

I've worked in care for over 30 years and I've done all aspects of care. So, it's part of my life now. It's not just a job.

if I couldn't do that one thing that I can do, I couldn't see a way through it.

"If that had happened, I would have overcome it and something transformative would have happened. But I'm not going to sit here and say for one minute that the first time someone hears that, they aren't going to think: 'What's the point?'"

But there is a point. There is life beyond brain injury. There is hope.

Clarke and her mother founded their charity SameYou in 2019 to develop better mental health recovery after brain injuries and advocate for change. They are now partnering with Big Issue Recruit to support survivors and their loved ones into work with the help of BIR specialist job coaches.

"Having a chronic condition that diminishes your confidence in this one thing you feel is your reason to live is so debilitating and so lonely," Clarke, 37, recalls.

"One of the biggest things I felt with a brain injury was profoundly alone. That is what we're trying to overcome."

Around 1.3 million people in the UK are living with the effects of a long-term brain injury but there is a lack of awareness around it, which means employers often fail to provide enough support.

New polling conducted by Big Issue Group and SameYou shows that over a third of survivors felt they returned to work too soon after a brain injury, and nearly as many felt pressure from their employer to do so.

Both of Clarke's brain haemorrhages occurred between filming seasons. After the first, she was back at work within weeks, with press interviews scheduled and a return to the *Game of Thrones* set. Only a handful of her HBO colleagues had been told in the immediate aftermath.

"The first fear we had was: 'Oh my god, am I going to get fired?' The biggest problem with brain injury in my opinion is the stigma that surrounds it. People don't want to talk about it. They don't want to look at it. They get very uncomfortable."

Clarke put pressure on herself to carry out the hours in her contract, but what was worse was feeling that others were treating her as though she could not work because she was fragile.

Playing the Mother of Dragons was a saviour for Clarke.

"It was a place to put all of my emotions, thoughts, fears, love, happiness

SURVIVOR STATS ↓

In a survey conducted by Big Issue Group and SameYou, of more than 300 brain injury survivors and carers, one-third of respondents said they did not feel ready to return to their jobs after their brain injuries



77%
of people who returned to work after a brain injury did so within 12 months



56%
of survivors have struggled financially since their injury
↓
89% of whom say their financial struggles were a consequence of their injury



1 in 5 survivors who returned to work rated the support they received from their employers as 'Poor'

The top five impairments that the respondents still experience are:

Fatigue (81%)

Cognitive changes (55%)

Mood changes (45%)

Communication changes (42%)

Arm or leg weakness (38%)

49 of 289

survivors were at risk of becoming homeless following their injury

27%

of whom were made homeless

69%

of whom felt becoming homeless was a consequence of their injury



46%

of survivors have needed to claim benefits since their brain injury

↓
Over two-thirds (**68%**) of these say their benefits were not enough to cover their regular bills and expenses



61%

of brain injury survivors who returned to work feel they would have benefitted from the support of a dedicated job coach

Clarke as Mother of Dragons Daenerys Targaryen



and joy," she recalls. "I put all of it into the work. I had a reason to recover, and I think that is so fundamental. It gave me a reason to want to get better and to want to try and live a life that I am proud of."

"But I felt a huge amount of survivor's guilt. People around me were saying it's incredible I survived, and that makes you go: 'Fuck, I better do something with it.' There was a fire to keep going."

It was years before Clarke stopped being scared that she was going to

die every day. She didn't get a sense of carpe diem and was instead filled with anxiety that it was going to happen again. Then it did.

The second brain injury (in 2013) was worse. She had a bigger bleed and needed open brain surgery. Parts of her skull were replaced with titanium and she had a drain coming out of her head.

"I thought I had used up all my strength to overcome the first one and it was harder to feel hopeful," she says.

She had a wound from her scalp to the bottom of her ear, and she →



I feel very proud of my brain now in a way that I wasn't before

was unable to wash her hair. Clarke worried constantly about hitting her head and whether it was raining or too sunny – gentle prods reminding her she was ill.

Walking downstairs was a challenge. She couldn't read or watch television. She tried swimming and two strokes was too much. The first time she managed to swim a width of a small pool, she knew that she was doing better.

Clarke believes that when you go into a hospital for a brain injury "they fix your brain, but no one fixes your mind". There is little support through the recovery process because medical

services do not have the capacity or funding for it.

"They are hard pushed to even save people," Clarke says. She spent a lot of time feeling sad and anxious, which heightened the tiredness. It was fortunate that her character Daenerys was becoming more stoic, and she leant into that. Her pain became art.

Clarke went to Comic Con in San Diego quicker than she would have liked and, in front of thousands of people and cameras, she believed she was dying of another brain haemorrhage. But she did an interview with MTV anyway, thinking: "Well, if I'm going to die, I better die on live TV."

Clarke had such moments for years. She warned hair and makeup teams that she might panic that she was dying even if she was perfectly fine. Few people knew until she published an article in *The New Yorker* in 2019, alongside the launch of her charity.

In the long term, Clarke says she feels healthy. She jokes that the brain injury only robbed her of good taste in men and her sense of direction.

"The truth of it is terrifying," she says. "I'll never know what's no longer there, but I think what has happened is that my brain has grown since both brain injuries.

"I feel very proud of my brain now in a way that I wasn't before. I was never clever. I was the actor. I was the one asking for paints or to watch a movie. As I've got older, especially because of the brain injuries, I want to prove people wrong."

The only time Clarke tears up is when talking about her dad, who she lost to cancer in 2016 and who supported her right to the end. She hopes he would be proud of her now.

"As someone who has lived through the death of my dad and being at his bedside, being a patient is easy. Being the carer is hard. That is what I feel true heartbreak over, what I put my family through."

Clarke's mum is as devoted to work as her daughter. Jenny grew up in poverty and worked from 16 until she eventually became vice-president for marketing at a global management consultancy firm. As a woman, she worked harder than anyone else because she feared that it could be taken away at any moment.

Clarke still calls her mum if she needs advice on what to wear on a date and laughs most freely when

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

SameYou is partnering with Big Issue Group to support brain injury survivors and their loved ones back to work

● Big Issue Recruit will introduce specialist job coaches to support individuals on a one-to-one basis during their search for employment and beyond. BIR and SameYou call on employers to better meet the needs of people returning to work after a brain injury.

Paul Cheal, chief executive of Big Issue Group, said: "There is a clear need to create more support and pathways for those returning to work after experiencing a brain injury. We are pleased to extend the work of Big Issue Recruit to a wider group of people who face barriers to work – brain injury survivors and carers of people who have experienced a brain injury. These are often a forgotten group of people in society."

Polling shows that survivors feel a range of pressures holding them back from returning to work, including financial pressures. As Big Issue has reported, benefits

are too low for people to afford essentials and disability benefits are difficult to access, heightening stress for brain injury survivors.

It follows the government's recent proposals to drive people with long-term health conditions into work through increasingly punitive methods. Big Issue and SameYou want to see a more supportive approach.

Cheal added: "Our ambition is not only to highlight the challenges brain injury survivors encounter in returning to work, but also to bolster the support we offer candidates by adding a job coach to the Big Issue Recruit team to specialise in this area of need."

If you would like to sign up to use the service as a candidate, or to learn how your business can support people with barriers to employment into work, visit jobs.bigissue.com, email jobs@bigissue.com or call 0207 526 3200

If you have been impacted by brain injury and would like to share your story, we want to hear from you. Email us at letters@bigissue.com or visit bigissue.com

they recall anecdotes together. She knows telling her story comes at a “cost”, but she persists as she knows that her words carry weight. Her charity is driven by her star power and her family history.

Doctors also discovered two brain aneurysms in Jenny and she had to have preventative surgery. Women in their family, they explain, are susceptible.

“You don’t realise that what you’re going through isn’t just you,” Clarke says. “You feel like you’re the broken one. You’re the one who messed up, and no one’s gonna help you and, my god, why couldn’t you do better?”

“You hear someone speak about things that are relatable and it suddenly makes you realise you’re allowed to ask for help. You are allowed to want to be better.”

Clarke is still throwing herself into work as much as ever (though responds with a laugh and “no, no, no” when asked if she can tell us what she is working on next). But we do know that she will continue her commitment to her charity work at SameYou.

Does Clarke really believe she is the same since the brain injuries? She breaks out into a big, wide smile and says simply: “Better.”

“Every momentous experience brings more empathy for people and the thing I care about most is people.



CASE STUDY →

SAME YOU

Brain injury is life-changing for family members too



● **Scott Pearshouse suffered a traumatic brain injury at the age of 27 after falling 40ft.**

His family were told that if he survived, he would be in an inpatient facility for at least two years. However, the married dad-of-one, now 40, made a miraculous recovery. Just as he was about to return to work after a year, he was made redundant from his job as an electrical engineer.

I found life difficult to comprehend and couldn’t accept a different me. I applied for jobs but getting a role wasn’t the hard part; keeping the job while my brain was recovering was.

I didn’t tell anyone about my brain injury. I couldn’t let anybody know what I’d been through because I wanted to progress in this world and I didn’t want them to look at me and think of me any differently.

I decided to study part-time for a Quantity Surveying degree in 2013 while still trying to maintain employment. I completed my degree and achieved a 2:1 grading in 2016.

The highlight for me was gaining sponsoring for the university fees, along with a first-class honour for my dissertation. I also studied for my RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) Chartership and in 2019 I achieved professional membership status first time round.

I previously hadn’t told anyone within work about the injury and I had really hidden it in case it was seen as a negative. But I shared my story on LinkedIn in December, and it has been the catalyst for change. I’ve had such positive feedback, I really wasn’t expecting it. I am now a mental health ambassador for LionHeart, which provide support to RICS professionals

and their families who may be going through bad times. My journey since the dark days of 2011 has been incredible. After everything I’ve achieved, I’m now talking to you guys and I have just been part of a panel talking about mental health for RICS.

