

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Reyhan Lalaoui (La-la-wee) Cell: 201.688.6063/Fax: 201.839.9886 Email: Reyhan@CountyFilms.com

Whiz-Kid Media Producer Confronts Teen Mental Health Crisis in Jersey City Series

JERSEY CITY, New Jersey (January 28, 2019): Reyhan Lalaoui has already led a pretty impressive young life. She graduated high school at the age of 13, became the youngest Valedictorian at Hudson County Community College at 16, and is set to obtain her bachelor's degree at Saint Peter's University this May as an Honors Student. But this busy 18-year-old award-winning writer isn't just studying - she's producing cutting edge media content, too. And she's laser focused on portraying the unique mental health challenges of inner city youth in a new television series set and filmed in Jersey City.

Suicide Spenders is the first series out of her production company, County Films. "I wanted to set the story in the same location I sourced my talent from," said Lalaoui, a lifelong Hudson County resident.

The main cast, bringing a surprising level of talent and maturity to their roles as a group of six diverse, struggling teens who find themselves thrown together at a high school support group, all hail from Hudson County high schools including High Tech, County Prep, Hoboken High School and McNair Academic High School. "The typical face of mental health challenges in modern media doesn't resemble our cast," said Lalaoui. Not only did the teen write, produce and edit the series, she also plays the role of Anya, a Muslim Moroccan-American who struggles with depression and crippling anxiety.

"We're from the inner city. We don't have easy access to quality mental health care. Many of us are uninsured." She added, "It's not always as simple as 'ask a trusted adult for help.' When you add the nuances of culture and religion into the mix, you'll start to see the sparks of a conversation that desperately needs to be had."

In the series, which Lalaoui strives to pitch to outlets like Netflix and Hulu upon its completion, the teens find themselves thrust into a half-hearted suicide pact which demands that they live life on the edge for one week. Their daring adventures are financed by a brazen theft of cash from the school they attend, Jersey City High. What happens during their week of moral abandon galvanizes the group into rethinking their plans and the trajectory of their lives.

"Not every story is going to show people making the right decisions," said Lalaoui. "The struggles in ***Suicide Spenders*** speak uniquely to Generation Z. I'm being honest about us. Sometimes, that truth is uncomfortably raw and controversial. But it also has the potential to bring people together."

Lalaoui noted that the beginning of the series has touches of satire. She believes the subject of teenage mental health has been misrepresented in entertainment in the past and she hopes her series is on the leading edge of an underserved niche in media, one driven by a sophisticated market of savvy young consumers hungry for authentic stories.

"This is not an aesthetically-pleasing high school drama," she said. "Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in this country. It's taking causalities every day and yet the media still romanticizes it. I'm working hard to change that."

Part of that work involves her Kickstarter campaign where she's already raised more than \$2,300 toward her \$10,000 fundraising goal. Lalaoui has so far paid for the production of two episodes from all of her savings and from prize money won when she successfully pitched her idea at the Saint Peter's University "Shark Tank" entrepreneur contest held this past December.

Lalaoui hopes to raise the all-or-nothing funds by the Kickstarter deadline in March. "We're looking for like-minded supporters who will take a chance on a hard-working young writer. I want to create new media that entertains and educates, but I need the right resources to make it possible," she said.

"I want to begin a conversation from a different angle. The issues that are hard to talk about are often the ones we most need to talk about."

To view the ***Suicide Spenders*** series trailer, learn about the cast, and get the link to the Kickstarter campaign, visit **CountyFilms.com**.

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