



BEHIND THE HEADLINES | TOM CLARK



New film highlights plight of homeless in 21st century Britain

'The Truth About Stanley' is a standalone drama about two homeless people, a young boy and an old man, who strike up an unusual friendship. It stars Oliver Litondo, a former newsreader-turned-actor from Kenya who recently starred in feature film *The First Grader*. The film's producer Tom Clark tells the behind the scenes story of how and why Stanley came to be made.

When Lucy Tcherniak and Neil Westley, the writers of 'The Truth About Stanley', came to dinner at my house in September last year, I never expected the project to go so far.

The pair had a tiny budget and were talking in terms of an eight-minute film. It was about two homeless characters and the script was extraordinarily moving. They needed a producer and I came on board. As I thought about how to get the money, people, equipment and places together for the film, it seemed to me that there was more we could do with this.

In an era of government cuts and a squeeze on the budgets of the councils and charities that look after the more vulnerable members of society, a film imagining homeless characters in a vivid, emotionally powerful way is actually quite significant. Why not find a way to make this a bigger film?

Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer is an international law firm and it is well known for its longstanding commitment to the cause of homelessness. I decided to ask Freshfields to sponsor the film so we could make it longer and better. I cold called the firm and got through to corporate social responsibility manager James Daffum. He took about half a day to say yes. Thanks to Freshfields, the film is now 21 minutes long and has much higher production values.

We then found third sector partners in The Big Issue Foundation and homelessness charity Anchor House. Anchor House is not as well known as The Big Issue but it is a vital part of the community in Newham, providing accommodation and life skills for the homeless. Both organisations were enormously helpful not just in terms of vital research but also in the production itself.

The Big Issue helped us get Radiohead on board to provide part of the soundtrack and Anchor House gave us their centre as a base for the first day of the shoot which was not only helpful from a logistical point of view, but also cemented with us what we were working towards as we breakfasted



A scene from 'The Truth About Stanley'

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amongst the residents.

One of the factors that persuaded all the partners to say yes to the project was the previous work of the director, Lucy Tcherniak. Her vision is pretty uncompromising. It was Lucy who insisted it could not be just anybody playing Stanley, it had to be Oliver Litondo, a former newsreader-turned-actor from Kenya who gave a brilliant performance as the world's oldest primary school pupil in feature film *The First Grader*. We got Oliver to London in time for the shoot by the skin of our teeth, after a few white-knuckle moments sorting out his visa, which, to be fair, were entirely down to my ignorance of such matters.

'21st-century Cathy Come Home' will highlight the rise of UK homelessness

The Guardian

Raif Clarke plays young runaway Sam. Oliver genuinely loves children, and he and Raif had an immediate rapport. It is just as well as we then spent five days touring some of the most desolate parts of London – like the Edgware Road Underpass and a far-from-scenic stretch of the Thames on the Isle of Dogs – in freezing cold winter weather.

The film was made for about 10 percent of normal industry cost. So many of the cast, crew, suppliers and councils gave us their services, talent and equipment for free or a fraction of the normal cost. It is amazing what can be done with a lot of goodwill. The film is also a testimony to the lack of interference from our partners.

Homelessness has always drawn my attention as it is a problem that can be solved unlike some far more seemingly insurmountable problems – there have already been great strides made in the last few decades. I have volunteered for Crisis at Christmas. One of the things I learned there was to acknowledge everyone who asks for money in the street, even if it is simply to politely say no. To be acknowledged is sustenance for the self and costs nothing – the homeless often go without this as much as other essentials.

I believe the strength of the 'Stanley' is that it is not a commercial, commissioned after the message has already been decided, although there is nothing wrong with that approach. Stanley is a sui generis creative project. It will, we hope, raise a great deal of money for – and open hearts to – a very good cause indeed. I hope more people like Sam and Stanley get the help they need thanks to this film.

'The Truth About Stanley' is free to view at <http://thetruthaboutstanley.com> and aims to raise money for The Big Issue and Anchor House. To donate text STANLEY2, 3 or 6 to 70300 to give £2, £3 OR £6 to The Truth About Stanley fund. ■