“Wimps lift weights; cheerleaders lift people!”

Thursday 4 April, 2013

She has been cheerleading for nine years and trains for 18 hours at weekends, and yet she is still frustrated that people do not take her sport seriously.

Fixer Zanele Mpofu, 18, from Prestwich, is a committed cheerleader and wants to persuade people the sport is not a joke and cheerleaders are not ‘ditsy’.

Zanele, a law student at Oldham College, said: “We have a saying in cheer: wimps lift weights and cheerleaders lift people!

“I live, breathe, eat, and sleep cheerleading. I coach, I choreograph, and I travel around the world competing on behalf of Great Britain.

“People often get the impression that cheerleaders should be ditsy, but it’s not like that at all. I’m currently studying law and I think I’d be lost without cheerleading. I work very hard for all the skills I’ve got and I’m very passionate about it.

“It’s not easy to pull off a routine like we do, while making it look easy to the crowd with a smile on our faces.”

Working with Fixers, the national movement of young people ‘fixing’ the future, Zanele wants to show there’s more to cheerleading than make-up and pompoms.

A report about her campaign will feature on ITV Granada Reports on Tuesday 9 April, from 6pm.

Craig Budgen, celebrity personal trainer and nutrition expert, took part in the report and agrees that cheerleading is a demanding sport.

“It is seriously quite impressive,” he says. “What the girls are doing involves quite a lot of coordination, flexibility, and strength. It definitely is a full body workout.”

Zanele says cheerleading is a demanding, high-energy discipline that is not only a great way to keep fit, but also a fun social activity for young people to get involved in.

“A lot of people think it’s just for girls but it’s not true. In America it’s quite cool to be a male cheerleader, but not here.

“I want more young people – boys and girls – to get involved for the health and social benefits, but I know that negative stereotypes can stop people from wanting to take part.”

During the report Zanele puts two male volunteers to the test – and they were surprised at just how strenuous cheerleading can be.

One says: “It’s very energetic, took my breath away. Yes it really is a hard sport. I enjoyed it too,” while the other says: “It’s changed my opinion of cheerleading. I used to think it was just for girls, but it’s different. It’s tiring.”

Zanele hopes she can get more people to look at cheerleading in a different light: “I want to raise the profile of cheerleading in this country and hopefully make people realise it’s a serious sport.

“Working with Fixers I think we can really make a change and get more people doing something that has loads of benefits.”

Fixers is 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 over 7,000 young people across the UK to have an authentic voice in their community.

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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.”

Photo attached. Captions:
1. Zanele Mpofu wants cheerleading to be taken as a serious sport.
2. The Manchester Diamonds cheerleading squad in action.

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.

There are lots more stories about young people doing great things on the Fixers website, Twitter and Facebook pages:
http://www.fixers.org.uk
http;//www.twitter.com/FixersUK
http://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, over 7,000 young people across the UK have become Fixers and created 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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