The message in my current workplace is ‘people before profit’ and I find this so refreshing. In the short time I’ve been there, they are helping me to thrive.

Hayley Pearshouse was 23 when she left work to care for Scott.

The couple, who live in the Midlands, have daughter Penelope, aged two and a half. Hayley, now 37, returned to work in a temporary role, and is now the senior lighting buyer for Sainsbury’s, Habitat and Argos.

I was at the stage when I was thinking, should we move to London, then Scott had his accident. Obviously it just threw everything up in the air because he was in hospital for so long. My work was really supportive and I changed my hours so I started at 6am and finished about 1pm.

Scott was in hospital for 17 weeks and I’d spend all day and night with him because he was really poorly. He had to have 24-hour care. It was intense.

Then Scott moved into a living facility with strict, limited visiting hours. I hated it and Scott would beg me not to leave him. Because he was so unhappy there, they said he could come home. But he’d need care. So, I handed my notice in that day. My dad had been a carer and he said to me, you’re so young. Do you want to be a carer? I said no, I don’t. But I love him and no one else is going to do that job as well as me.

I went back to work after a year. I took a maternity cover role as an assistant for a buying team and they asked me about the gap in my CV. I said I’d taken a year off to care for my partner and he’d just recently gone back to work and they understood.

I was trying to build my career because I was thinking if this doesn’t work out for Scott and he can’t hold down a job, I need to get a good job so that I can support us. It’s been a tough 13 years but we’ve always tackled things together.

Today, we’re happy and I am super proud of him. Scott is now really enjoying his career. And I absolutely love what I do.

← Emilia with her mum Jenny

Find out more about SameYou, including how to help and get help, at sameyou.org

Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393 (open 9am-6pm, Monday-Friday, except bank holidays); Welfare benefits line: 0300 222 5782 (open 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday, except bank holidays)

@IsabellaMorae

'Storytelling is the soul of activism'



*Nobel Prize-winning activist Malala Yousafzai talks to Big Issue about her new documentary, *Bread & Roses*, which shows the brutal realities of life for Afghanistan's women under the Taliban*

By Adrian Lobb

● *Bread & Roses*, executive produced by Nobel Peace Prize-winning activist Malala Yousafzai, is a film of resilience and resistance. It was shot by women in Afghanistan living under extreme oppression following the Taliban takeover in 2021, and shows them coming together to fight for their rights.

Yousafzai knows all about fighting for the rights of girls and women living under oppressive regimes. Her activism in Pakistan saw her become the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate at just 17. She continues to inspire millions.

Yousafzai, now 26, is increasingly combining her activism with filmmaking.

"Most people know me as an advocate for girls' education. I started producing films and working in the entertainment space because I believe that storytelling is the soul of activism," she tells Big Issue. "I know this from my own life and how much my story has resonated with people around the world. It really helped galvanise support for girls' education and I'm hoping that *Bread & Roses* does the same for women and girls in Afghanistan."

Work, bread and education should not be too much for anyone to demand. Yet after the Taliban took power, women's basic freedoms were immediately restricted. The film centres on the experience of three women – Dr Zahra Mohammadi, a dentist; activist Taranom Seyedi; and Sharifa Movahidzadeh, a former government employee now forced to stay at home.

Seyedi courageously films a group of protesters. One protest leader explains what is at stake when girls' education and freedoms are restricted: "They had dreams of becoming doctors, engineers, teachers. It's tragic that our girls are stuck at home. They had dreams."

The protest, like so much in the country, is broken up with violence. "Don't politicise education," plead the women, but the armed Taliban pay no heed. It's heartbreaking and enraging. Yet, as the news cycle churns ever onwards, the ongoing situation endured by women and girls in Afghanistan has been moved off the front pages and out of the public consciousness.

Yousafzai wants us to see what is happening in Afghanistan. She wants us to *really* see it. And to fully understand that we can never get used to this situation and must never ignore it.

"I want viewers to take away that what they see in the film is not normal," she says. "When people talk about Afghanistan or Pakistan, they assume that this is how life is in these parts of the world. When women are systematically oppressed, we should not excuse that based on religion and culture."

"Before the Taliban resumed control, women were in positions of power in Afghanistan... government officials and judges. That is why so many women are continuing to risk their safety and speak out, because they know that there is no basis for taking away their rights."

Actor Jennifer Lawrence was so moved by news reports at the time of the Taliban takeover that she and Justine Ciarrocchi, her partner at Excellent Cadaver Productions, began looking for a filmmaker to helm a documentary.

They found director Sahra Mani, the very definition of a courageous filmmaker, whose 2018 documentary, *A Thousand Girls Like Me*, followed Khatera, an Afghan woman in her fight to bring her sexual abuser father to justice. And Mani was already at work on *Bread & Roses*, which Lawrence and Ciarrocchi then backed. A show of female solidarity behind a film showcasing and celebrating female solidarity.

"I am so grateful to Jennifer for putting her name, resources and energy behind this film," says Yousafzai. "We don't see these kinds of stories on screen as often as I would like and it takes people like her to make that happen."

Malala Yousafzai (above left) was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in the Swat Valley in 2012

For Yousafzai, the women's video diaries echoed her own story of struggle and survival.

"If you experience life under terrorism, the only thing you wish for is that it will never happen again," she says.

"When I first watched *Bread & Roses*, I understood the mindset of the women in the film. What I experienced in the Swat Valley, Pakistan from 2007 to 2009, is very similar to what Afghan women are facing.

"But for them it has been a longer period of time and this is the second time the Taliban have gained control. I know how terrifying your daily life becomes. You don't know when it will end. You have nothing left to lose, so you risk your life to speak out with the hope that someone will hear your story."

Though the film is a difficult watch, the courage on display offers hope.

"While it is devastating to watch these women's lives deteriorate under the Taliban, it is also inspiring to see the bravery that Zahra, Sharifa and Taranom display and that they recorded their lives for the world to witness," Yousafzai concludes.

"*Bread & Roses* is not just a story of loss. It is a story of hope. The documentary shows these women coming together to organise and march in front of the Taliban to call for their freedom, to be able to work and for their daughters to learn. I am inspired by their courage and determination."

Bread & Roses is streaming globally from 21 June on Apple TV+ @adey70



(Above, l-r) Justine Ciarrocchi, dentist Zahra Mohammadi, Jennifer Lawrence and director Sahra Mani; (below) Taranom Seyedi is one of the activists who risked her life to film protests on her phone

Women's work

Director Sahra Mani and producer Justine Ciarrocchi discuss the solidarity, on film and behind the scenes, that made new documentary *Bread & Roses*



JUSTINE CIARROCCHI: When Kabul fell to the Taliban again in August 2021, Jen [Lawrence] had a pretty immediate reaction. She asked us to find an Afghan filmmaker and offer resources for them to capture what was happening in real time. We stumbled upon *A Thousand Girls Like Me*, which was Sahra's last documentary and one of the most poignant, stunning docs I've ever seen. We got to work tracking her down, which took a few weeks. She was already collecting footage from women on the ground, so we said, we'll raise money and get you some resources, please go make a movie.

SAHRA MANI: When Kabul collapsed, so many women lost their jobs. Many didn't get their salary for the last six months under the previous corrupt government and some were the only breadwinner in the family. They had to feed their children but also wanted to demonstrate for their rights. I knew some of the protagonists. They started sending me videos. These women want to raise their voice and take their rights back from the Taliban. They trusted us to tell their story, because participating in this film was risking their lives. They took a mirror to their lives for the audience to see exactly what's happening to them.

JC: We were overwhelmed and astonished by their resilience. It's unfathomable. I can't imagine going from being a college-educated, working, free human being to not being able to walk in the streets without a chaperone. We're in awe of them. Sahra was editing the film over many months and graciously included us in her process – so I've sat with the material for so long. And no matter how often I rewatch this movie, it's fresh and staggering every time.

SM: In this film, you can witness that Afghan women are not waiting for someone to go there and save their life, or feel pity for them, or give them something. They are fighting for their own rights. But unfortunately, they are always the first victim of the

decisions of politician men, and the first target of international terrorists called the Taliban. Because they know women are powerful.

JC: We're filmmakers. We're not politicians. We can't write policy. But Jen can offer a platform to issues that are worthy of it. It's a big part of what she feels is her responsibility as a storyteller. So for us, it's about giving Sahra a platform, giving these women a platform, spreading some awareness so people who are in power can make better decisions for these women.

SM: We trust the power of cinema as an important tool for change in all societies. Especially, in Afghanistan, where education is a privilege. As Afghan woman, going to school was a golden opportunity – and it was not given to us. We had to fight for it. In almost every corner of this world, it's a simple part of life to go to school. But we have to risk our life and fight for future generations. So many women went to Kabul and asked for bread and education. Not all of them survived. So many women disappeared. So when these women go onto the street and protest, they know they might never go back home.

JC: When we receive news, it's been sanitised through a western lens. It felt like there was a real opportunity to cut straight to the bone with this film. The fact these women shot the film themselves felt like a rare opportunity to create space for them to tell their story exactly as they wanted to.

SM: As a citizen of this world, we need solidarity. Women's rights in Afghanistan and human rights in the world are not separate. The Taliban take education from women in Afghanistan because they want to keep the mother of the family illiterate so it is easier to take their sons as soldiers. Then it will not just be Afghanistan's problem any more. It will be a world problem. Not today, but soon. I'm worried that in the next years, Afghanistan will become a place producing terrorists into the world.

