Disability or not - Worcester Tech Students raise efforts for greater integration.

Wednesday 6 February, 2013

Young people calling for greater integration of students with disabilities and learning difficulties into the social side of college life will be featured on ITV News Central on Thursday, February 7, from 6pm.

Two student union officers at Worcester College of Technology , Zeno Macdonald and David Walker, both of whom have dyslexia, feel attitudes towards students with disabilities makes integration within college life difficult.

Now working as 'Fixers', both Zeno and David are leading a group of classmates to help change attitudes which presently exist towards students with learning difficulties and disabilities, who often feel segregated, upset and unwelcome as a result.

Fixers is a movement of 16 to 25-year-olds across the UK who are supported to take action and change things for the better, addressing any issue they feel strongly about. How each Fixer tackles an issue is up to them – as long as they benefit someone else.

Zeno (18), who is the College Sports and Activities Officer, says that he wants to tackle the attitude of some students who make less able students feel unwelcome in the common room, and make disabled students feel uneasy when undertaking daily tasks which they sometimes find more difficult.

"A group of us felt that the able students weren't really integrating with the students with learning difficulties and disabled students. They wouldn't talk or interact with them or anything like that," Zeno says.

"I personally have been diagnosed with dyspraxia, dyslexia and ADHD. I was laughed at high school because I couldn't read, which other students thought was quite funny, so I know how it is to feel like an outcast.

"Our Fixers project is about breaking down the barriers between able students and students with learning difficulties and who are disabled. "

Fellow 'Fixer', David (20), who is the College Equality and Diversity Officer, feels that young people with disabilities are segregated within the college environment and action should be taken to help them feel more comfortable while learning.

"In order to get our message across, we have made a film exposing the current social aspects of the college and how we can come together to change it ourselves - to make it a more welcome and friendlier place for all people," says David.

Harry (21), another student involved in the project, said, "Some people have treated me differently because I'm autistic, but everyone's the same really. Everyone should be treated equally as we're all just as important as each other."

"I want lots of people to see our film because people who have disabilities are great and can do amazing things. It can also help bring more people together. I want everyone to see that even people with disabilities can be friends with them."

Worcester Technical College has an active policy of recruiting students with disabilities, with

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approximately a third registered with a disability or learning difficulty presently.

College Principle, Stuart Laverick supports the project and said, “It is great that this group has got involved with Fixers. It is key that we promote the benefits and values of a whole range of learners working together. That way, we can all start to understand the things we have in common.”

Working with Fixers, the students are making a film to show what it feels like to face social difficulty around college. This film will be used as part of a social media campaign and on the college’s website to raise awareness amongst peers.

Ultimately the aim is to set up a long-term scheme where the majority of students feel able to act as peer mentors/volunteers for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Zeno said, “The main message of our film is that we, as students, need to change our attitude and accept all classmates for who they are. It doesn’t matter how we look, we are still human beings, so we should treat each other the same. We are like a family and should all stick up for one another.”

Fixers are young people who give their time to make a difference in their communities.

Each Fixer is supported to create the resources they need to make their chosen project a success, with creative help from media professionals to make their own promotional material, such as films, websites or print work.

Fixers is a project of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), funded by the Big Lottery Fund which awarded them £7.2 million in April 2012.

“Fixers started in 2008 as just an idea… an idea given a voice by some 5,500 young people over the past four years,” says Margo Horsley, Chief Executive of PSBT.

“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. Their ideas can be challenging, inspirational and often life-changing.”

Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair, said: “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.”

Picture captions: One picture attached of Zeno Macdonald and one picture of all the Fixers involved

For images, interviews and more information, please contact Sarah Jones in the Fixers Communications Team by email sarahj@fixers.org.uk or phone 01962 810970.

Notes to editors:

Fixers is a project of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, and featured on ITV regional news programmes. Since 2008 more than 6,500 young people in England have become Fixers and created some 800 projects. Their achievements have been highlighted in over 300 ITV features. Now with a £7.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers is extending into Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and aims to work with 21,000 young people over the next four years.

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.

There are lots more stories about young people doing great things on our website, Twitter and Facebook pages:

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