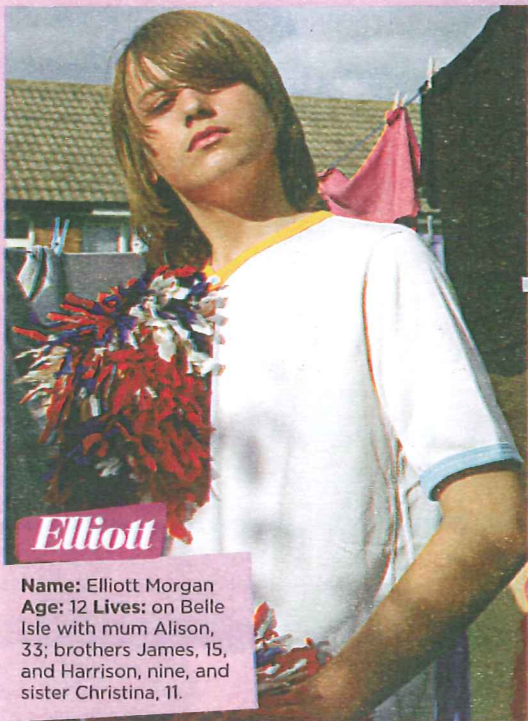




Billy
 Billy Pratt
 Lives: on Belle Isle Estate with mum Alison, 33, and two brothers, James, 15, and Harrison, nine, and sister Christina, 11.

REAL-LIFE BILLY ELLIOT

Billy, who goes to Windmill Primary, is the youngest member of the troupe. "I didn't know cheerleading was for girls when I first started. But I got to be a girlie when I first started. But I get sometimes at school because people are for doing it. I try not to care because of my future – I want to be a dancer when I want my dad to come and see me and the feeling of becoming a Billy. When I dance, he dances. His dad doesn't like dancing, my dad doesn't like me dancing. He called me, calling me 'gay boy' once when he was cheerleading. But then, further on in the film, his dad starts liking him, and he starts to go to these auditions in London. My dad understands me, understands doing cheerleading, it will be like the Billy Elliot story. I'm halfway there. In the film, I know all the words, and I can see the play when we went to London. It was amazing."
BEST THING ABOUT CHEERLEADING: "It gives me all of my energy."



Elliott
 Name: Elliott Morgan
 Age: 12
 Lives: on Belle Isle with mum Alison, 33; brothers James, 15, and Harrison, nine, and sister Christina, 11.

GOING FROM FEAR TO CHEER

Elliott, who goes to Rodillian High School, has never known his father. His siblings have different dads. None of the fathers live with them. He says: "I started doing dance classes with Ian when I was at primary school and really loved it. We did street, hip-hop and contemporary dance, and Ian asked if I wanted to audition for DAZL Diamonds and become part of the only male cheerleading group in the UK. "My mum doesn't say much but she said it was good I was doing something new. Cheerleading is really different and it's great to be part of something really different. With other types of dance you have to be loose, but with cheer you have to keep a straight posture. "Kids at school take the mickey but I just ignore them. I get really nervous before performing. "Before I started cheerleading I was really shy and nervous, and my mum says I'm much more confident now. I used to take things to heart but I don't do that so much any more."
BEST THING ABOUT CHEERLEADING: "Feeling part of a team."



Josh
 Name: Josh Holt
 Age: 13
 Lives: on Belle Isle with mum Donna, 30; stepdad Jason, 29; brother Alfie, two, and sister Lily, one month old.

HE'S GOT THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

Josh hasn't seen his dad since he was two years old and has no contact with him. He's a pupil at Rodillian High School and has been excluded twice for dangerous behaviour. He says: "I started after-school dance classes with Ian and he suggested I take it further and join his troupe, and I thought it might be fun. "Jason has been with my mum for about seven years. He's supportive about the cheerleading but he pokes fun sometimes. "At school, I've been in trouble recently for fighting. When my mum was my age, I know that she used to fight all the time and went to five different schools. She gets upset when I fight and I thought: 'It's not worth it.' "I do get nervous before performances or competitions but I tell myself it will be over soon and it always goes really fast. "Then I feel so good, I just want to do it all over again."
BEST THING ABOUT CHEERLEADING: "The adrenaline rush, which makes you feel great afterwards."

The rest of the troupe

Scott Graham
 Scott, 13, lives on Belle Isle with mum Donna, 32; stepdad Nigel, 35, a chef; sister Shannon, 14, and brother Connor, 11; twins Macey and Zak, nine weeks. He goes to South Leeds Academy. Best thing about cheerleading: "Doing the splits in the air."

Camoye Meade
 Camoye, ten, lives in Leeds with mum Penny, 42; dad Wayne, 48, a plastic fabricator, and five brothers aged between three and 18. Best thing about cheerleading: "It makes me feel happy inside."

McKenzie Scurrah
 McKenzie, ten, lives with mum Claire, 27, a childminder; stepdad Simon, 25, a TV engineer, and sister Bryony, five, on the Belle Isle Estate. He goes to Windmill Primary School. Best thing about cheerleading: "Exercising and building muscles."

Joe English
 Joe, 13, is team captain. He lives in Seacroft with dad David, 36, a chef; mum Christine, 37, a housewife; brothers Anthony, 20, and Liam, 11, and sister Sarah, 15. He goes to Corpus Christi Catholic School. Best thing about cheerleading: "It's great to be the only boys doing it."

In the pink: (left to right)
Camoye, Scott, Elliott, Josh,
Joe, McKenzie and Harvey



WORDS HELEN CARROLL PHOTOGRAPHS PHIL FISK

LET'S CHEER IT FOR THE Boys

ON A CRIME-
RIDDEN ESTATE,
MEET THE
REAL-LIFE
BILLY ELLIOTS
OVERCOMING
HARDSHIP
WITH THE HELP
OF POM-POM
POWER

FIND OUT
WHY THE
BOYS LOVE
CHEERLEADING