JOHN CALE

The teen viola prodigy went from a Welsh mining village to NYC and changing rock'n'roll with The Velvet Underground



I think 16 was my teddy boy era. I only dabbled in it. But it was about getting the right haircut and figuring how to keep your hair upright for hours. But it was really a quest for young ladies and charming them. I chased them a bit – I was fascinated, like everybody else my age. And there was a weird dodge I was doing between soccer and rugby. I was so focused on music that I wanted to avoid injuries and not lose too many teeth. So I went for football because it was less dangerous. And it worked.

My family were ensconced in music. My uncles were all plugged into a musical parameter that really meant a lot to me. One of my uncles was a composer, some of them were coalminers. My father was a coalminer. Variety is the spice of life. And I really liked all the varieties of music that were around. The local cinema in Garnant had suddenly popped up with *Rock Around the Clock* with Bill Haley. So all the kids in the area were full of it, jumping up on the stage, dancing. It was frowned on, but it was great.

There was a school orchestra and I really wanted to play the violin. But they ran out so I learnt the viola. It was by fortune, not by design. Until I got the viola, I was a timpani player and I'd whack away at these tubs as loudly as I possibly could. But it wasn't a great, combative place to be in the orchestra. You were only busy for a little bit and then you'd have to stop playing. Most timpani parts were rigorously patrolled.

I was already heading towards the avant garde. I was playing a lot of viola. I picked it up fairly quickly and I got to play the Telemann viola concerto with the school orchestra. I wasn't sure if music could be a career. But I kept pushing the viola. On Saturdays I'd get the train to Cardiff to the music school. The National Youth Orchestra of Wales was great for me. And at my local book library, a little miners' community library, you could ask for the score of anything and they would get it sent up from Marylebone Public Library. So I ended up with a lot of modern music and I lapped it up. I was fascinated by it. There was a Hindemith viola concerto, a Walton viola concerto and some craziness like Paganini's violin pieces, that I played for viola. It was nuts. I didn't get very far with that. But I did toil with it. And toil is the right word.

I stayed as late as possible in school. I was 17 and still fiddling around and pushing buttons for new music. But I had to take the next step. Was it Oxford or Cambridge or another school? The local minister would run sociology classes once a week so I would go there. But I didn't

1958 THE YEAR JOHN TURNS 16

The Bridge on the River Kwai wins seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture

Hendrik Verwoerd becomes prime minister of South Africa

Bertrand Russell launches the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK

have a plan for university. I got timid – there were restrictions on what a miner's salary could stretch to and what studies you could undertake without a sponsor. But I had a sponsor. I went to the Royal Academy of Music and Goldsmiths, and it was fabulous. I started organising performances. It was exactly what I needed to do.

I was annoyingly independent and free-spirited. I would bother people with it. Once I saw the sources of all this new music that was coming out, I zeroed in on it. I wanted to continue the pursuit of all that strange music. It was coming from all parts of the world. I wanted to find out more about John Cage and Stockhausen and all these composers I followed. I was glued to it.

Waving to my mother and father as I was getting on the plane to New York in 1963 is one of those scary moments. You really wonder, am I doing the right thing. But I got a scholarship to Tanglewood [music college] and it meant a lot. This was the place where lots of up-and-coming composers went. I'd managed to catch [influential American composer] Aaron Copland's ear and explain what I wanted to do and they provided the ticket. Iannis Xenakis, who taught the masterclass in composition, was trained as an architect. He'd worked for Le Corbusier's pavilion. So his music was designed on stochastic principles [mathematical models]! It was unbelievable I could come from Garnant and be there.

I generally look back at the fun side of The Velvet Underground. One of my closest friends in the Dream Syndicate [the avant garde group formed by La Monte Young, which Cale played with from 1964] was Tony Conrad. He had introduced us to the electronic pick-up, which changed the landscape for everybody. Tony and I were at a birthday party with this collection of musicians. They'd heard we played bowed instruments. Terry Phillips, who was working for Pickwick Records, said they had an interesting experiment going on in rock'n'roll. So we all perked up. One of the people was hired as a songwriter to write songs in the style of all the hits on the charts, and that was Lou Reed. Lou offered me a cup of coffee. We talked...

We had a ball and went on a small tour up the Hudson Valley. The group was painters, sculptors, a very different group of people than you normally find with musicians. It was a florid combination of sensibilities. We used the Pickwick studio and Lou wrote the song *The Ostrich*. It didn't go anywhere but then Lou said: I've written all these other songs they won't let me record. Sure enough, that was *Heroin* and *I'm*

Waiting for the Man. I said, come on, we've got to form a band. We can't just fart around like this.

When I got into the room with The Velvet Underground, I said we had to hurry up. Iannis had taken us to Carnegie Hall to meet all the young New York composers that had made it. Everything was coming together. And I'd just got back from London where The Who and the Small Faces were doing the same thing. So we needed to get on with it. *The Ostrich* was not going to do it, but if we focused on *Heroin* and *I'm Waiting for the Man*, I knew it would go somewhere.

It felt like the centre of the artistic universe for a while. The sense of humour was rapacious but there was also a lot of generosity and goodwill. When I look back at those days, we had run into this hidden source of talent. It was the strangest collection of people but also the most inspiring. Andy Warhol and everybody there was working very hard. It was the right atmosphere.

Collaboration is not a war. It's a combination. I would tell my younger self you have to really listen to what your partner tells you. If you collaborate, you need to pay attention. Patti Smith was already a poet and had made her presence felt in the poetry scene in Lower Manhattan. Iggy Pop was just a really good entertainer. As it turned out, a lot of people understood what they were doing when we made those records, so it didn't take long to get an understanding.

I can't say I have always been clear-headed about love. A lot of it is by chance. But if you keep going, you will find the right person. That's what I'd tell my younger self. And that's where I am happy to have arrived at.

Drugs are not the creative stimulant. If you want to get where you think you are going, you are going to have to do what everybody else does, which is nose to the grindstone. You may think you are doing a lot of work, but you are not. You are really wasting time. So the sooner you understand that great fact of life, the more work you will get done.

If I could relive one day, it would be the first time we did the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Everybody was in the Dom [on St Mark's Place, on 1 April 1966]. And everybody was using broken down equipment and just making it work. It was raucous. And everything felt absolutely new. There were so many ideas. And they all had some real sparkle to them.

POPtical Illusion by John Cale is out on Domino Records on 14 June
Interview: Adrian Lobb @adey70

ONCE I SAW THE SOURCES OF ALL THIS NEW MUSIC THAT WAS COMING OUT, I ZEROED IN ON IT. I WANTED TO CONTINUE THE PURSUIT OF ALL THAT STRANGE MUSIC



▲ 1966 (L-r) Poet Gerard Malanga, artist and movie-maker Andy Warhol and Cale in NYC



► 1975 Jamming with former Velvet Underground bandmate Lou Reed

▼ 1993 Performing in London on The Velvet Underground's brief reunion tour



Put our book of conversations with inspirational women on your reading pile. Bringing together some of the most insightful, revealing and entertaining interviews to have appeared in The Big Issue over the last 15 years, *Letter to My Younger Self: Inspirational Women* is edited by Jane Graham and out now.



Demand an end to poverty this General Election

1 in 5 people in the UK live in poverty. If we speak up, this election is our chance for change.

Big Issue is calling on party leaders to commit to ending poverty by implementing five key policies within their first year in office.



**Will you add your name
to our open letter?**

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BOOKS

Your essential guide to the UK book festivals of 2024
Lauren Crosby Medlicott

FILM

Hirsutes you: things get hairy in the enjoyable *Sasquatch Sunset*
Graeme Virtue

ARTS

A play about the Kyoto Agreement shows hope can ultimately prosper
Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson

MUSIC

The Aurora Orchestra brings ecstatic revelations in a cathedral
Claire Jackson

CULTURE



ART

FREE RUNNING IN GAZA

by *Klaus Thymann*

Founded in 1985, Freedom from Torture is a human rights charity dedicated to the rehabilitation of refugees and asylum seekers who have survived torture.

Their annual open photography competition is a fundraiser which invites photographers of all ages, nationalities and technical skills to respond to a simple question – what does freedom mean to you?

A selection of the photographs will be exhibited around the UK, and a winner in each age group as well as a number of runner-ups selected by a professional jury made up of eminent photographers Kolbassia Haoussou MBE, Aisha Olamide Seriki and director of Panos Pictures Adrian Evans.

Among this year's entries is this image by esteemed Danish

photographer Klaus Thymann, titled *Free Running in Gaza*.

"Kids doing free running in Gaza," he captions the photograph, "it is an oxymoron of course and that makes you think about what freedom is."

The Velorose Gallery, London, 17-29 June; The Glasgow Gallery of Photography, Glasgow, 17-23 June; 44AD artspace, Bath, 14-16 June; freedomphotocompetition.co.uk

Books



By Jane Graham, *Big Issue Books Editor*

SPONSORSHIP STANDOFF

DO OUR FESTIVALS HAVE A FUTURE?

● Book festivals have a flattering reputation for camaraderie and intellectual exchange. Those of us who annually attend major festivals like Edinburgh or Hay look forward to losing ourselves in the heady buzz created by hundreds of book lovers hoping to score a friendly spat over Rushdie vs McEwan, or Mantel vs Erpenbeck.

Conversations are fiery – readers are usually passionate and informed people – but the atmosphere is rarely too spiky to rule out another convivial glass of red. This year, though, the mood has changed. International geopolitics has entered with a controversy so combustible it threatens the continued existence of many festivals.

Several weeks ago a number of writers, including singer Charlotte Church and comedian Nish Kumar, pulled out of the Hay book festival citing links its main sponsor Baillie Gifford has to Israel and fossil fuel companies. The investment management group looks after £225 billion of global funds. British Pakistani writer Noreen Masud, who also pulled out, said she was shocked that Baillie Gifford “invests more than £10bn in companies complicit in Israel’s occupation of Palestine”. After two days of the furore, Hay organisers announced a suspension of the sponsorship.

