

# **GENERATION XXL**

## **PRESS KIT**

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## **GENERATION XXL**

### **Logline**

Four overweight teenagers in Nova Scotia struggle with issues of body image and self-esteem, and attend an intervention program that may help set them on a healthier path.

### **Short Synopsis**

Meet four Nova Scotia teenagers: Vincent is addicted to fast food; Greg hides behind his jokes; Kat is obsessed with beauty products; and a bullied Raya retreats to her room. **GENERATION XXL** follows these four overweight adolescents at home and school, then goes with them as they attend a Fit Intervention Program aimed at improving their self-esteem. As the kids struggle against junk food and soda pop, inactivity at the computer and with video games, peer group pressure and their relationships with their parents, we learn that weight loss is more complex than simply getting off the couch.

### **200-Word Synopsis**

Vincent is addicted to fast food, Greg hides behind his jokes, Kat searches for herself in beauty products, and a bullied Raya retreats to her room. All four of these Nova Scotia teenagers are part of growing number of teens who are obese or overweight. With a rise in early-onset Type II diabetes, high blood pressure, cardio-vascular disease and other conditions that up until recently were thought of as mainly 'adult' diseases, being overweight or obese has alarming implications for the future health not just for these four kids but for a whole generation. This generation has been called "Generation XXL".

**GENERATION XXL** follows Vincent, Kat, Raya and Greg as they confront their pounds and themselves, struggling against junk food and soda pop, inactivity at the computer and with video games, peer group pressure, and their relationships with their parents.

As part of their process of change, the kids attend a Fit Intervention Program aimed towards improving self-esteem and allowing the kids to find their own voice. Through them, we witness the inner thoughts and feelings of what it feels like to be an overweight teen.

In the process, we learn that weight loss is more complex than simply getting off the couch or embarking on a diet. A reflection of our time, **GENERATION XXL** goes beyond the obvious, offering an intimate, funny and character-driven look at the real situation of being an overweight or obese teenager in today's consumer-oriented North American society.

**GENERATION XXL** raises serious questions about society's response to the extra large, gives youth a voice, and has a message that benefits all of us.

## **Generation XXL**

### **Subject Profiles**

#### **Raya Izzard - 17**

Raya Izzard is from North Preston, Nova Scotia, the oldest and largest indigenous Black community in Canada. She grew up being ruthlessly bullied as “the big fat girl” and, as a way to cope with that, took refuge in her room...and in food. Having tried, and failed with, a number of diets in the past, Raya sees the FIT Intervention Program as a way not only to help her lose some weight, but to help her find some much-needed self-confidence. For Raya, achieving a positive self-image could make the difference between her realizing her dreams and seeing them slip away.

#### **Greg Penney - 16**

Greg Penney, from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, is a natural-born comic who loves to perform and can make almost anybody laugh, but there’s clearly a lot of complexity in his personality. With his parents divorced, Greg shuffles back and forth between them, usually spending all his free time in front of the computer or playing video games. Regularly teased for being ‘chubby’, Greg sees the FIT Intervention Program as a first step towards creating a healthier lifestyle for himself.

#### **Kat Curwin - 16**

Kat Curwin dreams of being able to go on shopping sprees for fashionable clothes that she can fit into. During the week she boards at a private school out of town, and weekends back in Halifax with her mother. Finding it hard to make healthy food choices when there are usually so many bad choices available, she struggles with her weight and her body image. Her mother hopes the FIT Intervention Program will allow her to take responsibility for her life and learn to make decisions that are healthy for her.

#### **Vincent Sylliboy - 14**

Vincent lives on the First Nations Reserve in Millbrook, Nova Scotia. With obesity rates higher in First Nations children than in the general population, Vincent is well aware of the above-average rates of diabetes and high cholesterol among First Nations people. As a self-proclaimed addict to soft drinks and fast food, he knows if he doesn’t change his habits he may face a premature death. Through the FIT Intervention Program, Vincent is exposed to a healthier lifestyle. Will the experience help him overcome his junk food dependencies?

## GENERATION XXL

### Adolescent Overweight & Obesity Fact Sheet

**Obesity** is defined as a **condition of abnormal or excessive body fat accumulation** in adipose tissue, to the extent that health can be impaired.

**In Canada, 16%** of children between the ages of 7-13 are **obese** and **32%** of children between the ages of 7-13 are **overweight**. (Stat. Can. 2001)

Obesity raises the risk of **heart disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis and gall bladder disease**, among other ailments.

Though **genetics** can be traced to obesity, **inactivity and poor diet** are the two largest contributing factors to weight gain.

