



Press Release

Issued: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018

### **Theatre in the Quarter attracts major funding for innovative refugee project**

One of Chester's leading theatre companies, Theatre in the Quarter has just embarked on its rehearsal period of its new project 'Walk My Journey' – an ambitious live street performance and film involving over 700 children drawn from 27 primary schools from across Chester and Cheshire.

Leading on from the success of its production 'The Lost Boy' in 2017, which told the story of a young Syrian boy as he learns to deal with the attitudes of British people living in a seaside town, the company is once again collaborating with national charity City of Sanctuary as well as refugee support groups in Salford and Hull to share the stories of young refugees from Eritrea, Sudan and Afghanistan. 'Walk My Journey' is a multimedia project, involving a short film, created in partnership with Andy Davies of The Video Company, and a mass choir of young people as they perform live in the streets of Chester on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

Matt Baker, Artistic Director of Theatre in the Quarter, said: "We are delighted with the range of funders who have come forward to support us with this project, from the Foyle Foundation, Arts Council England and the Lottery through to the Marjory Boddy Trust and the Earl of Chester, it proves to us that we have an absolute endorsement for this vital and timely piece of work."

Dr Jeff Morgan, Trustee of City of Sanctuary, said: City of Sanctuary is delighted to continue its relationship with Theatre in the Quarter, which began during the theatre company's The Lost Boy theatre project. He said, "We believe it's very important to inform the general public about refugees and asylum seekers; their journeys and the reasons why they flee their homes, careers and loved ones, and the horrendous challenges they face in seeking asylum in the UK. Hearing from them first-hand as opposed to reading and listening to the media."

Theatre in the Quarter has been working with three young men who have shared their experiences of their journeys into the UK, from time spent in Libyan refugee camps, perilous boat trips across to Italy and the notorious 'Jungle' in Calais.

Jeff continued: "That's why Walk My Journey is such an important project, because Theatre in the Quarter has engaged with three young asylum seekers, enabling them to share their stories on an artistic and educational platform and celebrating the potential contribution refugees can make to British society and local communities. I whole-heartedly congratulate Theatre in the Quarter for highlighting, once again, this subject matter in a sensitive and inclusive manner."

Walk My Journey will be taking place on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November, it will incorporate the city's Lantern Parade, led by Russell Kirk, before stopping at the West Door of Chester Cathedral where the film broadcast and mass community performance will take place at 7pm.

Matt continued: "It's absolutely humbling to hear these stories, we knew after the feedback that we received about 'The Lost Boy' in 2017, that we had to continue our work with highlighting the plight of young refugees. To have the opportunity to now share this project with over 700 young people means that Theatre in the Quarter is fulfilling the ambition that it set several years ago, and that's to challenge people's attitudes and perceptions of refugees

and asylum seekers and to educate our future generations here in Chester as to what it's like to be displaced in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

The schools have so far been involved with workshops which includes learning the songs for the film and also gaining more of an understanding about refugees making their journeys. Fiona MacSween, deputy head of Highfield Community School in Blacon said, "The children absolutely loved the workshop, thank you so much. We are looking forward to the filming and the live event in November."

Jo McLeish, producer of 'Walk My Journey' said: "It's been a real privilege to spend time filming these three young refugees who have shared their stories on camera, it cannot be easy for them to have to recap on some of the darkest days of their lives. What's been incredible is the response from the children in the workshops when we tell them about these journeys. They have asked lots of questions and are genuinely interested in what has happened to these three refugees. I am very much looking forward to working on the next stage of this project."

Theatre in the Quarter is very grateful to Chester Race Company who have enabled the filming of the 700 children to take place on the race course in October. Matt Baker added, "This will be incredibly exciting as we will be using the very latest drone technology to capture so many hundreds of children singing the song which will appear on the film."

Theatre in the Quarter is currently in talks with several cities across the UK who are hoping to program the 'Walk My Journey' film into their Refugee Weeks in 2019.



Murbark, the young Sudanese refugee who is taking part in Theatre in the Quarter's Walk My Journey film.



Children from St Clare's RC Primary School, Eccleston Primary School, Belgrave Primary School and Lache Primary School join hundreds of others in a workshop led by Theatre in the Quarter's Matt Baker and Jo McLeish