A few days later the Edinburgh International Book Festival, which takes place every August, announced the end of its 20-year partnership with Baillie Gifford for the same reason. And just last week the popular Borders Book Festival followed suit, with a regretful statement that said “Without the support of Baillie Gifford we would not have been

able to mount such a vibrant and varied children’s festival.” The company have since removed their backing for the Cheltenham Book Festival. Their support for literature events across Britain, and the crisis pulling that support will bring, is clear. The regretful nature of Borders’ statement echoes the tone of Hay’s and Edinburgh’s; both stressed that the relationship has been a significant factor in their survival. Edinburgh’s festival director, Jenny Niven, said she was sorry to part ways with Baillie Gifford and had only done so due to “intolerable” pressure. For its part, Baillie Gifford stressed that only 2% of client money is invested in fossil fuels, at clients’ requests. It also adds: “The assertion that we have significant amounts of money in the occupied Palestinian territories is offensively misleading.”

The company continues to sponsor a number of book festivals including Cambridge and Wigtown, but this is dwindling and there is understandable concern that more splits may follow. There is also anxiety about sponsorship in the arts in general, if every sponsor is to be investigated and, if found politically wanting, highlighted in the press and social media as an enemy.

So this year, when you pull up a chair in the sun to share your theory about Richard Osman’s popularity, treasure every moment. The future of British book festivals is as shaky as its ever been. Let’s hope peace between warring factions can be achieved in time. In the meantime, here is a list of book festivals. Funding permitting.

@Janeannie

The essential guide to book Festivals 2024

Words: Lauren Crosby Medlicott

1. ESSEX BOOK FESTIVAL

Until 30 June

Essex

Rather than hosting at just one venue, the festival hosts more than 100 events spreading over 40 venues all over Essex, from libraries to lightships. Set to headline the month-long event is Dr Sarah Perry, Essex University chancellor, with her highly anticipated new novel *Enlightenment*. An expected highlight is a parade of 500 flags celebrating hidden gems of the east coast, proceeding from St Leonard-at-the-Hythe church on Hythe Hill to the university campus.

essexbookfestival.org.uk

2. BORDERS BOOK FESTIVAL

13-16 June

Harmony Gardens, Melrose

Highlights will include celebrated comedians Janey Godley and Jo Caulfield, who will discuss their memoirs, and Labour shadow cabinet member Wes Streeting. The festival features a dedicated food village and a range of free family activities to enjoy on a day out in Melrose. Organisers have committed to zero waste to landfill, e-ticketing and a tree-planting donation for every ticket purchased.

bordersbookfestival.org

3. BARNES CHILDREN’S LITERATURE FESTIVAL

22-23 June

Barnes, South London

The UK’s largest kids’ book festival is back with more than 100 events. Over the course of two days children will have the opportunity to engage with *The Gruffalo* illustrator Axel Scheffler, learn how to write interesting articles from *The Week Junior* team and listen to Captain Hook tell his side of the story about what really happened with Peter Pan in Neverland.

barneskidslitfest.org

4. BRADFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL

28 June-7 July

Bradford, West Yorkshire

One of the largest literature festivals in the UK, the Bradford Literature Festival considers itself Europe’s most eclectic and diverse. Topics like AI,

There is anxiety about sponsorship in the arts if every sponsor is to be investigated and, if found politically wanting, highlighted in the press as an enemy

[illegible]

llangwmlitfest.co.uk

SUMMER BOOKS *Special***11. EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL***10-25 August**Edinburgh, Midlothian*

Should all go ahead as planned, 500 events will take place over the festival. Highlights include Richard Osman talking about his new series in a worldwide exclusive interview with Ian Rankin at the festival's pop-up village and Dolly Alderton chatting about her modern novel, *Good Material*.

edbookfest.co.uk**12. NAIRN BOOK AND ARTS FESTIVAL***31 August-8 September**Nairn, Highland region*

Gaelic language events are sprinkled through this weekend of live music, drama, book chat and dance performances in the seaside town of Nairn. On the outskirts runs a fringe festival with local creative and performance groups. Two family days will include free outdoor activities for adults and children alike.

nairnfestival.co.uk**13. BLOODY SCOTLAND***13-15 September**Stirling*

Don't be put off by the name – this celebration of crime writing attracts the best authors in the genre. Past guests have included Val McDermid and Sir Ian Rankin. There's also a pitching event for aspiring authors and a hotly contested quiz.

bloodyscotland.com**14. MARLBOROUGH LITERATURE FESTIVAL***26-29 September**Marlborough, Wiltshire*

Set in the picturesque market town of Marlborough, the long weekend offers a chance to immerse in literary arts while meeting fellow book lovers and discovering new perspectives. Sarah Perry, Robert Peston and Martin Sixsmith are the first guests who've been announced, with a long list of others to come.

marlboroughlitfest.org**15. NORTH CORNWALL BOOK FESTIVAL***26-29 September**St Endellion, Cornwall*

An intimate event curated by best-selling author Patrick Gale, the festival welcomes attendees to engage with author events, live music, workshops and an art exhibition on and around the ancient St Endellion hamlet. Expect signing sessions with

favourite authors and advice surgeries for emerging authors.

endellion.org.uk/north-cornwall-book-festival**16. BATH CHILDRENS' LITERATURE FESTIVAL***27 September-6 October**Bath, Somerset*

Books and stories will come to life through narrative readings of kids' favourite plot lines and characters. Workshops in the past have included creative writing sessions, illustration masterclasses and storytelling activities.

bathfestivals.org.uk/childrens-literature**17. WIGTOWN BOOK FESTIVAL***27 September-6 October**Wigtown, Dumfries & Galloway*

Wander through Scotland's national book town to find a festival of books, music, theatre, food and visual arts. A bagpipe procession through the second-hand bookshop-lined streets, followed by fireworks and a hog roast kicks off 10 days of 200 events and activities.

wigtownbookfestival.com**18. CHELTENHAM LITERATURE FESTIVAL***4-13 October**Montpelier Gardens, Cheltenham*

For 10 days, book lovers can drift through Montpelier Gardens to hear from some of the most talked about authors and discover brand new writers. While some events are ticketed, free family activities and fringe events are scattered through the Regency town.

cheltenhamfestivals.com/literature**19. WELLS FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE***18-26 October**Wells, Somerset*

Entries are flying in for the four international writing competitions which will be judged during the festival. The literary quiz and lunches were last year's highlights, alongside talks from guests including Emily Kenway.


wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk**20. BRIDPORT LITERARY FESTIVAL***3-9 November**Bridport, Dorset*

Inspired by the Bridport Prize for short story writing and poetry, the festival is celebrating its 20-year anniversary. The Bridlit Bursary offers £9,000 to two local Year 13 students who intend to apply for an undergraduate course.

bridlit.com

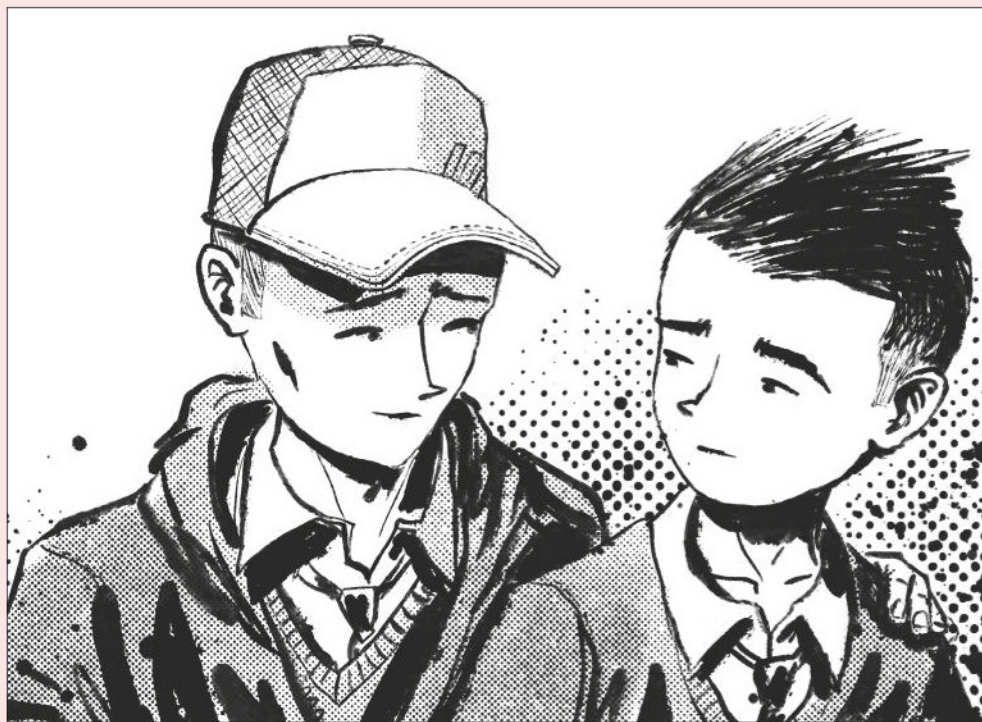
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

How fiction can help children understand poverty*By Tom Percival*

 **The Wrong Shoes** is my first full-length novel for children (ages 8+) and explores the crushing challenges facing children living in poverty today. The story is narrated by the main character, 12-year-old Will, whose father has been injured in an accident and is unable to find a job. Everything seems to be spiralling out of control for Will as his family's debts pile up and any hope of achieving his dreams, or even just getting by seem to be fading.

