

'Go back to where you came from.' What if you can't?

Monday 3 June, 2013

Two Canterbury based Fixers feel asylum seekers are misunderstood and more should be done to welcome them into society.

Oscar Leitner, 16 and Lauren Frend, 15, both members of the Kent Youth Theatre, have recently worked on a play, dramatising prejudices which presently exist towards asylum seekers in Kent.

Working with Fixers, the national movement of young people 'fixing' the future, the pair want to create a film, aimed at influencing people's attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers who genuinely need support.

A report about their campaign will feature on ITV News Meridian on Thursday, June 6, from 6pm.

Oscar a student at Kent College, feels passionate about the cause as his grandparents escaped Nazi Germany. He feels more people should understand the war torn environments which some asylum seekers are trying to escape from.

He said: "I am particularly interested in the problems of asylum seekers because my family were refugees from Nazi Germany and were made welcome here."

To aid their project, Oscar and Lauren interviewed two asylum seekers, both of whom escaped from devastated homes in Africa.

Yousif, one of the refugees, explained: "The worst part of the experience for me was in Sudan when I was being chased by the government, put in jail and treated very badly – I was thinking I was going to be killed at any time.

"When I first arrived in the UK, it was difficult. I felt lonely. I felt like there was no way for me to go back and I felt like I needed help."

Abdulgader, who came to Britain from Libya, added: "The militia came to my house. They arrested my brother, damaged my house and scared my family. My family left the house for Tripoli – they were still looking for me."

To help foster better understanding in their neighbourhoods, Yousif feels people should try to get to know asylum seekers and understand their experiences before casting judgement.

He said: "The message should be that asylum seekers are human beings that feel unsafe in their countries. They are made of blood and flesh, have feelings and they need support."

Juliette Wales of the Kent Refugee Action Network agrees and feels asylum seekers would rather be in their home country, but where they cannot, make the best of their situation in the UK.

She said: "The young asylum seekers I work with would want to say they have fled war, they've fled problems in their own country and left their families behind.

"They don't want to be here, they want to be back at home. But if they have to be here, they want to contribute to society, go to college, do well and be welcomed."

Oscar and Lauren hope that their film has a profound impact on their fellow home-grown students and that they are able to treat asylum seekers with equal respect.

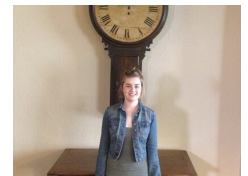
Oscar said: "Our main message is that asylum seekers are human beings and that they have every right to be safe, to be protected and have a happy life."

Fixers is a 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 an issue is up to them – as long as they benefit someone else.

The award-winning Fixers project has already supported more than 7,800 young people across the UK to have an authentic voice in their community.

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Now, thanks to funding from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers aims to work with a further 20,000 young people over the next three years.

Fixers is a project of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), a charity that brings together mainstream broadcasters, public and voluntary sector services, and viewers.

“Fixers started in 2008 as just an idea... an idea given a voice by some 7,800 young people over the past five 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. Fixers are always courageous and their ideas can be challenging and life-changing, not just for themselves.”

Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair, said: “The Big Lottery Fund is extremely proud to be supporting Fixers to engage with more young people to change things for the better. Fixers has a tremendous potential – one young person’s initial idea can be transformed into reality, spread across a community and make a positive influence on a wide range of people. There are thousands of young people campaigning to make improvements in their neighbourhoods and Fixers provides a platform to highlight their voluntary work and many achievements.”

Two photos attached.

Caption 1: Oscar Leitner from Deal

Caption 2: Lauren Frend from Herne Bay

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

www.twitter.com/FixersUK

www.facebook.com/FixersUK

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, around 7,800 young people across the UK have become Fixers and created more than 900 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.

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