

RSC

2025-2026

**ASSOCIATE SCHOOL'S
PROGRAMME
IMPACT REPORT**



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“PUTTING IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY AT THE HEART OF LEARNING BRINGS JOY”
TEACHER FROM NORWICH CLUSTER

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 25-26 annual Impact Report for the Associate Schools Programme – a network of schools and theatres working to transform the teaching of Shakespeare and provide robust research and data for the impact of an arts-rich education.

It has been another brilliant year for the Associate Schools Programme (ASP): check out the statistics on pages 11-12; read another fantastic case study, this time from the City of Peterborough Academy on pages 7-9; and enjoy the selection of brilliant photos from last September’s Connected symposium on pages 27-28.

With this report, we hope to capture the breadth and depth of this thriving programme—and its many outcomes. The ASP is a combination of pedagogy, high-quality arts experiences including performances, youth leadership and development pathways, and research opportunities. The outcomes that you see evidenced here include:

- Teacher confidence, competence and motivation
- Student engagement and enjoyment
- Student oracy and writing skills
- Student social and emotional development
- Increased connection and enrichment with partners
- Change happening at a whole school/community level
- Leadership within - and advocacy of - the programme

AFTER 20 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP-WORKING, WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO SHARING SUCCESSES AND LEARNINGS, AND TO MAP OUT OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE ASP MOVING FORWARD.

This is testament to the impact and changes we see happening on a daily basis, across the country, building a community of inclusion and transformation.

This year has been a special one as we look towards celebrating 20 years of working in deep, long-term partnerships with schools and theatres across England, and 10 years of the ASP.

As we bring partners and sector colleagues together for the Building Partnerships: A 20-Year Story arts symposium, we look towards the next ten years of the ASP, collaboratively exploring what we hope to achieve together. It's a time of reflection and future ambition. Whilst policies and politicians change, we will continue to advocate for every young person to have access to an arts-rich education, and the best way to enable this is through strong, meaningful, sustainable partnerships.

And a perfect time to recount the updated Shared Aims from the ASP Partnership Agreements as a reminder of the core work we do as we head into this new year.

Partners in the Associate Schools Programme agree to the shared vision of working in areas of structural disadvantage* to:

- **Build a collaborative, creative and inclusive network of teachers across state primary and secondary schools, FE colleges and specialist SEND settings alongside theatre colleagues.**
- **Provide children and young people with access to high-quality arts education that is embodied, playful, dynamic and imaginative, providing them with a deep connection to Shakespeare's work.**
- **Offer equitable opportunities that are relevant and responsive to the local context of each cluster, including performances, community engagement, and talent development pathways.**
- **Transform the teaching of Shakespeare's work through the RSC's Rehearsal Room Pedagogy and a network that fosters professional development, connection, generosity and challenge.**
- **Empower children and young people through positive changes to their sense of self, engagement, attainment, and life choices.**
- **Advocate for the transformative impact of Shakespeare's work, embodied arts practice in education, and sustained and innovative partnership working.**

* structural disadvantage identified through average Pupil Premium and Free School Meal Percentages % / Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government multiple indices of deprivation data / DfE New Culture Priority Places (updated 2026) / ACE Priority Places / Areas that have historically been underrepresented by funded arts and cultural organisations.



ASSOCIATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The Associate Schools Programme is our long-term partnership programme with schools and regional theatres across England with teacher professional development at its core. The work is predicated on transforming the way Shakespeare is taught in schools, using RSC rehearsal room approaches.

The programme is open to primary, secondary and special state-funded schools and further education colleges in England, with a specific focus on schools serving areas of structural disadvantage. It is built around the principle of schools and theatres working in local partnership to develop communities of practice from which we can build a body of research to advocate for an arts-rich curriculum.

Aims of the Programme:

- To facilitate a network and community of teachers and senior leaders committed to an arts-rich education using Shakespeare's work as a foundation for experiences.
- To open pathways from the classroom into training, leadership and talent development opportunities that increase the life choices of

young people and help to diversify theatre audiences and workforce.

- To build a robust evidence base that demonstrates the value of rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare and cultural learning.

If you want to contact the Associate Schools team, please email us on: associate.schools@rsc.org.uk



ASSOCIATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME (ASP) ACROSS THE UK