According to the Child Poverty Action Group, 4.2 million children were living in poverty in the UK in 2021/2022. That's one in three children, like Will, who struggle through no fault of their own, whose options in life will be severely limited. It's hard to focus when you're cold, tired and hungry. It's difficult to build confidence when your peers have all the right clothes, experiences and shoes, and you don't. It's also unlikely that you'll become the expert footballer you might have the talent to be, or to develop your musical skills to their full potential without additional clubs or training. These things usually involve money and always involve time – two commodities struggling families are unlikely to have.

One of the key themes of *The Wrong Shoes* is the idea of choice. Will is forced to make several decisions; some he makes well, others he doesn't. I wanted to communicate that when your financial resources are limited, so are your options. Your range of choices can be affected in a more dangerous way too. When you're desperate, the things you might choose to do to get by stretch out

SUMMER BOOKS *Special*

into areas that someone in a more comfortable position would never consider. This is where Will finds himself. Is he willing to compromise to help get his family out of trouble?

When I was young, there were times when my family didn't have much money, so I can empathise with Will, but *The Wrong Shoes* is in no way autobiographical – Will is a fictional character in a very contemporary setting that's far removed from the time I grew up. When I was young (in the 1980s and '90s) it felt like there was more support. There was a robust youth-care provision in the town where I lived; classes and workshops were put on at subsidised rates – some were free – so they felt accessible, even to families with less money. I received a grant to help me attend university, there were no tuition fees, libraries weren't being closed down, and housing and living costs were all proportionally smaller.

A few years ago, I read a document called *We Can Solve Poverty* by a charity called The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which outlined the steps that need to be taken and made it clear that with sufficient will (and crucially, financial investment) it CAN be done. That document was part of what inspired me to write this book – you must believe that change is possible to be able to bring it about. You must have hope. And despite its challenging subject matter, there is hope in *The Wrong Shoes*. Even though there are subtle threads of something almost approaching magic woven through Will's story, there is no sudden 'fairy tale' ending to the book. Just

You must believe that change is possible. You must have hope. And despite its challenging subject matter, there is hope in *The Wrong Shoes*

like in real life, the positive changes to Will's situation are hard-won and gradual, whereas any negative changes fall as suddenly as an avalanche.

Books enable us to see into lives we have no awareness of, and they also can reflect our own situations back at us, making us feel seen. I hope that any child who reads this book and is currently struggling will take Will's resilience, determination and hope to heart and will keep going, keep working as hard as they can to do the best that they can, despite the obvious unfairness of it all. It's also my hope that any children who read this book and don't have experience of Will's situation might be able to reflect upon the additional challenges that Will faces, and by extension, the situations that some of their peers will be struggling with.



The Wrong Shoes by Tom Percival is out now (Simon & Schuster, £12.99)

TOP 5 CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Five great new summer reads for young enquiring minds

1 *Bird Boy*

by Catherine Bruton (Nosy Crow, £7.99)
Age 9-12



A harrowing but hopeful tale about the healing bond between a troubled boy and the bird he saved.

2 *Alyssa and the Spell Garden*

by Alexandra Sheppard, illustrated by Bex Glendining (Faber & Faber £7.99)
Age 9-12



A fantastical tale in which young Alyssa discovers she has strong magical powers – but they don't always do what she wants them to do!

3 *The Cheat Book (vol.1):*

by RAMZEE
(Hodder Children's Books, £7.99)
Age 8-12



A brilliantly funny book about a shy refugee boy who works out how to blag his way through school, in and out of class.

Recommended by Cressida Cowell.

4 *Up High*

by Matt Hunt (Nosy Crow, £7.99)
Age 2-5



A little boy feels like he's flying when he's on his dad's shoulders. But a walk to the park proves some of the most interesting parts of nature can only be inspected if you're small.

5 *Champ*

by Payam Ebrahimi, illustrated by Reza Dalvand (Greystone Kids, £12.99)
Age 5-8



This beautifully illustrated book tells the touching story of a young boy with an artistic spirit born into a family of experienced sports people who expect him to follow in their footsteps.

SUMMER BOOKS *Special*

YES FESTIVAL

Letters
to Molly

Every 16 June, literary lovers flock to Dublin for Bloomsday – a celebration of Irish writer James Joyce's masterpiece Ulysses. The novel follows a day in the life of salesman Leopold Bloom as he runs errands, eats and drinks around the city, his path crossing with academic Stephen Dedalus. On Bloomsday the streets teem with those following in Bloom and Dedalus's footsteps. But this year, a new Derry-Londonderry festival, YES, shifts the focus to Bloom's wife Molly, whose sleepless, stream-of-consciousness thoughts close the novel. Big Issue asked some of the festival's participants what keeps them awake at night.



FLOR MacCARTHY

Training and development coordinator with Women for Election



How do we decide who gets our votes? How can we trust what we read?

The cacophony on social media often means that the loudest wins. I use 'he' deliberately here. 'Far right' groups (often anti-choice, anti-immigration, anti-LGBT+, climate change and Covid deniers, who favour authoritarian, strongman politics) are dominated by men: the so-called white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Incredibly, Ireland still stands at no 103 on the global list for women's representation in politics. This, despite the contribution of revolutionary women who fought for our independence more than a century ago.

Women for Election help support women to run for election. In the past year, we've run workshops with hundreds of candidates, many now on the ballot papers. Despite the disinformation; despite the threats (usually worse against women); despite the barriers for women to enter politics (culture, cash, candidate-selection, childcare and confidence), women

are coming forward to represent their communities in the greatest numbers ever (more than 655 women candidates in the local elections on 7 June).

We make up 50% of our population but have only one-quarter of the seats at the decision-making tables. It is not revolutionary to say that we, as a society, must now fix this democratic deficit. We need to vote the talented, strong and capable women who have come forward into power.

BARONESS SHAMI
CHAKRABARTI

Barrister, human rights campaigner, former director of Liberty and Labour peer



The grave threat to our fundamental rights and freedoms keeps me awake at night. After World War

II the international community united to enshrine fundamental rights. They protected privacy, fair trials and free speech and outlawed torture, slavery and discrimination. Their goal was greater global justice, equality and peace. Universal human rights as reflected in the European Convention on Human Rights have been so important to Ireland, not least for their unifying effect and



SUMMER BOOKS *Special*

because they are baked into the precious Good Friday Agreement. That settlement is now under attack, just as we are threatened by war, inequality, new tech and climate catastrophe, crises human rights can help us address. To believe in human rights is to believe in human beings. If they – and we – are to survive, these rights must be owned and understood by everyone.

Human Rights: The Case for the Defence
by Shami Chakrabarti is out now
(Penguin, £20)

MARTINA DEVLIN

Novelist and newspaper columnist, curating the No Ordinary Women strand of YES



My nine-year-old tabby Chekhov sees me as his serf which is the natural master-slave dynamic

between cats and humans a view hardwired in him at birth and involves Chekhov regularly waking me around 4am to unlock the back door then open the garden gate to allow him to patrol the neighbourhood an essential element of his feline duties as the local top cat he rips me from the arms of Morpheus by reaching up and inserting his paw beneath the duvet and applying the tip of one claw to the padded underside of my big toe exerting precisely enough pressure to startle me awake but not sufficient to break the skin and in so acting makes my mind a house divided while one side of my brain admires his judicious use of power to achieve his ends the other half of my mind wishes he'd use the cat flap installed specifically to give him independence but if wishes were horses beggars would ride as my granny always said and consequently a puss with a formidable sense of mission allied to a reluctance to avail of a cat flap designed to cater for him and no other is mostly what keeps me awake at night because once roused I struggle to sink back to sleep and at that point I sometimes fret about climate change and the fate of the planet although equally I might lie in bed fuming about an unused cat flap.

Flor MacCarthy and Baroness Chakrabarti are among the speakers at No Ordinary Women, curated by Martina Devlin as part of YES, a new all-women festival in Derry-Londonderry and Donegal, 13-16 June. yesderry.com

Above right: Paperchains project workers (from left) director Jo Billingham, co-founder David Kendall, actor, writer and contributor Gary, and AG Smith



When prison libraries break down walls

By Brontë Schiltz

To many, AG Smith is the Librarian – the creative force behind ghostly storytelling project Weeping Bank. But the author, who in 2020 and 2022 spoke to Big Issue about Paperchains, a creative project through which prisoners shared their experiences of lockdowns, also works in prison libraries across the UK.

That began when Smith was working for a landscaping firm that trained ex-offenders. “The very last apprentice we took on had spent some time in [young offender institution] Brinsford,” he says. “He said to me that it saved his life. He was only in there for about six months, but was taken on by the farms and gardens team. I started to think, how interesting would it have been to be one of many people who would have maybe helped to set him on a different route?”

Smith began to look for prison jobs and, fortuitously, a librarian role came up at Brinsford.

“There were 16-to-18-year-olds in the prison, it’s not necessary a population that’s used to going to the library, so I started to make it look more like a newsagent, he says. “Everything was displayed face-on. I thought, well, the lads are used to shopping in that way.”

He then worked with the National Literacy Trust on the Six Book Challenge, “encouraging new emergent readers to read six books, filling in a reading diary as they went along. That was brilliant. It had never been done in a young offender institution before and the challenge aspect really appealed to the lads.”

This led to a second collaboration with the Trust, Books Unlocked, which provides prisoners with copies of a Booker Prize shortlisted or longlisted title to read, discuss and keep. He selected *Pigeon English* by Stephen Kelman because he “felt the subject matter would resonate”.

But he “faced many, many obstacles, including the group itself – these lads didn’t know one another. There was a lot of tension sometimes, so the early sessions were very much me building trust. I just read to them for the first two sessions, gave them plenty of coffee and biscuits. And by about the third day, they were absolutely hooked, and all of a sudden, one of the lads said, ‘I’ll read for a bit,’ so I sat back, and after that, I probably never read another page.”

