Paralympian Kate Murray backs campaign encouraging people to look past disabilities

Friday 8 March, 2013

A group of mixed ability ‘Fixers’ from Dumfries have won the support of Paralympian Kate Murray to get disabled and able-bodied young people mixing together more.

Lead Fixer Caitlin McDowell, 16, said in her experience, friends with disabilities often felt left out at school.

“One of my friends has a form of communication disability. After school we would play netball, games and went away a lot together. But in school she wasn’t allowed to mix with us.

“It was annoying because she was my friend. We spent time together after school, but at school she was in a different group and we couldn’t openly talk to each other.”

Kate Murray, who lives in Hawick, has been competing in archery for over nine years, and won bronze at the 2007 World Championships in Cheongju, Korea. Part of ParalympicsGB, Kate finished in the top 10 of the women’s Individual Recurve at London 2012, and celebrated her 64th birthday on the opening day of competition.

“I’m very interested in this idea of incorporating young people together in schools,” she said.

“I sometimes think that, young people in particular, don’t know what to say to disabled people. It’s a lack of knowledge. I went to a local school and, once I got them talking and they could see past the wheelchair, they could relax. People sometimes seem to think ‘oh you’re special’, but no I’m just the same. I think it’s a great project.”

A report about the group’s campaign will feature on ITV News Lookaround on Tuesday 12 March, from 6pm.

The group is made up of able bodied and disabled young people, some with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, Asperger’s and autism.

“We feel that there is too much separation between able bodied and disabled people, not just locally but across the whole of the UK,” said Caitlin.

“We want to break down barriers so that people feel more able to mix with each other. We all have the same goals and, as teenagers, we enjoy the same things.

“We’re planning on setting up a website where both disabled and able bodied students can share their experiences, ask questions, and find out information. It’s a two-way street really.

“It will show that we’re kind of united and we’re all mixed in different ways but we should be able to mix a lot more openly. The idea is just to get people talking. Once a conversation starts then the actions come from that,” said Caitlin.

The group are particularly keen to raise awareness in schools as they feel those with a disability are kept apart from non-disabled people.

“I think it’s very important to get able-bodied and disabled people together – they have a lot to offer,” added Kate.

“Mixing together gives each other an insight. Able-bodied people don’t tend to understand the silly little things you have to cope with. I think it’s essential that they should be mixed.

“In my experience, perhaps because I’m an older person, I have found it a lot easier. As a child it could be a lot harder. I’m a lot older and wouldn’t tolerate it. Young people don’t have the confidence of age like I have.

Sarah Cosby from Disability Rights UK said: “Disabled people are four times more likely to be in unemployed than non-disabled young people. It’s a complete waste of disabled people’s talents.

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“Research shows that the best way to change attitudes and break down barriers is for disabled and non-disabled people to interact on equal terms and school is a great place for that to start.”

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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 almost 7,000 young people aged 16 to 25 across the UK to have an authentic voice in their community.

Now, thanks to a £7.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers aims to work with a further 20,000 young people over the next three years.

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 trademark 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 7,000 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 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.”

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

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Notes to editors:

• Since 2008 some 7,000 young people in England have become Fixers and created 800 projects. Now with a £7.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund, Fixers is extending into Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.
• 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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