Schools and theatres working together to transform experiences of Shakespeare

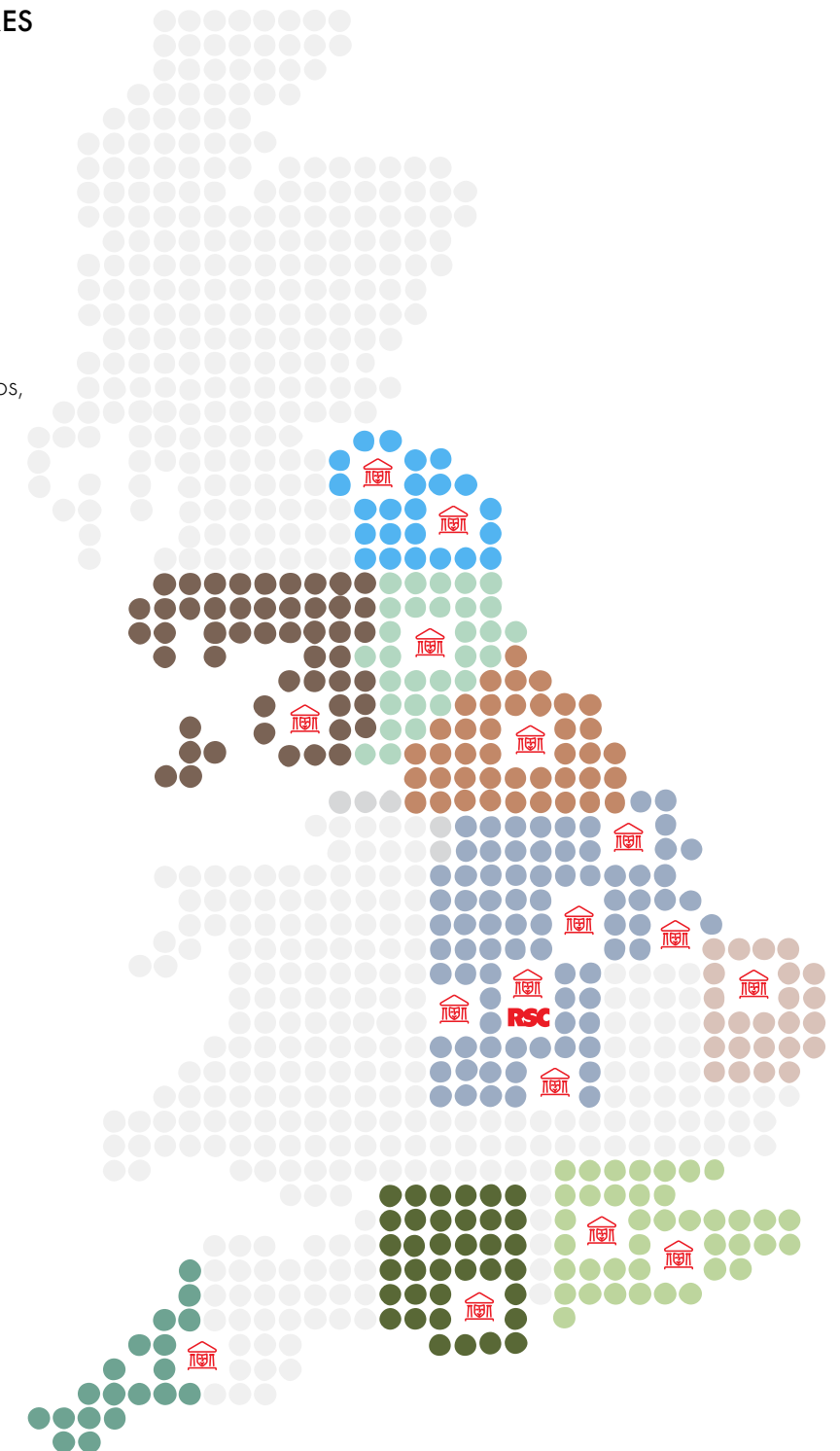
ASP PARTNER AREAS

○ 280 ASSOCIATE SCHOOLS

 16 ASSOCIATE REGIONAL THEATRES

- Blackpool Grand Theatre
- Bradford Theatres
- The Belgrade, Coventry
- The Core at Corby Cube
- Embassy Theatre, Skegness
- Hall for Cornwall
- Hull Truck Theatre
- The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury
- Mayflower Theatre and Mayflower Studios, Southampton
- New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Newcastle Theatre Royal
- Northern Stage, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- Norwich Theatre
- Silhouette Youth Theatre, Northampton
- Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham
- York Theatre Royal

- North
- North West
- North East
- East Midlands
- Midlands
- East Of England
- South East
- South
- South West



CASE STUDY: CITY OF PETERBOROUGH ACADEMY

The City of Peterborough Academy (COPA) is a diverse, multicultural, inner-city secondary school in Peterborough. Around half of our students speak English as an additional language and almost half are eligible for free school meals.

Shakespeare has always been part of the English curriculum at CoPA. Over the last three years, since joining the RSC Associate Schools Programme, our partnership with the RSC has had a significant impact on the development of Drama at CoPA. The rehearsal-room approaches and CPD opportunities provided through the programme have shaped our approach to teaching Drama and Shakespeare, enabling students to encounter Shakespeare through Drama as well as English. These approaches are now embedded within a KS3 Drama curriculum built around Shakespeare, our Playmaking Festival work, and wider

extracurricular opportunities.

The support we have received through the programme has also helped us build a network of colleagues and schools who have supported the delivery of KS4 Drama and the development of our extracurricular provision. We are now beginning to explore how these approaches can be used more widely in English lessons, building on the success we have seen in Drama and extracurricular work.

Through our Drama curriculum and Playmaking Festival rehearsals, we use RSC rehearsal-room approaches to introduce Shakespeare through performance, discussion and collaboration. Students are expected to explore, question and experiment and rehearsal-room techniques encourage them to make choices, debate interpretations and discover meaning for themselves, rather than being told what to think. Students regularly discuss how characters' choices would be judged in a modern context and explore how scenes might look if they took place today. By using these techniques, understanding emerges through the process itself, giving students the confidence to engage with Shakespeare as something relevant and

not intimidating.

The impact on students involved directly in the Playmaking Festival is visible in English lessons. Through sustained exposure to Shakespearean language in rehearsals and performance, students develop confidence in working with complex texts and finding interpretations. By the time they study Shakespeare at GCSE, the language already feels familiar. This allows students to engage more readily with character, theme and meaning, rather than feeling intimidated by the text itself. Teachers have commented on the confidence these students show when working with Shakespeare and are often impressed by the way students approach texts that are typically seen as complex or intimidating, engaging readily with language, character and interpretation. Colleagues are equally struck by how students who may appear shy or anxious in the classroom often rise to the occasion in rehearsals and performances, demonstrating confidence and leadership that might otherwise go unseen.

For many students, involvement in Shakespeare

projects has provided a sense of belonging and a community of like-minded young people. Students who first joined Playmaking Festival rehearsals have gone on to take part in school productions, choose Performing Arts at KS4 and pursue further opportunities through the RSC, including the National Playmaking Festival and the Next Generation programme. For one student, their participation in the National Playmaking Festival was one of their first visits outside of Peterborough. This truly life-changing experience would not have been able to happen without the opportunity being fully funded by the RSC. Participation has also helped strengthen relationships between school and home, with families speaking positively about the confidence, commitment and enthusiasm they have seen develop through rehearsals and performances.

