

NET Television Assists Young Filmmaker with Production and Broadcast of Documentary

LINCOLN, Neb. (June 23, 2010) -- Armed with compassion and a video camera, 17-year-old high school student Natalia Ledford produced, directed, wrote, shot and edited a documentary about Sudanese teenagers who came to the United States to escape a devastating civil war that killed their family members and destroyed their homes. "Paths of the Displaced" documents the struggles and triumphs of five Sudanese teenagers living in Lincoln. It airs Tuesday, July 6, at 9 p.m. CT on NET1 and NET-HD, repeating on NET2 Saturday, July 10, at 7 p.m. CT and Thursday, July 15, at 6 p.m. CT.

Now a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Ledford befriended the refugee teens while they were all students at Lincoln High School in Lincoln, Neb. She was shocked by their stories, yet fascinated by the courage and resiliency the young people displayed. As Ledford developed close friendships with the students, she decided to begin a film project to raise awareness about the crippling issues affecting refugees everywhere, told from the first-hand perspective of her student refugee friends.

"They described running as their villages were being attacked by the government, witnessing children being murdered and having to walk hundreds of miles on foot to refugee camps. I had no idea that there were students at my high school who had come from such extreme circumstances," said Ledford.

Ledford was curious about Africa, and learned about Sudan from students she tutored in the English Language Learners (ELL) classes at Lincoln High. Toward the end of Ledford's junior year in high school, she and her refugee friends decided to produce a short video about the situation in Sudan to show to other classrooms at the school.

The project gained the support of NET Television in 2007 when Ledford and her mother approached the statewide NET Television network for advice. As part of a cooperative effort between UNL's College of Journalism and Mass Communication and NET, Ledford received visiting status as a UNL student and was granted use of editing and post production facilities. She also became an NET intern, which provided her with access to professional mentoring and feedback.

"Natalia is a remarkable young person. You don't run across people like her very often. We provided support and guidance, but it's her writing and her storytelling in the program," said NET Television Special Projects Manager Michael Farrell, who worked closely with Ledford on the documentary.

Dr. Mary Pipher, a psychologist and author of "The Middle of Everywhere," a book about her own experiences working with refugees, is featured in "Paths of the Displaced." She also played a critical role in developing the project. Pipher was interviewed in the documentary and has since helped to guide Ledford with the project.

"Paths of the Displaced" combines an historical depiction of the ongoing civil war in Sudan and its consequences in the present day lives of young refugee victims now living in Lincoln and Grand Island. Because their story is told through the eyes of an American peer from their high

school who progressively becomes their close friend, the film reveals a deep cultural contrast between its maker and characters. It also exposes newly-developed friendships and a cross-cultural, mutual understanding that Pipher refers to as the "circle of us."

"Paths of the Displaced" focuses on the challenges refugees face in the school systems and in the job market when they relocate to an American city such as Lincoln. Ledford hopes to inspire people to support the local organizations that assist refugees, as well as to show the success her new Sudanese friends experience in their new lives. "Once I began filming, I started learning more and more about the refugee resettlement process and how incredibly difficult it can be. That ended up becoming the focus of the film," she said.

"Natalia has accomplished something that many would-be novice or even accomplished filmmakers strive for and rarely achieve. 'Paths of the Displaced' will be an important film to be shared with schools and communities across the state and the region, and it will do much to broaden our understanding and empathy for newcomers living among us," said Farrell.

The documentary has already been shown to audiences in Lincoln, who have had highly emotional reactions to its content. Ledford plans to continue using the film to raise awareness and motivate action for refugees in Nebraska, and hopes to gain enough support to expand these efforts nationwide. Ledford is currently studying in Rwanda, Africa, and recently received a National Geographic Young Explorers Grant that will enable her to begin her next documentary.

"Paths of the Displaced" is a co-production of NET Television, Meadowlark Films and UNL College of Journalism and Mass Communications. It was funded in part by the Nebraska Humanities Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. NET1, NET2 and NET-HD are part of NET Television, a service of NET. For complete program schedules, visit NET's Web site at netNebraska.org/television.

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NET Television:

NET1 is Nebraska's first public television broadcast service and includes PBS and award-winning, locally produced public television programming. NET1 programming is also obtainable on Dish and DirectTV satellite networks in available areas; **NET2** offers live coverage of the Nebraska Unicameral, and other news and public affairs programming; **NET3** is a 24-hour channel featuring the most popular how-to, travel and lifestyle series; and **NET-HD** presents high-definition digital broadcast programming displayed in a wide-screen format.