Listen to my tragic story to understand the plight of asylum seekers

Tuesday 4 June, 2013

A Swindon-based Fixer who had to flee his country for his life aged seven after he was orphaned in violence that wiped out his entire village is campaigning to promote understanding of asylum seekers.

Abdulkareem (also known as Abdul) Musa Adams, now 16, was forced to leave Sudan, the only place he had ever known, following the bloodshed which claimed the lives of his parents and sisters.

Finally granted a safe haven in the UK eight years later, Abdul is now working with Fixers, the national movement of young people 'fixing' the future, to share his tragic story.

Millions of children worldwide are displaced by war and human rights violations every year and some - like Abdul - end up in the UK as refugees.

With Fixers, Abdul is planning to make a short advert detailing his nightmare journey from Sudan to long-term safety in Swindon, and to explain why people like him seek asylum.

"I joined Fixers to send a message out, to young people especially, that they need to be aware of conflicts abroad and the suffering they create, and that they need to help the people affected," said Abdul through a translator.

A report about his campaign will feature on ITV News West Country on Thursday, June 6, from 6pm.

From a cattle herding family in Sudan – a country ravaged by war - Abdul managed to escape the bloodshed that destroyed his rural village in the Darfur region with his younger brother because they had been making a trip a short distance away.

"One day troops came to my village," he said. "When the attack first began all we could see were helicopters because we were on the outskirts, then we saw people on horseback riding into the village and then flames coming out of the houses, and we could hear the sound of guns and bombs. The village was wiped out. I climbed up a tree and hid.

"From that point onwards I feel like I have been on the run, for years now I have been trying to get away from trouble."

Spending the majority of his childhood in refugee camps, on the street and in prison, it took Abdul eight years of travelling to find his safe haven in Swindon.

Running for their lives, it took the brothers three days to walk from Sudan to Chad immediately after their village was attacked. They were helped by a male and female villager whose separate families had both been slaughtered in the attack.

The four of them spent 18 months in a Chad refugee camp, but they split up when they panicked after hearing a rumour that the government was going to send them back to Sudan.

There was only enough money for two of them to get to Libya, so Abdul and the man – who he saw as a father figure – fled there, while the woman and Abdul's younger brother went deeper into Chad to hide.

The plan was for the woman and Abdul's brother to follow them on to Libya later – but they never saw them again.

Spending three years in Libya, Abdul was separated from the man when they were both imprisoned.

Abdul was sent to jail for refusing to join the Army as a child soldier and he was beaten there on a daily basis.

During one attack, he received head injuries and was hospitalised.

Managing to run away from the hospital, Abdul lived in a factory where the owner let him stay.

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He then fled to Egypt where he was picked up by the Red Cross, Abdul spent more time in Benghazi and Tripoli before getting on a boat to France where he lived in dustbins.

Abdul arrived in the UK in September 2012 after climbing onto the underside of a truck not knowing its destination.

He has had several foster placements since he arrived, but has been living with foster carer Ira Muir in Swindon for three months.

Granted leave to remain in the UK, he goes to the town's Harbour Project – which provides support to refugees and asylum seekers - every day and also attends college.

He conducts daily searches on Skype and Facebook to try to locate people in Chad, Libya and Sudan who can help him to look for his brother.

"I am still haunted by this past, even now I have sleepless nights," said Abdul.

"But the main thing is that I am no longer hearing the sound of guns. All I can hear now is birds singing first thing in the morning, and that makes me really happy."

Abdul hopes the advert he is planning to make with Fixers will be used by Social Services and the Harbour Project, which has offered him great support.

David Rowlands, chairman of the Harbour Project, said: "What Abdul is doing is proving to people that there are countries across the world where there is a real fear of persecution of death and torture and I think this will throw a new light on the asylum seeking process."

Fixers is a charity which supports thousands of 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 around 7,800 young people across the UK to have an authentic voice in their community.

Now, thanks to funding from the Big Lottery, 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).

"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. Captions:
1. Abdulkareem Musa Adams
2. Abdulkareem Musa Adams with foster mum Ira Muir

For images, interviews or more information, please contact Sarah Jones in the Fixers Communications Team by email sarahj@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 960 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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