Students and staff increasingly see Shakespeare as something the City of Peterborough Academy is good at. One student even commented that "drama has changed this school."

Emily Gillespie-Beal, Teacher of English and Drama, City of Peterborough Academy.

“WE TAKE PRIDE IN OUR PERFORMANCES,
OUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLAYMAKING
FESTIVALS, AND OUR PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE RSC”

TEACHER OF ENGLISH AND DRAMA,
CITY OF PETERBOROUGH ACADEMY, EMILY GILLESPIE-BEAL

“THIS WORK HAS HELPED MAKE
SHAKESPEARE FEEL RELEVANT, ACCESSIBLE
AND MODERN AND HAS TRANSFORMED OUR
APPROACH TO DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE”

TEACHER OF ENGLISH AND DRAMA,
CITY OF PETERBOROUGH ACADEMY, EMILY GILLESPIE-BEAL



“ I ENJOYED PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE THE MOST BECAUSE YOU REALLY GET TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE VARIETY OF SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS. ”

CONFIDENCE, PRIDE
AND PERSONAL GROWTH

“ I PLAYED THESUS AND I HAD THE BEST DAY ”

JOY AND CELEBRATION

IN THEIR OWN WORDS, MANY STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO EXPLAIN WHAT THEY GAINED FROM STUDYING SHAKESPEARE THROUGH THE REHEARSAL ROOM APPROACHES:

“ LEARNING ABOUT HIM, BECAUSE IT'S INTERESTING TO FIND OUT WHAT PEOPLE IN THE PAST DID AND WHY ”

CURIOSITY AND LEARNING

STUDENT VOICE

There is lots of fabulous, detailed and thought-provoking feedback that we are going to dedicate time to reviewing. However, here are some headlines that we really wanted to share with partners:

More than four-fifths (83%) of primary pupils reported that they **always or often perform Shakespeare when studying it**, while **over 90% of secondary students** reported that they perform Shakespeare at least sometimes as part of their learning.

More than 80% of primary pupils reported feeling happy or excited about learning Shakespeare, and approximately three-quarters of secondary students described their experience positively, most commonly using terms such as **fun, interesting, creative, interactive, enjoyable and entertaining**.

Many younger pupils also identified that studying Shakespeare's work is for **everyone, playful and useful**.

Performance Drives Engagement:

The most frequently mentioned highlight was the opportunity to perform Shakespeare. One of the strongest findings was that many pupils wanted more Shakespeare, not less, frequently requesting:

- More acting
- More performance opportunities
- More rehearsal time
- More opportunities to watch productions
- More practical and creative activities

Across a diverse geographical spread and age range, **performing Shakespeare** emerged as the most valued aspect of participation, helping young people develop confidence, creativity, collaboration, leadership skills and a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's work. Most significantly, students repeatedly expressed a desire for more opportunities to perform and explore Shakespeare's work actively, whilst highlighting the lasting impact of the programme.

WE RECEIVED

483

STUDENT RESPONSES FROM 13 SCHOOLS
STUDENTS RANGED FROM 6-19 YEARS OLD



“ IT IS FUN BEING A SHAKESPEARE AMBASSADOR BECAUSE WE GET EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES ”

LEADERSHIP AND ASPIRATION

REPRESENTING 9 CLUSTERS:
BRADFORD
CORBY
COVENTRY
CUMBRIA
NORFOLK
NOTTINGHAM
SOUTH BIRMINGHAM
WARWICKSHIRE
YORK AND SELBY

REACH AND ENGAGEMENT



Including schools in pathway clusters

Schools

32

Clusters

Including developing pathway clusters



280

143
Primary

87
Secondary

16
SEND

2
FE College

1
Alt Provisions/ PRUs

31
Others

Proportion of teachers who said they Strongly Agree or Agree with statements following CPD training:

I am more confident in establishing an inclusive learning environment for my students to learn about Shakespeare's plays

100 %

1029

Teachers Reached



I have developed knowledge and skills to plan and teach transformative lessons on Shakespeare's plays

100 %

I feel better equipped to creatively interpret Shakespeare's plays

100 %

1029

Estimated number of teachers attending CPD

CPD days delivered

76

99%

Proportion of teachers rating CPD content as Excellent or Very Good

99 %

Delivery of course content

94 %

Match of content with Participant Needs



79

Number of First Encounters: King Lear Performances

15

Number of schools

15

Number of theatres/ community venues

28

Number of creative Associate workshops



11,158

Audience Members

Proportions of audiences watching in schools

45 %

4995 people

New to live theatre

16 %

Experiencing Shakespeare in performance for the first time

39 %

28

Playmaking Festivals in 2025 - 2026

Over

260

Teacher Directors

More than

5300

young people celebrate their work by sharing Shakespeare's words with an audience



FIRST ENCOUNTERS: KING LEAR



Wow! What an amazing experience we had in November 2025 at Cowes Enterprise College, hosting the RSC's First Encounters: *King Lear*.

We are the only school on the Isle of Wight to take part in the RSC's Associate Schools Programme, and so even more amazing to be asked to host the touring production of *King Lear*. We managed to fit in 4 performances: 2 for students during the school day for Years 8 and 9, and then one afternoon and one evening performance both for students and the wider community.

“IF YOU GET THE CHANCE, WE WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND HOSTING FIRST ENCOUNTERS!”

ELIZABETH STANNARD
DRAMA LEAD AT COWES
ENTERPRISE COLLEGE



“I ATTENDED THE LIVE THEATRE THIS EVENING WITH MY DAUGHTER TO WATCH KING LEAR AND I JUST WANTED TO SAY HOW AMAZING IT WAS! WE BOTH REALLY ENJOYED IT VERY MUCH.”

