

CELEBRITIES HELP YOUNG GAY PEOPLE LIVING IN THE STICKS

**YOUNG LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE OFFERED THE
CHANCE TO TAKE PART IN MAKING 4 FILMS**

WEBSITE LAUNCH –

www.ruralmedia.co.uk/sticks

Herefordshire's Rural Media Company is launching STICKS AND STONES, a lottery funded project, to combat homophobic bullying in rural areas.

Project managers have recruited gay celebrities to take part, many expressing on the website how they have dealt with homophobic bullying in the past and how it effects their public life now.

The website www.ruralmedia.co.uk/sticks is now online and young gay people from across the UK can register their interest in the Sticks and Stones filmmaking project or chat with other people, either in the FORUM (from Friday 14th September) or in live web chats, featuring celebrity guests.

Celebrities such as black lesbian rapper Mz Fontaine and Big Brother's Josh Rafter signed up after seeing how a project like this will help young people considering their sexual orientation but who are stuck out in the sticks and putting up with small town homophobic attitudes.

Eventually, project managers and youngsters who've got involved with the online forum will work together to write scripts for a series of short films, which will explore bullying scenarios and ways to get out of them. It's hoped about 50 young gay men and women from isolated rural communities across the UK will get involved in the filmmaking process. These films will then be launched on internet sites like YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.

Doctor Who and Queer as Folk writer and producer Russell T Davies is quoted on the website, making some interesting points about life as a gay teenager:

"The most extraordinary thing to happen over the past 10 years is the existence of the gay teenager. When I was at school at a big comprehensive there was no one in the world like you. There was no one on television, there weren't even documentaries. The internet has been the most phenomenal thing for young gay people and more empowering and liberating than any law. You used to feel completely alone, and now you can go online and meet

thousands of people like yourself. The day a 12-year-old can watch telly with his dad and go 'Cor, look at him' when a sexy man appears on screen, and for the dad to laugh like he would if it were Pamela Anderson, we will be getting somewhere."

Josh Rafter, the Big Brother star and director of Britain's biggest gay property management agency Outlet is lending his support:

"I am delighted to be helping the Sticks and Stones project," says Josh. "It was incredible the number of letters I received after Big Brother from young gay people who felt isolated and in a lot of cases bullied and harassed. Many were terrified to openly admit they were gay."

As well as Josh, other high profile gay celebrities are getting involved. Mz Fontaine stated on the Sticks website:

"Being isolated can leave one feeling alone, distant and uninvolved. For those in this situation now I understand and feel the struggle you're going through. Though it's not always safe, the internet is an effective form of communicating with others who may be in the same situation. There is life away from isolation; there is hope out there and with the help of projects like Sticks and Stones people can have a platform for expression."

Rural Media Company chief executive Nic Millington said:

"There are so many homosexual youngsters in rural areas across the country but many feel they're the only one. They are usually being bullied in school for being different because teenagers are trying their best to fit in."

Sam Hyde from the Camelot Foundation said:

"What makes this project special is that the films will be made by and feature the people who know about the issue best - young gay men and lesbians themselves."

Gay lobby group Stonewall estimates that there are more than 60,000 young people suffering from homophobic bullying in rural areas. Although The Rural Media Company is based in Herefordshire, Sticks and Stones is a national project and hopes to reach out to youngsters across the UK.

NOTES: website launches 1st week September / online forum Friday 14th September / first live web chat hour 1st week of October.

Please call Steven Davies, Project Manager, for further information
- 01432 344039 or email stevend@ruralmedia.co.uk

Jpegs attached – Josh Rafter / Mz Fontaine