

Landmark Visa Ruling Signals Possible End for Cross Cultural Youth Work



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ON
THE YOUNG**

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April 1st 2011

On Tuesday a Judge rejected an appeal against the first ever declined Visa application for a South African political activist and former student of the Somafo School applying to visit the UK on an educational exchange with children's charity Woodcraft Folk. The application was brought by Brighton Woodcraft Folk to enable a South African activist, Tshepiso Mokoena, to attend the charity's 85th anniversary international youth camp. The ruling is likely to prevent Tshepiso and a delegation of South African children she would have chaperoned, from attending CoCamp, Woodcraft Folk's International Festival of Cooperation. The decision was made on the grounds that Tshepiso does not have any direct relatives living in the UK despite a long standing reciprocal relationship between Woodcraft Folk and Tshepiso. The case is being seen as a clear indication that as UK Visa regulations tighten, cross cultural educational youth work is set to fall dramatically, as Woodcraft Folk and similar charitable organisations become unable to obtain visas that enable international children's events.

Tshepiso has been working with Woodcraft Folk since 1988 when she and a delegation of South African children were hosted by a Woodcraft Folk group in Brighton. Since then Tshepiso has worked closely with Brighton Woodcraft Folk and in 2010 Tshepiso helped organise an educational trip where children from Brighton and Hove visited South Africa; meeting local children affected by apartheid, visiting environmental projects, volunteering in a nursery and even meeting the mayor of Johannesburg to present him with a gift from the mayor of Hove.

Woodcraft Folk has hosted large international children's camps and conferences every year since the end of WWII to bring young people together from across the globe to engage in cross cultural learning, challenge negative perceptions and have fun. Currently many young people and youth workers from outside the EU need to apply for visit visas to be allowed to attend these events but in recent years it has become increasingly difficult to obtain these visas for individuals from poor backgrounds especially from developing countries despite all costs and expenses related to the trip being paid for by the host organisation.

Sarah Susman is a volunteer Woodcraft Folk leader in Brighton and supported Tshepiso's appeal. She said: "The increasing difficulty of getting visit visas for short term exchanges is seriously blighting our international work as we are becoming confined to exchanges with organisations from within the EU. This ruling is deeply worrying as even an activist whose work has directly benefited British young people cannot obtain a week long visa"

Notes:

[1] Woodcraft Folk is the cooperation children and young people's movement. It has approximately 10,000 members operating over 400 local groups around the UK. Woodcraft Folk offers a place where children grow in confidence and become active in society become global citizens.

[2] Woodcraft Folk is a member of IFM-SEI the international education movement for young people with over a million members worldwide.

[3] Visas have been required for South African Nationals since 2010. To Woodcraft Folk's knowledge this case is the first Educational Exchange to be declined.

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