EMAIL FROM A PARENT

As we have no theatre, we use a large space called the Inspiration Zone, but the acoustics can make it challenging for performers. We were so impressed by the RSC company who not only performed with energy and passion at each show but also coped with the challenges of a non-traditional theatre space. The students were particularly impressed by the vocal range of the actors and how they not only coped with the space but delivered high-quality, emotional performances within it.

Both school performances were for whole year groups with about 180 students in each, many of whom had not only never seen live theatre before, never mind Shakespeare! It was interesting to see how each audience responded to the play: The year 9 audience sat quietly, clearly listening carefully to what was happening and talked afterwards about how they felt. Some students shared their response to the provocation of 'Speak what you feel' including, "We just need better, braver, more honourable leaders". One student who shared their hopes for the future said afterwards "[It was] absolutely incredible - thank you!".

We have a healthy number of Year 9s opting to take GCSE Drama next year and feel that this live theatre experience has really supported their interest in Drama.

The year 8 audience was much livelier getting involved

in the show and responding to the downfall of the sisters and Edgar by clapping and booing. There was a clear section of the audience who had seen a pantomime and knew how to react to a villain! This may be the only time in their lives when they see professional theatre and Shakespeare, and it was a wonderful experience for them that will definitely support students in their work with the English department. Claire Brooks, English teacher said: "Thank you for braving the ferry prices and coming to the Isle of Wight! My English students don't have much opportunity to see live performances, so this was a real treat and much appreciated. [You are] obviously very experienced with engaging a teenage crowd!"

The show was inspirational to both our GCSE and A level Drama students too who came to see the show to support their knowledge and understanding of live theatre. Year 12 and 13 A Level Drama students were so excited to shadow the stage crew during the rehearsals and performances and found it an inspirational experience.

Elizabeth Stannard,
Drama Lead at Cowes Enterprise College

The RSC's Youth Advisory Board is made up of young people from across the Associate Schools Programme who are passionate about the arts, and who want to ensure young voices are heard in support of them. Many of us have been (or still are) Shakespeare Ambassadors in our schools and are interested in developing as young leaders. This year, we have the largest board to date with 31 members from across England: from Cornwall to Cumbria, Newcastle to Norfolk, aged 13 to 25 years old. We have also elected a new Co-chair, Freedom (me!), to join Freya and Edie, and for the first time Deputy Co-chairs, electing Alma and Maia to these inaugural positions.

The Associate Schools Programme has provided so much for me and for other young people with a passion for the arts. It has been, and I hope, will continue to be, an anchor for those seeking opportunities to create, explore, and express themselves. My name is Freedom, and I am a newly elected co-chair of the YAB. Having been part of the YAB for three years, the ASP has allowed me to grow in confidence and feel part of something truly unique.

As a young Black woman from Bradford, I have seen my city transform from one often defined by its challenges into

the City of Culture 2025, where identity, community, and creativity have been celebrated through the arts. This has shown me the power that creative opportunities can have in changing perceptions and empowering young people to share their own stories. Programmes such as the ASP provide the confidence and platform needed for young people to recognise their potential and present their ideas to the world.

Through my time in the YAB, I have learnt what it means to make the arts more accessible to young people across England and how creative opportunities can make a meaningful difference within our communities. My main interests lie in nurturing young creative voices and encouraging greater access to theatre and inspiration. I hope the ASP continues to give young people the confidence to explore their creativity, have their voices heard, and feel that they belong within the arts. Ten years of partnership demonstrates its lasting impact, and I believe that continuing this work is essential for the next generation of young people and creators.

Freedom
Co-chair of the RSC's Youth Advisory Board

A MESSAGE FROM THE YAB



SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT:

JOANNE BEN-SLAMA & SHEETAL CHAUHAN AT GREAT ARLEY SCHOOL

Nominated by Blackpool Grand Theatre

Since joining the cluster, Great Arley SEND school have made the most of every opportunity. They consistently attend CPD (usually with 2 members of staff), Playmaking, Ambassador events and their commitment to making every opportunity count for their SEND young people is outstanding.

Joanne & Sheetal say:

Through participation in the Shakespeare project, key learning was successfully embedded into our scheme of work and lesson delivery. Students took ownership of the performance process by preparing costumes, selecting music, and managing stage entrances and exits.

Over the sessions, they developed confidence, resilience, and a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's language and theatrical experience. SEND learners were supported through simplified language, enabling them to fully engage with and understand their roles. Students were encouraged to share and develop their own ideas throughout rehearsals, fostering creativity and collaboration.

Staff confidence also grew significantly, with colleagues actively participating on stage and embracing new approaches. Professional development opportunities, including playmaking and acting workshops, provided valuable knowledge and practical strategies, such as icebreakers, which have since been implemented in lessons.

The project also enabled students to work alongside peers from other schools, promoting social interaction, teamwork, and a shared appreciation of Shakespeare.



SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT:

AMY JOHNS AT
ELLOUGHTON PRIMARY SCHOOL



Nominated by Brough Primary School, Hull

The school have completely engaged in the project and have demonstrated enormous commitment and enthusiasm. This has been reflected in their written work as well as the positive way in which they talk about the work they are doing. They have made it a key feature of their work in class this year and have embedded it within the curriculum.