Following the success of the project, Kelman visited the prison. “It felt like that was a way of breaking down those walls,” Smith says. “If we’re going to work towards helping to reduce reoffending, people have got to reintegrate into the community and feel like they’re part of it and valued.”

According to the National Literacy Trust, around two-thirds of the roughly 80,000 people in custody in England and Wales have the literacy skills expected of an 11-year-old. This is over four times higher than in the general population. And 47% of prisoners have no educational qualifications at all.

Prison libraries play an integral part in the teaching of literacy and functional skills that are requirements to most careers and daily life. Learning to read can reduce stress and vulnerability, improve resilience, self-confidence and future prospects.

A 2017 Ministry of Justice report shows that prisoners who took part in educational activity were 9% less likely to re-offend compared to non-library users.

Amid ongoing cuts to prison and library services, Smith’s work is vital. “People in prison need to see the impact of the decisions they’ve made, and they can explore through art, through music, through reading,” he says. “That’s where mindsets can change.”

paperchains.org @BronteSchiltz

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Film



Graeme Virtue

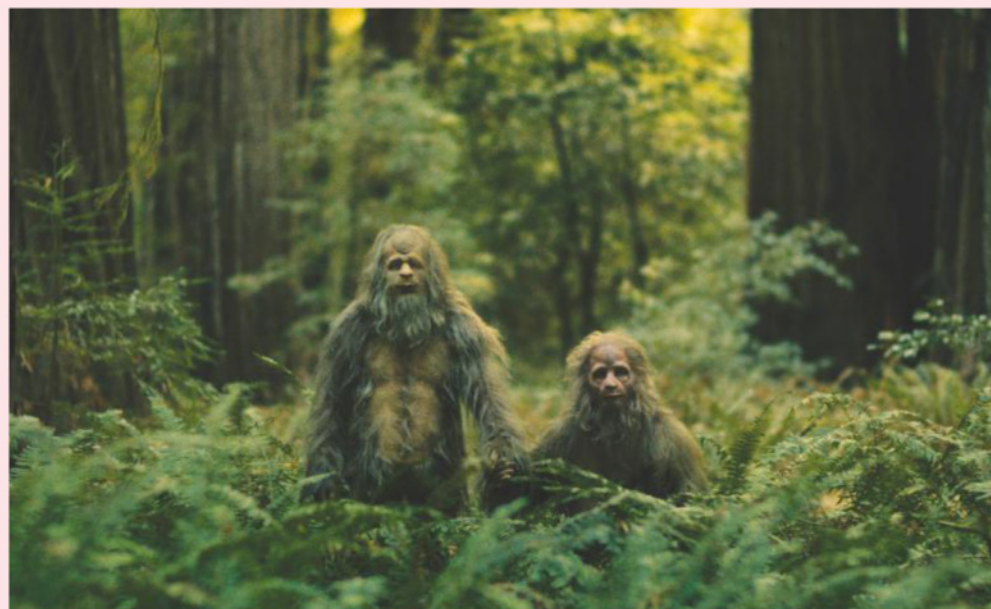
REVIEW

Things are gonna get hairy

Check your pagan calendar because there must be some sort of solstice looming for movies about the great outdoors. Whether by accident or design, this week we are getting a cluster of independent films exploring the majesty and potential lethality of untamed nature (even if the big Hollywood offering – Pixar’s *Inside Out 2* – is more concerned with a teen girl’s interior landscape).

In the agrarian thriller *Arcadian*, Nicolas Cage and his two young sons seem to be embracing the simple life on such a nice little steading you half expect Worzel Gummidge to amble into frame. But at night they must fortify their farmhouse against violent, unseen terrors desperate to claw their way inside.

The similarly unsettling low-budget horror *The Moor* dredges up disturbing memories on a bleak Yorkshire heath that has a notorious history of swallowing children whole. (A good tagline might be: “Every ramble is a gamble.”) On a rather more optimistic note, the new documentary *Wilding* adapts Isabella Tree’s 2018 bestseller about how she revitalised her kaput West Sussex estate by abandoning farming orthodoxy, ditching pesticides



Super furry animals: Jesse Eisenberg and Christophe Zajac-Denek in *Sasquatch Sunset*

and letting livestock roam free. Yet somehow the weirdest of this movie mulch bunch is not the one with Cage doing a post-cataclysm *Clarkson’s Farm*. Instead that honour falls to **Sasquatch Sunset**, a gorgeous-looking, elegiac wildlife film set deep in the US wilderness, a vast prelapsarian idyll of lush, towering forests.

It follows a year in the life of nomadic creatures rarely captured on celluloid, the camera silently observing as a family group of cryptids adapt to the changing seasons: foraging, frolicking and occasionally fornicating. Watching as these hairy humanoids instinctively care for each other – grooming each other’s coats, or gathering material for a communal nocturnal shelter – you begin to feel some cross-species kinship, akin to those glances of “meaning and mutual understanding” David Attenborough identified when in close proximity to the mountain gorillas of Rwanda.

It makes you wonder: why has no-one documented the life of the noble sasquatch before? And the answer, of course, is that they do not exist beyond hoary old legends of Bigfoot or the fun 1980s family flick *Harry and the Hendersons*. The impressive trick that *Sasquatch Sunset* pulls – via immersive cinematography, committed physical performances and a woozy post-rock score – is to get you emotionally invested in this furry gang of four snorting and grunting at each other, even though on some level you are aware that you are just watching Jesse Eisenberg from *Zombieland* mooching about in a gorilla suit.

Credit is due to bankable stars Eisenberg and Riley Keogh (from *Mad Max: Fury Road* and Prime Video’s vintage rock’n’roll drama *Daisy Jones and the Six*) for signing up for such prosthetic-heavy roles where they are totally unrecognisable as a dim but inquisitive beta male and put-upon female respectively. The family unit is rounded

out by co-director Nathan Zellner as a puffed-up, belligerent alpha male from whom we quickly learn the sasquatch sign language for sex, and Christophe Zajac-Denek as the baby of the bunch looking to find their place in the pecking order.

The film has been billed as a comedy, and there are certainly moments of silent movie-style clowning and straight-up slapstick. It also does such an effective job of mimicking the sedate, rather reverential shooting style of nature docs that when bodily functions abruptly intrude – sometimes to a hilariously scatological degree – it is truly shocking, yet also in keeping with the idea that this is an observational film interested in all aspects of sasquatch behaviour.

But just when you have it pegged as a gross-out comedy in Chewbacca drag, it captures moments of surprisingly deep emotion.

As the seasons unfold, and the family group face challenges to their cohesion and even survival, it becomes clear that even though *Sasquatch Sunset* does not feature any humans, it wants to interrogate the effect we are having on our planet, casually and cruelly encroaching on even the most remote landscapes. But despite the ways our hairy heroes look out for each other, this is not a film particularly interested in hand-holding.

Even after embedding with these wild bigfoots for a tumultuous year, you are left to draw your own conclusions about what this enjoyably eccentric but indulgent fable all means. Perhaps when it comes out on Blu-ray they should consider adding an Attenborough commentary track.

Sasquatch Sunset is in selected cinemas from 10 June. sasquatchsunsetfilm.co.uk
Graeme Virtue is a film and TV critic
@GraemeVirtue

KYOTO

Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson



'WE LOVE PUTTING THE WHOLE WORLD ON STAGE'

The creators of Little Amal, the giant puppet of a Syrian refugee who crossed the world, have a new play that asks whether the 1997 Kyoto agreement offers any hope for the future of the planet through the lens of today's political climate

By Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, founders of Good Chance and 2019 Big Issue Changemakers

Since Good Chance built its Dome Theatre in 'the Jungle' refugee and migrant camp in Calais in September 2015, we have been privileged to work all over the world creating art of all shapes and sizes, with truly incredible artists and collaborators. This ranges from our play *The Jungle*, a story of struggle and solidarity set against the backdrop of the European refugee crisis, to *The Walk*, our festival

of welcome from Syria to Glasgow with Little Amal – a three-metre-tall puppet – at its centre. We have celebrated the culture of Afghanistan by flying kites in 47 cities across four continents in the space of one day, and presented new pieces of theatre, art, music and dance in cities from Istanbul to Algiers, from Paris to Washington DC.

The golden thread which connects all our work is the belief in art's

power to connect, surprise and imagine change. In an ever more global world of increasing disagreement, fear and polarisation, sharing the same space as another person – the same air – as a heart-thumping piece of theatre explodes between, around and within you, can be an antidote to isolation and individualism. It is theatre, more than any other art form, that can encourage us out of our self-created cells and get us interested in each other and society again.

That thread extends throughout our new play. **Kyoto** charts the decade-long series of environmental negotiations which led to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which contained the world's first legally binding carbon emission targets. It's a remarkable story of humanity finally agreeing to act in the face of climate catastrophe, and of the power of possibility, compromise and hope over powerful vested interests, and that stubborn unwillingness to change present in even the best of human nature.

We were drawn to the story in part because of the burning relevance of the subject matter. Scientists say that 2023 was the warmest year in 100,000 years. We face a daily onslaught of terrifying projections of the impact of climate breakdown. And, of particular pertinence to Good Chance, many hundreds of millions of people are predicted to be displaced from their homes by 2050 as a result of climate-induced drought, famine, resource scarcity and conflict.

But what also fascinated us about this story was its incredible message of hope. The idea that nearly 200 countries, so vastly different in their backgrounds, religions, cultures and needs, could agree on something as contentious and complex as climate change was profoundly compelling. And at a time which we often feel really is a 'golden age of disagreement', when we find ourselves ever more entrenched in our tribal positions, maybe there could be something in this story which could be of relevance for us today.

