

Globetrotter's journey subject of TV film

By Megan Doherty

Even with his cosmopolitan, world-travelling background, Canberra man Pierre Johannessen was challenged by the enormous task of making a difference in a country as needy as Bangladesh.

In a documentary to be broadcast this weekend about his time as an Australian youth ambassador for development in Bangladesh, Mr Johannessen is seen squelching through muddy villages, organising staff to help build homes for local families and playing basketball with children in a local orphanage, all the while knowing most people exist on no more than \$1 a day and are at the mercy of the vagaries of the weather.

At one point he says in the documentary, "You're faced daily with the onslaught of just how much the need is and I'm not sure anyone can be prepared for that."

Yet he also believes being in Bangladesh was "one of the best experiences of my life".

Mr Johannessen, 26, the communications director for ACT Liberal senator Gary Humphries, is one of six young Australians featured in the documentary *No Ordinary Journey*.

Each was part of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for



SUPPORT: Pierre Johannessen organised staff to help build homes for Bangladeshi families. Photo: MELISSA ADAMS

Development program, funded by AusAID to support young Australians who want to live and work in a developing country.

"It hasn't hit me yet that it's actually going to be on TV. It still seems like something really personal," he said.

"I think one of the hardest things for us as returned ambassadors is to explain to

people what the experience was like. I mean, we do our best to describe it, but it is fairly difficult to convey that imagery we see every day, so this documentary will really help."

Mr Johannessen chose Bangladesh as "one of the more difficult positions I could apply for" and worked for a year with Habitat for Humanity, helping

people rebuild their homes and lives.

It was there he started his non-government organisation Big Bang Ballers, using basketball to fight youth poverty and social disadvantage.

"I constantly felt I wasn't doing enough, so as well as the work I did for Habitat, I tried to reach out in other ways. Sport

was a great way to do that," he said. "Through running basketball tournaments, my team was able to fund-raise. We would use the proceeds to run skill camps at orphanages. We also prepared survival packs for local slums, with basic things like rice and clean water."

Big Bang Ballers now works in seven countries, including Afghanistan, and is having a gala fund-raising event at the Tongue and Groove bar in Civic on September 14.

The son of a Norwegian father, Per, and Iranian mother, Jaleh, Mr Johannessen was born in Iran and raised around the world, as his father was a regional representative for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Pierre Johannessen and his mother moved to Canberra in 1992 after his father's death. He attended Canberra Boys Grammar School and the University of Canberra, studying law and politics.

He has been nominated for the Young Australian of the Year Award, for which the ACT finalists will be announced later this year.

■ *No Ordinary Journey* screens at 3pm on Sunday on Southern Cross Ten. Tickets for the fund-raiser at Tongue and Groove will be available from September 1.