Amy says:

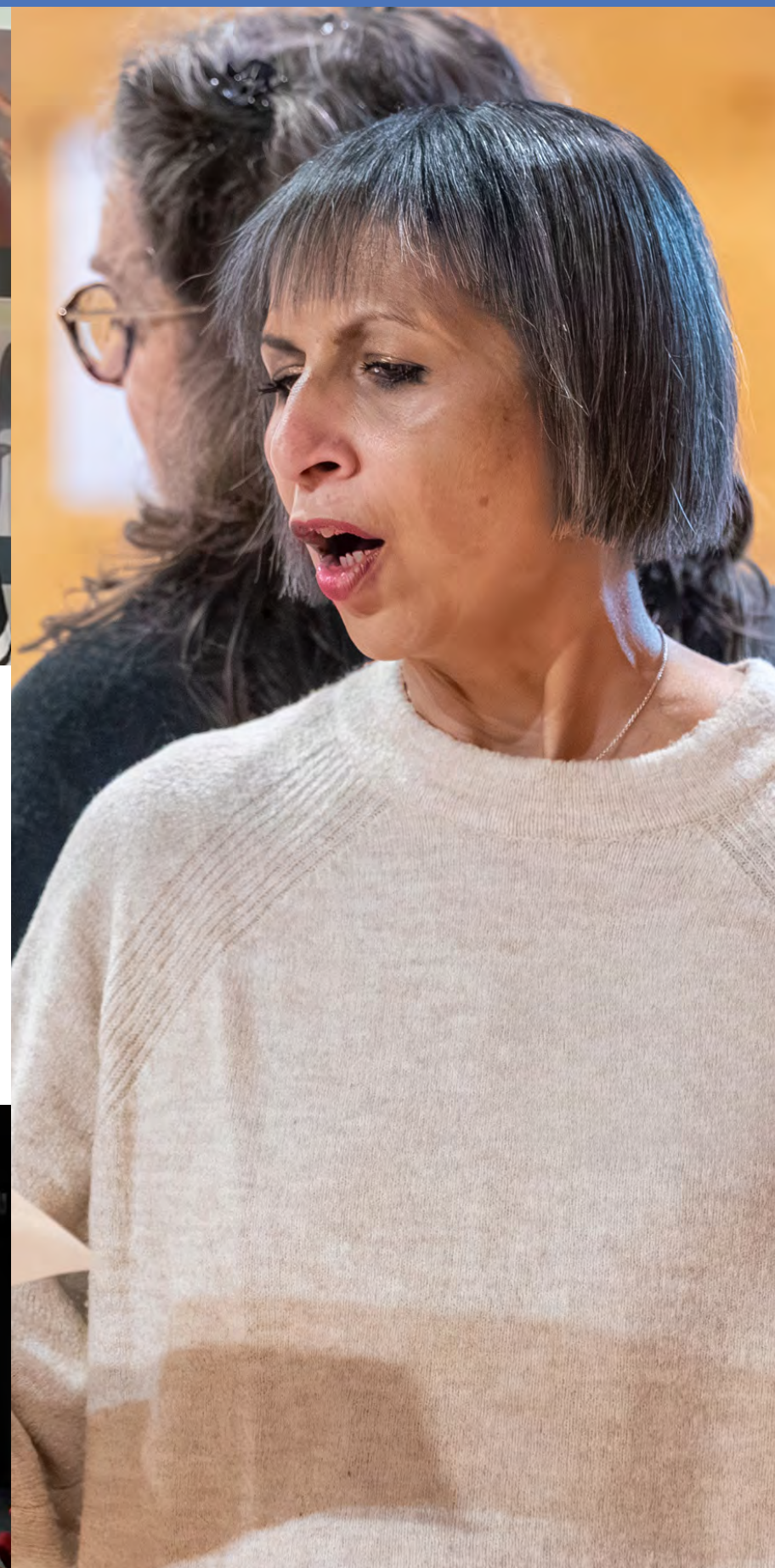
Being part of the Associate Schools Programme this year has had a transformative impact on our children. Personally, I gained immense confidence and fresh ideas from the inspirational CPD sessions, which I fed into our writing curriculum. This led to a huge increase in oracy skills; the children were so inspired they even continued classroom exercises on the playground.

Our team was amazed to see how deeply engaged all the children were in Shakespeare's Macbeth, especially those with SEND. These children truly blew us away during the performance, where they absolutely shone in the spotlight—something they would never have imagined themselves doing previously. We are very grateful to Brough Primary School for nominating us for this award, and for being so supportive in sharing their experience of the programme from start to finish.



SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT:

LAURA CURTIS FROM
CARTMEL PRIORY C OF E SCHOOL



Nominated by Dowdales School, Cumbria

Cartmel have recently joined our cluster and Laura, as lead teacher, has embraced the pedagogy, thrown herself into our CPD, has run a trip to Stratford and having completed her Foundation certification is now embarking on the Intermediate.

Laura says:

It has been a joy and honour to work alongside the team at Dowdales School, the RSC, and colleagues from schools in our area as part of the Associate Schools Programme; for my own professional development, but also because of the positive impact the programme has had on the confidence, imagination and literacy skills of my students.

I'm looking forward to continuing our work together and developing our students' love and understanding of Shakespeare's works. Thank you very much to the team at Dowdales School for nominating me for this Spotlight!

SPOTLIGHT ON ENGAGEMENT:

GEMMA BRUMWELL AND EMMA KERRIGAN-DIAPER
FROM MOUNT PLEASANT JUNIOR SCHOOL

Nominated by Mayflower Theatre & Mayflower Studios, Southampton, and Havant and South Downs College

We have directly observed the school embedding rehearsal room techniques across their classroom teaching, demonstrating a meaningful and authentic engagement with this and the RSC's Matilda programme. Their commitment, passion and enthusiasm have been exceptional throughout. Staff approach the work with openness and creativity, creating a rich learning environment where pupils feel empowered to participate. The impact on learners is clear: children are eager to speak Shakespeare's words aloud, approaching the language with confidence, curiosity and joy. Their growing enthusiasm and willingness to explore Shakespeare's work is a testament to the school's dedication and the strength of their engagement.