It also seemed to us that the 1990s had begun to feel like a period within history, and not simply like yesterday. We were interested in exploring whether there was something about this period manifestly different to our own, and if something in those differences meant that agreement in the present day feels much less possible than it did in that decade.

And add into that the pure drama of the story. Fiendishly complex environmental negotiations might not sound like the most obvious recipe for a fun night at the theatre, but having spoken to dozens of diplomats, chief

scientists, lobbyists and world leaders who participated in the talks, we were amazed to discover it's also a political thriller, with Shakespearean levels of drama, tragedy and jeopardy. This is important for a subject which people often complain leaves them feeling depressed and powerless. One of our challenges was how to tell a story about climate change that had exactly the opposite effect: that really connected with our audience on an emotional level. That made them feel, and left them empowered and even, perhaps, hopeful.

The final, frenetic session of negotiations in Kyoto have gone down in UN history. Hundreds of countries took to the floor, proposing and debating amendments right through the night, all in the glare of the public eye: for the first time it was being live streamed using a new invention called the internet. When the chairman finally bashed his gavel at 10.15 in the morning, thousands of exhausted and bleary-eyed delegates broke down in tears and cheers of relief and joy. They had done the seemingly impossible: reached agreement. Is that something we can still find today?

Good Chance loves theatre that makes an audience sit forward rather than sit back, storytelling that compels us to lean in and become a part of it. The RSC's beautiful Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon will be transformed into a circular UN conference hall in which audience members sit alongside actors, like delegates at a negotiation. We love putting the whole world on stage, and our company is full of incredible actors from around the world who bring such a wealth of talent and experience.

We hope, when the final gavel of the play comes down, that our audience will share in that moment of impossible triumph. And that it might live on beyond the timber frame of the playhouse

Kyoto makes its world premiere in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 18 June–13 July. rsc.org.uk
goodchance.org

The cast of *Kyoto* in rehearsal



ROBIN INCE IS ON THE ROAD



I am a hypocrite. I try my best. My best is not good enough. All the above are true statements. We have 24-hour-a-day access to stories of the worst of humanity. Even then, there are many atrocities that will go unreported because they are not politically expedient or just not seen as fitting the entertainment quotient of the news. We are overwhelmed and yet only seeing a fraction of the horror of the world. We are exhausted before we have even managed to do anything concrete that may help. We are lost.

We try to do something and then a horde of critics will tell us we haven't done enough or we've done the wrong thing. Doing nothing is such a secure place to be. By doing nothing, your actions cannot be criticised because there weren't any.

Those who control the stories often control our emotional outbursts and pile-ons. When I first made some reasonably vanilla comments in support of feminist friends who were getting relentless abuse for their statements in support for the trans community, I soon discovered that my support for them meant that I hated women, apparently. The control of that narrative has led to the popular belief that trans-critical voices get extreme abuse and trans-supportive voices are treated with kid gloves. This bias makes it much easier to create a simple "goodies" and "baddies" scenario. I would prefer the end of abuse as a weapon on any side. When I told someone about the rape threats that had been repeatedly received by some pro-trans feminist friends, I was told "I bet their rape threats aren't as bad as the ones my friend gets."

What an untenable place to be in. Our heart tells us that we must speak out, then our anxiety silences us for fear of being misunderstood and turned into a bigot.

The performer Paul Currie was accused of antisemitism and banned from the Soho Theatre in February, which led to losing his slot at Glastonbury and at various comedy festivals. I was not there that night, but have heard many reports and it seems that the newspaper version of events are not quite what happened.

For the newspapers, the story is all done and dusted in 48 hours. Not for Currie, who could be a lifelong pariah. The story revolves around the use of a Palestinian flag and two members of the audience's response to it. You can hear Currie's version of what happened on a recent Alexei Sayle podcast.

What I find most disturbing about this story is the speed with which Currie was declared a bigot and banned by the theatre he was performing in. This does not seem like justice served, but by institutions seeking to get out of the hot water as rapidly as possible. I have performed runs of shows at the Soho Theatre and had a lovely time, but for now,

Our heart tells us that we must speak out, then our anxiety silences us for fear of being misunderstood and turned into a bigot

I would not feel comfortable playing in a space that seems to disassociate itself from an act so rapidly. All such stories ultimately do us no favours. They create an us and them situation, they make things binary and often give voice to the most extreme.

Shortly after that event in Soho, I was speaking to the writer Dave Cohen. He told me of the camaraderie and support between his local synagogue and mosque. These stories go unwritten, and tell us there are other ways and that many people of many persuasions can reach out and share bread.

As so often with the On the Road column, I didn't start my travels. I intended to write about Sarah Corbett, who I met in Milton Keynes. She told me about the craftivist movement. Seek it out. It is a way to be creative, to make beauty but also to try and open up conversations and campaign to make the world better.

Robin Ince is an author and broadcaster
[@robinince](https://twitter.com/robinince)

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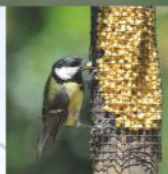
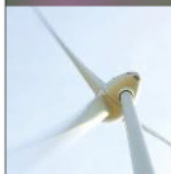
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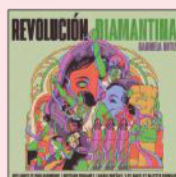
Ecstatic revelations at close quarters

● To my left, the oboe sang the theme; it was taken up by the violins behind me. To the right, cellos danced atop the offbeat bassline. I couldn't see the flutes, but I could clearly hear when it was their turn for the melody. It soared across the instrumentalists' heads and around the cathedral. As a reviewer, I've been privileged to have some excellent seats, stalls in some of the loveliest historic opera houses in Europe; that left-hand viewpoint in Wigmore Hall where you can perfectly see the

pianist's hands. And, as a fan, I've sat in different positions around the Barbican purely to hear how the acoustics change. I'm a regular purchaser of the bargainous (£8) – and vertiginous – balcony seats at the Royal Opera House. But all of these positions pale against Norwich Cathedral's cold stone floor, where I sat as the Aurora Orchestra played the final two movements from Beethoven's *Symphony No 3 (Eroica)*.

When conductor Nicholas Collon invited audiences at Norfolk & Norwich Festival's performance to sit among the ensemble, he wasn't short of volunteers. The Aurora Orchestra has been playing in this immersive way for several years now – it's made possible by learning symphonies off by heart. Not needing music stands allows the musicians the freedom to move around, as they did within Norwich Cathedral, encouraged to swap positions in between movements. The closing allegro molto – with its catchy motif, taught to us by Collon before the performance – gathered momentum around those brave enough to stand the spray from the French horn. "Sorry," whispered the player, as she emptied what we will euphemistically refer to as moisture from her instrument. There was no apology necessary. After the pandemic years – where

RECORDING OF THE WEEK



Like pussyhats – the pink beanies first worn by those involved in the 2017 US marches – and 'feminists wear pink' memes, overtly feminine symbols are often used in subversive ways. In Mexico, protesters threw pink glitter at police following the rape of a woman by local officers. The move began 2019's 'glitter revolution', an uprising against the country's tolerance of violence against women. Gabriela Ortiz's **Revolución Diamantina** is a new ballet about these themes and features on the first album of the Mexican composer's orchestral works, recorded by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and star conductor Gustavo Dudamel.

Revolución Diamantina by Gabriela Ortiz is out now (Platoon)

Religious experience: Aurora Orchestra perform at Norwich Cathedral

musicians had to be two metres away from each other, and audiences even further – we couldn't have been more delighted by the concert. The next day the congregation would be there for the usual Sunday services, though I'd already had my own near-religious experience. It's the second time this year I've witnessed how Aurora's physical approach to music can enhance the performance – as part of the ensemble's collaboration with violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, musicians played on the stairs of the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

I'm excited to hear what the group will do at this year's Proms, when instrumentalists are joined by the BBC Singers and the National Youth Choir for Beethoven's *Ninth by Heart* (Prom 42; 21 August).

Norwich Cathedral is one of the key venues for the Norfolk and Norwich Festival, a 17-day series of events that runs across the city every May. Like Aurora, Laura Cannell used the distinctive architecture as part of her performance, positioning herself in the 'crossing' – the centre of the cross shape – surrounded by the audience. Her album *Antiphony of the Trees* – featuring melodies inspired by birdsong – took on an ethereal quality as live recorder figures were electronically looped, reverberating around the nave. Cannell's creative use of playing two instruments simultaneously, alongside the recordings, gave the impression of an entire wind ensemble. Her swooping calls were enough to energise the peregrine falcons, who called in response from their nest on top of the spire.

Opening up the cathedral in this way also brought a full house to hear a late-night recital by Cathedral Master of Music Ashley Grote, whose multifarious techniques in Messiaen's ecstatic organ work *L'Ascension* was shared via large-screen projections across the building, allowing a rare inspection of the newly rebuilt organ, one of the largest in the UK.

Claire Jackson is a writer and editor. [@claireiswriting](mailto:claire-jackson.co.uk)





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- Interview Date:** Week commencing 24th June 2024

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For an informal discussion about the role, please contact:
karen.vowles@vamt.net

Closing date: 14th June 2024 12 noon - Interview date: 26th June 2024



national youth advocacy service
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News from the Intrepid Wool Lady

The House of Rumble-de-Thump

I love food and words, probably equally. I never play with my food, but I do like playing with words. Recently I discovered the Rumble-de-Thump. It is an old Scottish dish guaranteed to keep at bay the coldest of Northern winters. Think of it as a bubble and squeak but on steroids. Its generous addition of oodles of butter, bacon and cheddar cheese makes it much richer, and it is really a satisfying full meal, just on its own. Quite yummy.

