

The Friends of Natasha

In 1996 Year 7 students at Forest Gate School in Newham saw that their friend Natasha Matambile was crying.

She told them she was being forced to leave this country.

Natasha came from Angola in Southern Africa. Angola was in the middle of a violent civil war. Her father had been badly beaten and her four year old brother had been killed. The family had been forced to leave in 1991 and find safety here.

But now the British government wanted to send her and her family back during half term. The class decided to start a campaign to keep Natasha here but they had only two days left. Shamima Patel, Natasha's friend, said:

“We thought it was unfair that she would have to leave her school and friends. We called ourselves The Friends of Natasha. We wanted to show that children like Natasha could depend on their school for support.

I think this country should welcome people of all cultures, particularly if they are escaping from danger at home.

If Natasha leaves our classroom will be silent. Natasha is part of our community – I can't see what she has to leave us. We should all have the chance to live in safety with our families. Refugees like Natasha have already suffered enough – why should we make them suffer more?”

They got 800 people to sign a petition and two hundred school students marched in the local park. They contacted their MP and the Home Office. They managed to get a few weeks delay on the deportation. And eventually, after students put pressure on Newham Council and the government, Natasha and her family got the right stay here permanently on May the First 1997.

Let Natasha Stay!

