

Videocamp Film Fund 2018

Final Five Q&A: Rosa Rogers, director of *Together*

Filmmakers from 29 countries applied to the Videocamp Film Fund 2018, for the chance to receive \$400,000 to produce their film on inclusive education. After tough deliberations the Final Five films have been chosen, and now it's down to the judging panel, made up of highly respected film industry members and inclusive education specialists. They will announce their selected project on 21st September.



One of the films through to the Final Five is *Together*, directed by former BAFTA-winner Rosa Rogers. We talked to her about the inspiration behind *Together* and her past work, including making films in British Sign Language.

Where did the idea for *Together* come from?

A few years ago we made a series of short films exploring inclusive education for the Open University. We went to Indonesia to film an amazing pilot scheme where they introduced Key Word Signing into some schools. It was incredible to see how it enabled children of different abilities to fully engage, both with their education and socially with each other. It's fantastic to see something so genuinely inclusive being pioneered somewhere like Indonesia, where there still is a lot of stigma and superstition around disability. What really struck us about one school in particular, Galuh Handiyani school in Surabaya, is that it's so oversubscribed now, for children with and without disability. Since then we've wanted to go back and do something in more depth and for a wider audience.

Who are the main characters in the film?

We would follow four young friends at Galuh Handiyani School in East Java. Bima is 17, a talented designer and performer who is Deaf, and whose confidence has soared since he came to the school four years ago. Restu and Khofiah are best friends who bonded over a love of football and dance routines. Restu has autism and she and Khofiah help each other to negotiate the world. And 8 year old Mansun is discovering life beyond four walls, starting school after spending most of his life inside his family's small village house. The power of documentaries is in the personal human stories, and finding the universality within them.

Our main characters all represent slightly different things, each with a unique personality. My last feature documentaries have been very similar in this style. They've had three or four central characters, all part of something that brings them together but all having their own stories. It feels like a structure that's worked as a way of taking the audience into a world that's very vivid and personal, but shows things from a few different perspectives.

What impact do you think this film could have?

I think it could be huge, because there's such a gap at the moment between the aims of the UN convention in terms of inclusivity, and the reality of most schools. We would want to have screenings with policymakers, government officials and academics, to discuss specific inclusive policy aims, but also screenings at schools, with parents and communities. With any kind of social change you need pressure from both ends, top-down and grassroots. There need to be policy changes but also the will and support to help those policies succeed in practice.

What challenges do you think there are specifically in the UK around inclusive education?

It feels as though inclusivity is going in the wrong direction. It's partly about funding cuts, and there just not being the support that's needed to make inclusivity work. But also there's this culture of results, where it's much much harder for schools to do anything that's not purely target-driven. And inclusivity isn't target-driven – it's about something that's much more important, but much deeper. I'm really passionate about schools being the place where you're mixing with everybody. If you grow up learning to understand different ways in which people might experience or view the world, that sets up how you negotiate the world later on. If schools aren't doing that it bodes really badly for the future.

How would you make this film inclusive on and off screen?

Representation on screen is hugely important, but so is representation behind the camera. We can't expect to see the full spectrum of human experiences on screen unless we have a diverse mix of people making the films, so having an inclusive team throughout this production process would be really key. My experience working with Deaf and hearing filmmakers at Channel 4, making films in British Sign Language, made me aware of how much talent there is and how many barriers there are for people with disabilities to get into the film industry.

We've also already spoken to the school about running filmmaking workshops at the school. One of the visual ideas for the film is to do these sequences where we really experience the world through the perspectives of our main characters. We'd develop them with the young people, and depending on how they want to do it they may film those themselves. Giving them the tools to show how the world looks through their eyes is key.

Tell us about some of your other work

A couple of years ago I made the documentary *Casablanca Calling*, about a scheme in Morocco training women to be religious leaders for the first time. They're called the mourchidat, meaning 'female guide'. It's such a strong counter-narrative to so much of what was in the Western media about Islam at the time. The film seems to resonate with people and I think that's because of the way it's told with a few central characters. You may look at this culture and think it's different and nothing to do with you, but then you get drawn in and realise how much you have in common with these people. It's about recognising and embracing difference – in some ways it's a similar theme to *Together*. And my most recent documentary, *Pirates of Sale* is about four young people at a circus school in Sale, Morocco. It started as a social project for children who were out of school, but it's now a professional circus school, and it's this magical world that just turns all your cultural expectations upside down. The film is being adapted at the moment by the National Theatre, so hopefully there will be a stage version on its way.

What would it mean to you to win the Videocamp Film Fund 2018?

As a filmmaker my work is all about putting the spotlight on perspectives we don't often hear about, and helping audiences understand the world in a different way. Winning would be an incredible opportunity for my producer Jane Dibblin and I to combine our filmmaking with our experiences with disability to make something really special.

About Rosa Rogers

Rosa Rogers is an award-winning documentary director whose films have been made and shown around the world. Her work includes a wide range of documentary, drama and experimental film for broadcast, educational use and for the NGO/charity sector. She spent three years working with a team of Deaf and hearing filmmakers to produce innovative films in BSL (British Sign Language) for Channel 4. In 2014 she was invited to speak at the UN about her work and the role of women as social changemakers and she has spoken at a number of international events on the theme of countering violent extremism in conjunction with screenings of her film Casablanca Calling.