



MERCURIAL PICTURES

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SEEN BUT NOT HEARD...

H IS FOR HARRY highlights power of telling stories from the perspective of children and young people to help boost educational outcomes for all children

Mercurial Pictures, the documentary film production company behind the acclaimed education documentary H IS FOR HARRY, has published its vision for change and CPD toolkit supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to coincide with National Storytelling Week (1-8th February).

Recent figures from JRF highlight that 4.1 million children are living in poverty, a rise of 500,000 since 2011/12. Against the backdrop of a Britain riven with debates around educational disadvantage, social mobility and identity, the new vision outlines a five-step plan based on the experiences of children and young people in the film.

The vision, toolkit and surrounding H IS FOR HARRY outreach campaign intends to create a constructive public debate through the power of telling stories from the perspective of children and young people you might not normally see or hear. The vision outlines the A-E five-step plan for change:

- A. **Abolish illiteracy** – Illiteracy helps to perpetuate unemployment, homelessness, crime and can drastically lower life expectancy. Real social change cannot happen without confronting the issue of illiteracy in schools and at home. Illiteracy is ingrained in the fabric of British society with whole families being held back from achieving a better life.
- B. **Begin with the voice of children, young people and families** – As a society, we believe that every child counts yet the narrative around educational disadvantage and poverty is too often negative. It is vital that important debates at national and grassroots levels do not become disconnected from the direct experience of children.

Stories like Harry's resonate powerfully and can be profound catalysts for change by creating empathy and compassion for those who actually experience the impact of public policies.

- C. **Champion early intervention** – Our background should not dictate how well we do in life. It's not right that children growing up in poorer communities do not achieve the same educational outcomes as those who do not. Early intervention transforms children's lives. These services need investment given the crucial role they can play supporting families and identifying children with developmental difficulties.

- D. **Deliver support all-through a child's life** – A lack of social mobility hinders children and young people in many different ways, not just academic achievement. We need a collective vision for continuously unlocking opportunities for every child and young person, no matter what their age or circumstances.

An early, holistic approach combined with sustained all-through support throughout school and college years is the best chance of helping children like Harry break free from poverty.

- E. **End the blame narratives and show compassion** – we face a complex, systemic issue to which there is no easy answer. Scapegoating individuals or organisations is not going to make the difference that is needed and offers no sustainable solutions.

What is required is a nuanced debate about the issues and deep thinking about why the system is having these tragic outcomes. Constructive public debate and the making of good policy happens best through showing compassion with those who experience the impact of public policies.

Directed by Ed Owles and Jaime Taylor, *H IS FOR HARRY* is a coming of age story about Harry, a charismatic 11-year old boy, who arrives at secondary school in suburban London unable to read or write. The film follows Harry over two years as he fights to improve academically, overturn the illiteracy experienced within his family and begin to believe in a different future for himself.

Jaime Taylor, Co-Director of *H IS FOR HARRY*, said: “After growing up in a similar neighbourhood to Harry, it is evident that his experience of disadvantage and illiteracy is far from unique. Similar stories are unfolding in towns and cities all around us.

“Too often children and young people’s perspectives are omitted from debates about education and wider society. This is deeply unfair when they are living and breathing the critical issues that schools and educational settings are facing today. We need to ensure all our children have the best chance to get on in life, whatever their circumstances. Because the worst, most debilitating effect of poverty on young people is the lack of confidence and headspace to imagine that life could be different.”

Abigail Scott Paul, Deputy Director of Advocacy and Public Engagement at Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said: “As a society, we believe that every child should have the best start in life. And yet in a typical classroom of 30 children in the UK, nine are growing up in poverty. This means nine children whose opportunities and life chances are restricted. For a country like the UK, this is unacceptable and we know it doesn’t have to be this way.

“*H IS FOR HARRY* is one authentic story that shows that the change we need for our children is possible, with Harry and his fellow classmates defined by their potential, not by their poverty. This important film, and the surrounding campaign, should act as a catalyst to have this conversation in the corridors of power as well as the wider community.”

The *H IS FOR HARRY* outreach campaign is a call to action for parents, carers, teachers, children, young people, community leaders and policy makers to help make the changes needed to improve educational disadvantage.

Over 2020, a range of activities will be taken forward to ignite discussion and drive social action, including:

- Supporting schools, universities, local authorities, libraries and other organisations to host their own screening of H IS FOR HARRY to raise awareness. The new screening guide and CPD toolkit accompanies the film and is jam-packed with tips and advice to help spark debate and action following the screening.
- Growing partnerships with charities, community initiatives, think tanks and research organisations around key H IS FOR HARRY themes, including early intervention, literacy, inclusion and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) etc.
- Seeking a UK broadcasting partner to show the film and partner on outreach and advocacy. This follows successful international screenings in Sweden, Canada and Spain.
- Engaging with MPs, parliamentarians, committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) to further prioritise children and young people's lived experiences in policy making. This builds on an Early Day Motion and mention in a House of Commons debate alongside the film being used as a training resource within the Department of Education.

To download the H IS FOR HARRY Vision for Change and Screening Guide and CPD Toolkit, and to show the film at your school or educational / community setting, visit:

www.hisforharry.com/takeaction

For further information on H IS FOR HARRY visit <https://www.hisforharry.com> or search @HisforHarryFilm on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/HisforHarryFilm>) and Facebook (<https://facebook.com/HisforHarryFilm>)

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

About H IS FOR HARRY

- Directed by Ed Owles and Jaime Taylor, H IS FOR HARRY is a coming of age story about Harry, a charismatic 11-year old boy, who arrives at secondary school in suburban London unable to read or write.
- The film follows Harry over two years as he fights to improve academically, overturn the illiteracy experienced within his family and begin to believe in a different future for himself.
- The film tells a new story about:
 - The impact of illiteracy on children's futures;
 - The complex issues that lock families in poverty and hold children back from achieving their potential;
 - The need for schools, education and communities to work together to drive change;
 - The need to listen to children and young people.
- Download the H IS FOR HARRY Screening Guide and CPD Toolkit, and find out further information on how to screen the film at your school or educational / community setting, at: www.hisforharry.com/takeaction
- H IS FOR HARRY continues to screen at a myriad of cinemas, conferences and festivals, both nationally and internationally. Find out more at: www.hisforharry.com/watch
- For further information on H IS FOR HARRY visit <https://www.hisforharry.com>
- Search @HisforHarryFilm on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/HisforHarryFilm>) and Facebook (<https://facebook.com/HisforHarryFilm>)