Gemma & Emma say:

The Associate Schools Programme has complemented our work in developing confident, articulate speakers through oracy. Teachers have benefited from working alongside actors and immersing themselves in the rehearsal room approach, enabling them to facilitate exploration and performance rather than direct it. This has given children greater ownership of their ideas and interpretations. Our pupils have particularly enjoyed collaborating to develop their understanding of the play and making creative decisions about how their section should be performed. They have designed sets and costumes that reflect their own personalities, experiences and backgrounds, creating performances that feel authentic and meaningful. The programme has strengthened creativity, collaboration and independence, while giving children the confidence to share and justify their ideas.

Most importantly, it has helped them to see that Shakespeare is for everyone, and that neither age nor background is a barrier to engaging with, enjoying and performing his work.



SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WORK:

RUTH GREAVES AND SALLY MADDISON AT
RUFFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Nominated by Theatre Royal and Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham and Bluecoat Beechdale Academy

As new members of the cluster, Rufford Primary have embraced the RSC Associate Schools programme with extraordinary energy, imagination, and pride. Students created a film based on A Midsummer Night's Dream, showcased in the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall foyer as part of the Shakespeare Unfolded festival. This sat within a bold, whole-school celebration spanning Nursery to Year 6, with Tudor dance, immersive woodland storytelling, and quill writing bringing Shakespeare vividly to life. Their outdoor space became an enchanting literary world, student leaders facilitated performances for peers, and families were welcomed to experience and celebrate a pupil-led creative achievement.

Ruth & Sally say:

This is the first year our school has been part of the ASP and the first time the school has really ever engaged with Shakespeare and we have LOVED it. Being from a school in an area of significant deprivation, with families from all over the world, Shakespeare wasn't part of many of our children's

or families' lived experience, but being part of the ASP has started to change that.

We fully embraced everything the Nottingham Theatre Royal and RSC had to offer and brought Shakespeare to life for every child from 3 - 11 years old. Our Shakespeare Ambassadors helped create a whole school Shakespeare week, with immersive woodlands, Shakespeare art, Maths, Science, writing, Drama, PE, History, Geography and Dance lessons, as well as getting a film maker to create our version of A Midsummer Night's Dream with all of our Year 4 - 6. We ran mini drama clubs and even did a year group performance to parents. Having children perform Dream on the stage at the Theatre Royal was breathtaking, not only because it was their first time performing Shakespeare, but it was their first time performing on a stage ever! Staff have been blown away by how engaged the children were and the work they produced, and it has helped them feel more confident in Shakespeare teaching too. Our next step is to try and bring the children to Stratford-upon-Avon and start to think about what our Shakespeare theme for next year will be.

Thanks again for this opportunity. It's been wonderful to introduce over 450 children to Shakespeare in a fun and immersive way.



SPOTLIGHT ON PLAYMAKING:

KAT AUSTIN AND CLARE TAYLOR AT STAR OF THE SEA CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Nominated by Northern Stage and Sacred Heart Catholic High School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Kat & Clare are in their 4th year of Playmaking Festivals and have grown in confidence each year. They are able to use rehearsal room techniques learnt in CPD and apply it to their rehearsals and the young people in the cast really understand the story and the words they are saying and have an appreciation for the storytelling. Being in their rehearsal room feels collaborative and young people are able to express and feed in their own ideas. Kat and Clare's contributions during our CPD sessions are always valued. They bring energy and fun to every session while also being reflective and thoughtful. They are always willing to generously share ideas and they help to create a collaborative learning environment for everyone.

Kat and Clare say:

We have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the RSC Associate Schools Programme. The opportunity for our children to perform at Northern Stage helps develop confidence, creativity and performance skills. It has been wonderful to see the children rise to the occasion, grow in confidence and truly shine, demonstrating just how invaluable this opportunity is for our pupils.

The programme also acts as a springboard for our whole-school Shakespeare Week in March, where pupils across all year groups explore the play being studied that year. This helps foster a love and appreciation of Shakespeare from an early age, deepening children's understanding and enjoyment of his work.

We have grown as practitioners through the support of the RSC, Northern Stage and participating schools. The collaboration and shared expertise have enriched teaching and learning across our school, and we look forward to many more years of involvement in this fantastic programme.



SPOTLIGHT ON PLAYMAKING:

VANESSA ADAMS AT SKIPTON ACADEMY

Nominated by Bradford Theatres and Bradford College

This year Vanessa and her students are doing the whole of Hamlet in school, as well as her scenes for Playmaking. She always wants to make sure they all know the whole story and let them have the experience of really getting inside the characters. Discussing the themes along the way, to really connect them to the relevance of Shakespeare's work in today's society.

So when a school pulled out of Playmaking, she instantly stepped up and picked up their scenes, no stress, no worry! She is always going above and beyond. This will be her 8th Playmaking. She will be leaving this year, so I would love her to know what stunning, selfless work she has done for her students over the years.

Vanessa says:

Being part of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Associate Schools Programme for the last 8 years has been one of the best teaching experiences of my career. I have been passionate about Shakespeare since I was at school and being able to pass this passion on to my students through the RSC rehearsal room approaches has been brilliant, offering the best CPD opportunities. It has enriched our drama curriculum, raised students' aspirations and provided numerous opportunities for young people to engage with high-quality theatre and Shakespeare's plays. TSA students have developed confidence, creativity, teamwork and communication skills, working with students from various other schools and professionals in the Performing Arts.

The programme has fostered a culture where the arts are valued and celebrated. I am leaving TSA this year, but I plan to continue to be involved with the RSC and the Playmaking Festival to inspire future generations. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity!





SPOTLIGHT ON SHAKESPEARE AMBASSADORS: SHARON BARDO AND SHAKESPEARE AMBASSADORS AT ANGLO EUROPEAN SCHOOL

Nominated by Ormiston Sudbury Academy

Anglo European School's Shakespeare Ambassadors are incredibly hardworking and talented performers who consistently rise to every challenge. They collaborate brilliantly with other ambassadors across their cluster, leading rehearsals with confidence and genuinely shaping devised work for the Playmaking Festival. What really stands out is their commitment: when the school could no longer fund the programme, they took it upon themselves to raise hundreds of pounds to keep it running. They are creative, driven and supportive of one another, and fully embody what the Ambassador programme is about.

