

Young Bristol woman on mission to break self-harm taboo

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A Bristol Fixer is drawing on her own experience of self-harm to improve understanding of why people deliberately hurt themselves.

Imogen Smith, who self-harmed from the age of 15, is creating a website to educate and inform sufferers, their loved ones, health professionals and teachers.

Working with Fixers, the national movement of young people 'fixing' the future, the 23-year-old hopes to break down the stigma and misconceptions surrounding the issue.

A report about her campaign will feature on ITV News West Country on Thursday, May 9, from 6pm.

Imogen says her self-harming was triggered when she was admitted to hospital with an eating disorder.

Suffering from depression, she continued to deliberately hurt herself throughout her AS and A-levels.

"I felt driven to self-harm because I was feeling so alone," she said. "I felt like I didn't have anywhere to go or any hope at all.

"Self-harming feels like a release. It makes you feel calmer and like you have more perspective on the situation. Like a drug, it takes you to another place momentarily."

It was when Imogen went to university that she learnt coping strategies to fight the impulse to self-harm.

Her family and friends were a great help, and Imogen believes that emotional support and practical advice is the key to recovery.

Through her website, she wants to prompt more open discussion about self-harm and to equip more sufferers with the tools to get better.

"I completely understand that self-harm is a condition that's hard to get your head around," said Imogen.

"Even having gone through it, I sometimes cannot believe I was there and I can't believe that it happened to me.

"So I can completely understand people's judgement, shock, anger and frustration. All I would say is that it does happen, it happens to a lot of people and we need to help them."

An estimated one in 12 young people in the UK are believed to have self-harmed at some point in their lives, according to a recent charity survey.

While self-harm is often associated with cutting, Imogen wants to raise awareness that it can include actions like bruising, scalding, scratching and overdosing too.

"My message to someone who is self-harming would be that you are not alone," said Imogen.

"Hopefully my journey is going to help other people to aim for recovery. You do have the power to change your situation with the right tools."

Imogen's website is set to go live this summer.

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 7,400 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), 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 7,400 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.”

One photo attached. Caption: Imogen Smith from Bristol.

For images, interviews or more information, please contact Maggie Morgan in the Fixers Communications Team by email maggie@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

[Read Imogen's story on the Fixers website](#)

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 7,400 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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