Not content with only the recipe, I have adopted the name and now apply it to all kinds of domestic household situations.

For example, Bear, the 15 kilogramme, 4 month old Marrema puppy eats all kinds of stuff she shouldn't. Everything goes into her rather cavernous mouth. This can result in a bout of very loud and alarming tummy gurgles and me swiftly suggesting she might want to go outside. "Bear, let's go visit the garden, lest you have an indoor attack of the Rumble-de-Thumps!"

The word is easily and aptly applied to Tar and Mac, the two young pitch black cats. Under normal circumstances, they move about the house almost silently, in keeping with their feline elegance and lithe agility. Until around 4am, when they decide to have a game which results in them cavorting noisily around the house like baby elephants. The crashing and banging invariably wakes me up and, as I surface, I think, yes, the cats are rumble-de-thumping.

I thoroughly recommend you try making a Rumble-de-Thump and I am more than happy to share the recipe. How you then incorporate the word into your own personal lexicon is entirely your choice, but I hope you do.

Jessica

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Puzzles

Crossword

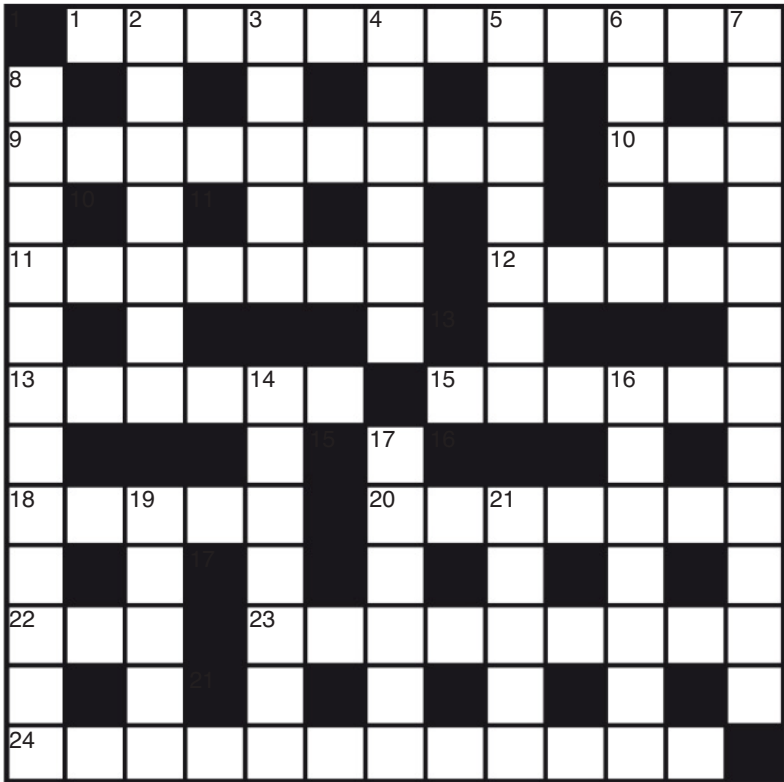
CRYPTIC CLUES

Across

1. Four trouser supports (4,2,6)
9. Suitable device to serve one's purpose (9)
10. Tailless animal in India (3)
11. Sounds like quadruped incurred penalty in the game (7)
12. Some risked getting stuck with a small anchor (5)
13. Hold the admiral (6)
15. Men she arranged to catch (6)
18. Lantern that is easy to carry (5)
20. The case of a sheriff perhaps (7)
22. He sounds a bright lad (3)
23. Deceitful at home from that time on, note (9)
24. Declare hidden facts, but hopefully not to the enemy (5,7)

Down

2. Habit will shock soldiers going in (7)
3. It sticks up in Cambridgeshire (5)
4. Somehow make it safe for the festival (6)
5. Tear apart little Kenneth, who had been caught again (7)
6. Many old people unable to get out (5)
7. Mark cheers an unorthodox eastern entertainer (5-7)
8. Personal dissection? (4-8)
14. Tedious exchange in the open air (7)
16. Plead to cut short the starter at last (7)
17. He acts strangely, being modest (6)
19. One getting up in Georgia port (5)
21. Calendar of the moon (5)



QUICK CLUES

Across

1. Not restrained (12)
9. Five-sided figure (9)
10. Donkey (3)
11. Terrace (anag.) (7)
12. Marshy river tributary (5)
13. Passive (6)
15. Repulsive (6)
18. Ire (5)
20. Medical (anag.) (7)
22. Relatives (3)
23. Worship (9)
24. Immediately (5,3,4)

Down

2. Never-ending (3-4)
3. City in Nebraska (5)
4. Labelled (6)
5. Offer more than the previous person (7)
6. Verdant (5)
7. Payment (12)
8. Informal coat (6,6)
14. Tell a story (7)
16. Iridescent (7)
17. Be in contact (6)
19. Literary style (5)
21. Skilled practice (5)

Sudoku

The second-toughest Sudoku in Britain

	5		8		9		4	
				2			3	6
	4						1	
	2							
8		7			6			5
4			9					
		2		3				8
5				7				
	6				4			



Win

The first correct drawn entry to the crossword will win a copy of this week's random book selection, *Space: The Human Story* by Tim Peake

Send entries to:
Crossword Competition,
The Big Issue,
43 Bath St,
Glasgow, G2 1HW

ISSUE 1618 ANSWERS

CRYPTIC

- Across** – 1 Pack-drill; 6 Bap; 8 Trial marriage; 9 Lying; 10 Average; 11 Sprite; 13 Twilit; 16 Calomel; 18 Loser; 20 Utter devotion; 22 Ted; 23 To the good.
Down – 1 Pet; 2 Chili; 3 Delight; 4 Isaiah; 5 Large; 6 Bradawl; 7 Presenter; 9 Lose count; 12 Related; 14 Welcome; 15 Albert; 17 Merit; 19 Sligo; 21 Nod.

QUICK

- Across** – 1 Corkscrew; 6 Sec; 8 Determination; 9 Droop; 10 Elysian; 11 Cicada; 13 Lather; 16 Ideally; 18 Locum; 20 Floating voter; 22 Let; 23 Enthroned.
Down – 1 Cod; 2 Ratio; 3 Scraped; 4 Rained; 5 Weary; 6 Swinish; 7 Conundrum; 9 Deceitful; 12 Cheroot; 14 All over; 15 Cygnet; 17 Lethe; 19 Cut in; 21 Red.

4	3	7	1	6	5	2	8	9
1	9	2	8	4	3	5	6	7
6	5	8	2	7	9	4	1	3
5	2	9	6	3	7	1	4	8
8	4	3	5	2	1	9	7	6
7	6	1	9	8	4	3	5	2
2	7	5	3	1	6	8	9	4
3	1	6	4	9	8	7	2	5
9	8	4	7	5	2	6	3	1

MY PITCH

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RICHARD LEWIS, 49

● I've been rough sleeping off and on for 35 years. I'm one of the original vendors from London back when Big Issue first started. We were battling against homeless beggars back then – that was the reason John Bird set it up initially.

When it first started, I was anti-Big Issue for the first six months. That was the case for me and all my homeless mates because one minute we had nothing and the next minute we had people coming up to you saying, 'I have more rights than you. Eventually we latched on because people were turning to the Big Issue. We thought, 'You know what? This is easier than sitting on the floor and begging for money.' We stood up and had a little pride and people would say well done for doing something positive.

I've sold the magazine in London, Birmingham, Leicester, Swansea, as well as Cardiff. I've stuck with Big Issue because if you sit and beg on the streets the council and the authorities move you on. If I sit on the street with some magazines and my Big Issue jacket on, they leave me alone because I'm official.

We'd all like to end poverty and begging, but it will never happen because the rich want to keep the rich where they are and the poor where they are. But I would rather sell the Big Issue than beg. I play the harmonica so when I sell the magazine I will entertain and play a little bit to get people's attention, draw them in a bit and get them to look my way. As John Bird called it: we're entrepreneurs. If I can get your attention by singing a song and getting a little smile on your way to work, then my job's done. And if you come over and buy a magazine, then that's a bonus.

I play the harmonica so when I sell the magazine I will entertain and play a little bit to get people's attention, draw them in a bit and get them to look my way



I lost my father when his lorry crashed in France when I was 14. Then my stepfather was a bit of a weirdo and I suffered abuse from him. I complained to my mother about him when I was 14 going on 15, but I just packed a bag one night and left. I got as far as London and got trapped there on the streets begging. You couldn't claim benefits, you couldn't do anything because you weren't old enough.

I've been battling PTSD all my life now. When things go wrong, I just pick up my bag and walk away. It's easier. It's better than me losing my rag and hurting somebody. I lost my job in 2019; I was working as a vehicle inspector for an auction house. Because of my health problems I had to stop work. I lost my accommodation and I ended up going into shared housing in Birmingham. But I've chosen to sleep on the streets. I've had to walk away from properties because I don't like the violent side of me. If I get angry with someone then I'll snap, so it's better to walk away.

I've seen so many friends beaten up or murdered on the streets because they were homeless.

A magazine sale is one meal for me. I'm diabetic so I have to eat a hot meal at least twice a day so I can take my medication. I was built to survive, I was built to work, but now I'm dying with diabetes. I'm having the index toes on each foot removed as they are ulcerated. The infection has got into the bone and there's nothing that they can do. All I can do is let them amputate them. But I can't have the operation until I have somewhere to live. I'm in pain, I'm struggling every day to walk about. I can't keep the dressings clean. But I've travelled the world for so long that I've got no local connection so I can't get anywhere. I'm getting to the point where I can't take it any more. The longer I wait the more chance there is that I'll lose my feet, not just my toes.

Interview: Liam Geraghty

Photo: Exposure Photo Agency

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