Sharon says:

Anglo's two ambassadors have been instrumental in all aspects of the ASP. As performers from the previous year they were able to cascade their knowledge and

experience to younger students who had signed up for 2026. However, it was our ambassador's skill at raising money to fund the project which was most impressive. Particularly as they did this by performing an extract from A Midsummer Night's Dream and explained to large school audiences the importance of Shakespeare, encouraging them to donate. Ella and Bea were also superb directors and organisers.

They were able to solve complex staging problems, take registers, feed lines to actors in rehearsal whilst themselves developing and nurturing their natural intuition for play making. Through their excellent leadership the other cast members were able to grow in confidence and themselves perform superbly on the night. It is telling that every cast member of Julius Caesar wants to be an ambassador next year.

We are extremely grateful to Ella and Bea for their efforts and are delighted the RSC is recognising them with a Spotlight.

Nominated by Old Basford School, Nottingham

Haydn Primary School have established the Year 5 residential as being in Stratford Upon Avon for the last 4 years, since they took part in the National Playmaking Festival with the RSC. Every year they book the YMCA to stay in and then organise for the entire year group to attend an RSC production and a workshop. These RSC opportunities support the development of the Year 5 performance of our partnership's chosen Shakespeare play at Easter. Work for the residential starts early and costs are spread out and supported to ensure everyone can attend. This year Haydn Primary Year 5 are performing Macbeth at school and will later work with the Nottingham City Partnership's Playmaking Festival in July. The residential is an inspiration to our partnership schools who are now looking to see if they can run similar residencies.

Ros says:

As part of our work with the Associate Schools

Partnership (ASP), we perform the designated play as our Year 5 production. In order to ensure that children become immersed in the play we have a two-day residential visit to Stratford-Upon-Avon during which the children take part in workshops, attend an RSC production and visit Shakespeare's Birthplace. The workshops, based on the play, led by RSC staff, make the play engaging, practical, and accessible for all learners. Following the trip, the children return enthusiastic, motivated, and eager to immerse themselves in rehearsals for their own performance and in the literacy work that we do alongside. The learning extends beyond the pupils, as staff also gain valuable ideas, techniques, and confidence alongside the children. Experiencing a professional RSC performance is inspiring and demonstrates the power of live theatre. Our work with ASP also has a significant impact on literacy, providing high-quality resources and creative approaches that benefit teaching across the curriculum. These resources support our whole-school Shakespeare Week, which is also enriched by our Year group performance of the play, ensuring the project's impact reaches every class and enriches learning throughout the school community.

SPOTLIGHT ON PARENTAL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: ROS HARRIS AT HAYDN PRIMARY SCHOOL



SPOTLIGHT ON SLT:

LIZ MILLMAN & DAVID HURDMAN AT ST PETER AND ST PAUL C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL, BURGH LE MARSH



Nominated by Embassy Theatre, Skegness

David Hurdman (Headteacher) is 100% behind the project, believing in the impact it can have on the children and staff. He has attended CPD sessions and cluster meetings enthusiastically, taking ideas on board. Fully supportive of Liz and her team, he has been determined that the children were able to benefit from the Playmaking experience recently and was so proud of everybody involved. David is a passionate exponent of the impact opportunities like this can have on individual children.

David says:

Being part of the Associate Schools Programme has been an incredibly positive experience for our school. Traditionally, in my experience, primary schools have offered many opportunities beyond the classroom through sport, but since becoming Headteacher, it has

been my mission to ensure that the performing arts are valued just as highly. We have worked hard to champion creative opportunities for children and to instill the importance of this work among staff and governors alike. The Associate Schools Programme has helped us do exactly that.

While there are always some children who you can confidently predict will thrive in a creative environment, it is often those who surprise us most who leave the greatest impression. Through projects such as Playmaking, we have seen children develop confidence, resilience, collaboration skills, empathy and a genuine sense of belonging. Some have gone on to pursue a growing love of performance, but the impact reaches far beyond the stage.

Children learn to communicate effectively, take risks, support one another and discover strengths they did not know they had. These are qualities that benefit them throughout their education and beyond, making opportunities like this truly invaluable.



SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATION: SHARON GRAY AT COVENTRY ALTERNATIVE PROVISION ACADEMY

Nominated by The Belgrade Theatre and Edgewick Primary School

Coventry AP Academy embraced their first Playmaking festival with enthusiasm, creativity and determination. They went above and beyond to ensure their pupils could take part meaningfully, building confidence and teamwork through the process. Their commitment to giving their students new opportunities and celebrating their successes was evident throughout the day. Staff helped the pupils feel valued, encouraged and proud of their achievements. The pupils were asking when they could perform again. The courage, effort and ambition shown by the school made their Playmaking journey truly inspiring and a wonderful example of the power of the programme.

Sharon Says:

At Coventry Alternative Provision Academy our students have been excluded from mainstream school, yet we ensure they are fully INCLUDED in our creative, performance-led curriculum. In April, our year 10/11 students performed scenes from A Midsummer Night's Dream as part of the outstanding RSC Playmaking festival.

They had never been on stage before, let alone performed Shakespeare! Carter, as Lysander, wrote his own original rap in our music studio titled 'Unrequited Love' produced by Joe Cook and performed it live. Lainey, Javion, Junior, Lewis, Carter and Tilly were cool under pressure and delivered on the day. Their self-esteem rose as high as the claps in the audience. As the lights dimmed, their eyes shone. Myself, Danielle, Joe, James Heaton and Glenn Mellor were proud to see our excluded children take centre stage for once in their lives – igniting self-belief and hope for the future.