The direct costs of obesity in Canada were estimated to be **\$1.8 billion** in **1997** (Stat. Can.)

The world now has more **overweight** people than **undernourished** people.

Adolescents watch an average of **3 to 5 hours** of television a day.

Adolescents who lived with an **obese parent** are **more likely to be overweight or obese**.

Children living in neighborhoods with a **lower socio-economic status** have a **greater likelihood** of being **overweight or obese**.

Over half of **First Nations** children in Canada are **obese or overweight**.

The average Canadian household visits a **restaurant** for a meal or snack **520 times a year**.

Children's fast-food meals typically contain **700-900 calories**, or more than **half the recommended daily amount**.

As the **intake of soft drinks** has **doubled** over the last **30 years**, so has the rate of **obesity nearly doubled**.

More than **50% of teenagers** consume at least one **soft drink a day**, and many, especially boys, **consume 3 or more a day**.

In some school vending machines, **soft drinks** are priced lower than water by the pop manufacturers and suppliers.

Many medical and world health officials are claiming we should now add **obesity** to the other world epidemics such as **HIV-AIDS** and **tobacco**.

## **GENERATION XXL**

### **Q & A with “GENERATION XXL” Writer/Director TERESA MACINNES**

#### **What is Generation XXL about?**

**Generation XXL** is a one-hour television documentary that delves into the world of youth who are struggling with issues around weight and body image. The story is told through the perspective of four Nova Scotia teens – Raya, Greg, Kat and Vincent - and follows them as they attend the FIT Intervention Program, a program that focuses on self-esteem and creating a healthy lifestyle. As the program evolves we witness the inner thoughts and feelings of what it feels like to be an overweight teen and get a unique look on weight loss and the people behind it.

#### **What is the program about and who is behind it?**

The **FIT Intervention** program was designed by youth specialist **Peter Davison** in conjunction with a series of experts specializing in youth and body image disorders. The program is not a boot camp; rather it is specifically designed to empower the kids by helping them understand themselves and societal influences. It is a model of what happens when a community comes together for a common cause. Contributors to the program design include Dr. Phil Campagna, from Dalhousie University; eating disorder specialist, Heidi Mack; an art therapist from the IWK Children’s Hospital; a private sector nutritionist; a youth worker from the Eating Disorders Action Group in Halifax; and two counselors.

#### **What inspired you to do this film?**

ZIJI Film and Television Ltd. in Halifax had already developed **Generation XXL** and brought it to the point of production by the time I came to the project. I had just finished a series about youth and violence in schools and am fascinated in general about youth, how we perceive them, and the reality that exists behind the headlines that are written about them. I quickly came to realize these kids are a product of their environment, with a much bigger societal context behind their individual circumstances.

#### **So, what is the societal context?**

Generally speaking, we live in a society that feels it is unsafe for children to go outside unsupervised, and so what many youth do is go home and communicate over the Internet or engross themselves in video games and television. Although they participate in organized sports, kids typically do not go outside and play anymore, and the majority are driven everywhere they go. Many youth have rooms that include a TV, computer and even fridge, so they never even have to leave their room. Coupled with physical education being cut back in schools, our kids have become very inactive.

I think soda pop, fast food, processed food, and junk food are aggressively marketed to young people. In recent months some of these companies have been challenged by school officials who have eliminated soda pop and junk food from their menu and replaced it with more healthy options. This has not been an easy choice because schools often rely on the huge monetary incentives from the soft drink companies to help pay for extra curricular activities in the school.

And then there is the diet industry. There are a lot of people making money from the fact that people are overweight and, by and large, diets are ineffective. Studies have shown that 90% of diet programs fail. In fact, many diets have the adverse effect of causing people to gain *more* weight.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, families seem to be spending less and less time with one another, particularly around the dinner table, eating home cooked meals. I think there is too much pressure on parents to work all the time and that's largely because our cultural priorities are to consume and not to connect with one another.

### **What surprised you the most during the making of the film?**

Although I was somewhat aware of it I didn't realize how mean we are to overweight people in our society. One of the more heartfelt moments in **GENERATION XXL** is during an art therapy exercise where the kids are asked to write down every name that they have ever been called. What you see in this scene will break your heart.

I also didn't realize how aware kids are about their weight and how desperately they want to change. Unfortunately, it seemed like for many of them it was for all the wrong reasons. Instead of health reasons, it seemed to be more about friends, boyfriend/girlfriends and image – reasons perhaps typical of adolescent preoccupations. When they had the opportunity to learn more about the impact of weight on their health they were completely shocked.

