Crowborough teens say counselling works

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Two Crowborough teenagers who experienced mental health problems after traumatic experiences are raising awareness of the benefits of counselling.

Grace Berkery and Jess Constable, both 16, want to use their positive experiences of counselling to ensure others like them are open to the support available.

With support from Fixers – the charity that supports young people aged 16-25 to tackle the issues that fire them up – the girls are launching their mental health awareness campaign.

Both girls mental health difficulties were triggered by significant life changing experiences when they were younger – Grace having escaped from a house fire and Jess after losing her grandfather.

Grace said: “I looked through the bannisters and I could see the flames coming from the kitchen. My dad came out of the bedroom. He said we have got to get out. So we jumped out of my top window and then we had to jump down to the outside roof.

“To begin with I didn’t feel bad because I thought we were all safe, that was the main thing. But after that I began to get the flashbacks. I just remember feeling really lost and not knowing what was normal.”

Jess added: “When I was younger I used to self-harm and got counselling and started to feel a bit normal again.

“But when I was 14 I lost my granddad and that triggered everything again. There have been times where I felt I wanted to kill myself because I didn’t know what else to do.”

Motivated by their personal experiences, both are working on a campaign which points young people, with mental health concerns, in the direction of counselling – something which has changed both their lives.

Jess said: “We want to raise awareness of mental health and help young people to get the help they need.

“Eventually I ended up getting counselling and when I did I found it really helpful.”

Grace was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic disorder, following the house fire; something she feels has increased her understanding of her mindset.

She said: “They did an assessment and that came out about having Post Traumatic Stress.

“As soon as I was diagnosed with something, I realised I was normal and that I just had this problem and it was easier to overcome. I just needed that help to overcome it.”

Francis Burrows, Director of Operations at MindFull, supports the girls’ campaign, as he feels the earlier a young person is diagnosed with a mental health condition,
the greater the chance it won’t affect them going into adulthood.

He said: “We know about a quarter to a half of all adult mental health problems can be prevented if they are treated through childhood and adolescence.

“The key thing is to make sure young people get help at the earliest opportunity and to support them to get professional help so they can talk about their problems.”

The pair’s key message is that young people seek to understand their own mental state by simply talking about it and hope their example inspires others to do just that.

Grace said: “It’s good to get help. It’s the best thing you will ever do as by accepting yourself and the way you are, it feels like you are one step further to being OK again.”

Jess said: “My message to young people is to get help as soon as you can because I can promise you, when you do, everything will feel so much clearer.”

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Fixers is charity which supports young people across the UK to take action and change things for the better, addressing any issue they feel strongly about.

How each Fixer tackles their chosen issue is up to them – as long as they benefit someone else.

The award-winning Fixers project has already supported almost 10,000 young people to have an authentic voice in their community.

Each Fixer is supported to create the resources they need - such as films, websites or print work - to make their chosen project a success.

Now, thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers aims to work with a further 19,000 young people over the next three years.

Photo attached. Captions:
1. Fixers Grace and Jess, both 16, from Crowborough

For images, interviews or more information, please contact Jatin Patel in the Fixers Communications Team by email jatin@fixers.org.uk or phone 01962 810970.

There are lots more stories about young people doing great things on the Fixers website, Twitter and Facebook pages:
www.fixers.org.uk
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Notes to editors:

• Fixers started in England in 2008. Now with a £7.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers is extending into Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. To date, 9,914 young people across the UK have become Fixers and created 1,040 projects.
• The Public Service Broadcasting Trust is a charity that brings together mainstream broadcasters, public and voluntary sector services, and viewers.
• The Big Lottery Fund (BIG), the largest distributor of National Lottery good cause funding, is responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised for good causes by the National Lottery.
• BIG is committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environment and charitable causes across the UK since June 2004. The Fund was formally established by Parliament on 1 December 2006.
• Since the National Lottery began in 1994, 28p from every pound spent by the public has gone to good causes. As a result, over £29 billion has now been raised and more than 383,000 grants awarded across arts, sport, heritage, charities, health, education and the environment.
• Margo Horsley, Chief Executive of Fixers says: “Fixers started in 2008 as just an idea… an idea given a voice by over 9,000 young people over the past five years. They have reached thousands of people with their work, on a national stage as well as in and around where they live. They choose the full array of social and health issues facing society today and set about making their mark. Fixers are always courageous and their ideas can be challenging and life-changing, not just for themselves.”
• Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair, says: “The Big Lottery Fund is extremely happy to be supporting Fixers to engage with more young people to change things for the better. Thousands of public-spirited young people across the UK are campaigning to make improvements in their own communities. By providing a platform to highlight their voluntary work and many achievements, Fixers demonstrates the positive contribution thousands of committed young people are making at a local level and challenges negative stereotypes.”

Company Contact:

Fixers

T. 01962810970
E. sarahj@fixers.org.uk
W. https://www.fixers.org.uk

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