CONNECTED 2025 REVIEW

For the Hampshire and Isle of Wight cluster, the Connected symposium has provided us with superb opportunities and has been integral to our partnership. As one of the newer clusters, our first visit in 2024 sparked our collaboration as a Lead School and Theatre partner – and this year we returned and attended together.

It's this opportunity – to work together; to meet teachers and theatre partners from around the country; to discuss and share ideas; and to engage in sessions run by brilliant practitioners – that makes Connected an inspiring event. As a member of my college's leadership team, it can be challenging to take time out for CPD, but Connected provides an excellent opportunity to network with schools across the country and build relationships with arts organisations.

This year's busy schedule started with keynote speaker Sally Bacon OBE discussing recent educational

policy and its effect on the Arts: 'Addressing the Access Gap'. As Chair of the Cultural Learning Alliance, it was uplifting and heartening to hear of the Alliance's work in promoting and advocating for an arts-rich education accessible to all young people. Pedagogy is at the heart of the Associate Schools Programme and there were plenty of opportunities for teachers and theatre partners to engage in creative sessions rooted in rehearsal room approaches.

We took part in voice workshops, again developing ideas that could be used in our classrooms and put together scenes on Julius Caesar that demonstrated how sessions can include all pupils and culminate in an active, creative (and noisy!) performance. In the evening, we had the chance to watch the RSC's excellent production of 'Measure for Measure', which was preceded by another workshop, again modelling techniques to use in the classroom.

On the second day, it was a privilege to work with voice coach Patsy Rodenberg on 'presence', and a workshop on 'Building Communities of Practice' helped us to gain a clearer understanding of what a thriving local community of practice can look like.

As a cluster, we have gained so much from attending the Connected event – the training was a true catalyst, providing not just theoretical knowledge but immediately applicable skills directly from professional practice. It truly is an inspiring event that sets the tone for the academic year ahead: for the CPD days, workshops and playmaking festivals we're planning and delivering.

We left equipped with practical skills, renewed confidence, and a clear, locally focused strategy to enrich the drama and English curriculum, ensuring that the profound power of Shakespeare is accessible, engaging, and impactful for every young person in our cluster.

From Lead Teachers and SLT at Havant and South Downs College and partners at the Mayflower Theatre & Mayflower Studios.





WHAT'S NEXT?

We are excited to celebrate 20 years of transformative partnerships with schools, theatres and communities across England, including our Building Partnerships: A 20-Year Story arts symposium, where we have invited partners and sector colleagues to celebrate, reflect and look ahead to the future of cultural-education partnerships. You can find all the details of the anniversary celebrations on the RSC website: [Building Partnerships - A 20-Year Story of Arts Impact | RSC | Royal Shakespeare Company](#).

First Encounters: Julius Caesar will reach audiences in 5 hub schools across England, with week-long residencies in each. Accompanying the tour and whilst it is at The Other Place, there are a series of post-show discussions, hosted by members of the company and including a variety of guest speakers exploring the main themes from the production. We will also be joined by student representatives from the host schools at our Young Creatives Festival in November. For more information about this, please contact associate.schools@rsc.org.uk.

As part of these celebrations, we plan to communicate the research and impact of the programme, including the findings of the Outcomes Framework 2026 Report. This report presents the final findings from the RSC's three-year Outcomes Framework, providing the most comprehensive assessment to date of the impact of sustained participation in the Associate Schools Programme. The two key areas to report on are:

- **Year 6 pupils achieved statistically significant higher scores than pupils in the original Randomised Control group:** there was a 25% increase in the robust overall indicators of language proficiency and writing quality (including syntactic complexity, grammatical completeness, lexical density, and emotionally expressive language). This indicates that sustained exposure to the teaching approaches and Shakespeare's language supports ongoing improvements in language development.
- **Continued development of academic self-concept** (including feelings of self-confidence, ability and learned optimism) between both Year 5 and Year 6, and within Year 6 alone, was statistically significantly. This provides particularly strong evidence that the positive differences are not simply a feature of different cohorts: improvement can also be observed longitudinally within the same period of programme participation.

Taken together, with corroborating, qualitative case study data, the results provide an important validation and extension of the findings of the Time to Act RCT. Overall, the three-year Outcomes Framework therefore moves the evidence beyond a single intervention study and the direction of these findings replicates the increased scores first identified through the RCT.

Collectively, this provides increasingly strong evidence that sustained engagement with rehearsal-room pedagogy and Shakespeare's language is associated with meaningful and enduring improvements in pupils' writing, academic confidence and engagement with learning.

Thank you to the 20-for-20 Teacher Researchers who made this work possible.

For 2026-27, we are also looking forward to developing new clusters, forming new relationships with schools across England, and sharing our pedagogy with more teachers, meaning more young people get to experience the work of Shakespeare as it should be: relevant, exciting, and inclusive! Finally, we just want to say a big 'Thank you' from everyone at the RSC and across the network for the incredible community of practice that is the Associate Schools Programme.

We are so proud to work with all of our school and theatre partners. And we can't wait to see you at Connected 2027 – 'Save the Date' will be coming out soon.





The Core
at Corby Cube



NEW VIC



THE
MARLOWE
THEATRE

Mayflower

SILHOUETTE YOUTH THEATRE





The Associate Schools Programme is made possible thanks to our community of generous supporters, whose previous and ongoing support has been instrumental in growing the reach and impact of the programme over the past 20 years.

Photography by:

Sara Beaumont, Megan Taylor, Topher McGrillis and our partners.

Special thanks also to:

- The Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust
- AL Philanthropies
- Aud Jebsen
- Kristian Gerhard Jebsen Foundation
- A legacy gift from the late John Jennings
- Lifelines International
- Chris and Jane Loughran
- Lizzie and Mark Philip-Sorensen