Then there is the debate in the field about the best way to go about tackling this issue. Most experts agree that kids should not diet and that the approach should not be about talking about losing weight but about how to create a healthy lifestyle. In fact, many argue that the current "moral panic" around body fat may, in fact, contribute towards eating disorders and other health problems. So there are not easy answers, and at times I felt like I was walking through a minefield.

### **What's happened since the film was completed?**

I don't ask the kids if they have lost weight, but I do ask how they are feeling and doing at school. Without exception, all of them are doing better at school, they feel more confident and have become more involved in school activities. Several of the youth are actively working with us to launch a web page and to attend various screenings to answer questions. I am looking forward to continuing to work with them. Their bravery and their honesty have given us all insight into this most complex problem.

My sincere hope is that this film will stimulate a dialogue among youth, parents, community and experts. It is up to all of us to tackle this problem and so it is imperative that the solutions include all voices, especially the youth who have so many powerful things to say.

**GENERATION XXL**

## **Filmmaker Biographies**

### **TERESA MACINNES – writer/director**

Director Teresa MacInnes brings to *Generation XXL* her expert eye as a seasoned filmmaker and her sensitivity as a former social worker. Since 1988 she has directed more than a dozen documentaries for television, which have been broadcast nationally and internationally, garnering awards at many film festivals. Other directing credits include the documentaries: *Hope for the Future* (2006); *Teaching Peace in a Time of War* (2004); *Learning Peace: A Big School with a Big Heart* (2002); *Waging Peace: A Year in the Life of Caledonia Junior High* (2001); *Lost* (1999); *Women Artists: The Other Side of the Picture* (1998); *Under Wraps*; (1996); *A Rough Crossing* (1995); and *Teen Rebel/Teen Mom* (1994).

Teresa's film *Hope for the Future* has just been named one of four Finalists for the 2007 Shaw Rocket Prize, recognising this year's best Canadian television programming targeted for family or youths 13-17 years of age, and with a \$50,000 prize to the winner, while *Teaching Peace in a Time of War* recently won First Prize at the World Peace Film and Music Festival, organized by the World Movement for Global Democracy.

### **LESLEY ANN PATTEN – executive producer**

Lesley Ann Patten is a writer/director who began creating films in 1997. Her work has been broadcast and screened in Canada, the U.S., Asia, and Europe. Ms. Patten's documentary, *Loyalties*, won the Canada Award. Her latest award-winning feature documentary, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, has just opened theatrically in the USA. In addition to directing and writing, her Halifax-based company, ZIJI Film & Television, functions as an executive producer and co-producer.

### **KENT NASON - director of photography**

Kent Nason began his filmmaking career with Crawley Films in Ottawa in 1969. He joined the National Film Board of Canada in 1973 as a cinematographer and participated in the formation of the NFB film production studio in the Atlantic region. He has photographed over 200 hundred films in his career and has been a freelance cinematographer and videographer for the last five years. He received a Gemini Award for *Best Cinematography in a Documentary Series* in 1996. Kent has photographed a number of award-winning documentary series for television and enjoys shooting drama as well as documentary.

### **PETER GIFFEN - editor**

Peter Giffen is a thirteen-year veteran of editing all things film and video. His editing credit can be found on numerous Gemini and Hot Doc winning documentaries and he is consistently one of the most sought-after editors in Atlantic Canada. He brings a level of passion to any job, whether it is high-end corporate video for national clients or animated television series. Peter owns and operates Editfarm Inc., a full service AVID post facility in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and has proven time and again that "sooner or later everybody needs a good editor."

## **ZIJI FILM & TELEVISION LTD.**

ZIJI Film & Television Ltd. is a Halifax-based film and television production company renowned for its playful, sharp, and award-winning documentaries. Lesley Ann Patten founded the company in 1999. The word ZIJI, from the Sanskrit, means, “shining confidence”, and Patten chose the name for its relevance to the Maritimes. Just as the lighthouses of the Atlantic shores have, for generations, pierced the darkness to serve as beacons to aid others, it has been the goal of ZIJI to create programming which benefits others. The company produces documentaries, performance films, and drama. ZIJI also functions as an executive producer or co-producer on external productions. ZIJI’s hour-long documentary, *Loyalties*, won the Canada Award at the Gemini Awards, the *Best Social Documentary Award* at Hot Docs, a Yorkton Golden Sheaf Award, and was named among *The Ten Best Documentaries of 2000* at the American Film Institute Festival. Other ZIJI programs include *Warrior Songs – King Gesar*, nominated for a Banff Rockie Award as *Best International Performance Film*, *Voice Set Free*, a Gemini Award-winner for *Best Direction in a Documentary Program*, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which premiered at the Vancouver Film Festival, and *Regarding: Cohen*.