

Bendigo Autistic Advocacy and Support Service

Co-convenors

Beck Kelly - Sarah Hansford - Tony Langdon
Beck Hartland - Allison Worland - Susanna Flanagan

Bendigo Autistic Advocacy and Support Service issues the following statement in relation to why we do not support the currently circulating short film, or others like this, entitled 'Ky's Story'.

The Bendigo Autistic Advocacy and Support Service believe that neurodivergence is a natural part of a neurodiverse humanity. Autism is a genetic neurological difference or disability. Disabilities involve significant challenges and unique positives. Our challenges are compounded by the barriers predominantly caused by ignorance, and lack of inclusion and acceptance.

BAASS values each autistic individual as unique and aims to empower individuals to achieve and optimise their potential, growth and development; regardless of age, ability or economic status.

Each individual can achieve a meaningful, independent and safe life to the greatest extent possible through access to appropriate public and community services, individual supports and learning programs.

Media is often inclined, and in respect to this film, to represent people with disability using language and imagery that serves to embed stereotypes and put at risk members of an already vulnerable minority.

Whilst we applaud the intention behind this film as promoting awareness and acceptance of autism, the genre of this film serves to present more harm than benefit to the autistic community.

We cannot support or promote a film that depicts autistic people in this manner, with an overall ableist feel and message.

The depiction of autism in the media plays a powerful role in public perception. The choice of words, images and messages can determine perceptions, attitudes and behaviours within the community. Whilst well intended, this film depicts a lack of understanding and misconceptions about autistic way of life.

Ableism is defined by stopableism.org as:

- “ the practices and dominant attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities.
- a set of practices and beliefs that assign inferior value (worth) to people who have developmental, emotional, physical or psychiatric disabilities. “

Ableism devalues people who have physical or mental disabilities and implies that anyone. In the context of this film, ableism is based on the preface that *non*-autistics are the normal and implies that being autistic is abnormal, less than, cannot function in society. Ableism serves to isolate and marginalise an already vulnerable minority.



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- The terminology used on this film is negative, pathologising and oppressive and takes the form of an eternal child narrative, speaking *for* Ky.

Using negative, pathologising language relies on the pity or medical model of disability. It reinforces and perpetuates negativity and community misperceptions (stigma) around autism.

Through the lens of a pathologising model, autistics are viewed as a burden, intellectually inferior, in need of 'treatments' or 'cures' and even as dangerous and aggressive.

For eg. "affected by", "autism doesn't discriminate", "special acceptance".

Autistics don't require a "special" acceptance. Humanity is a diverse entity, we all need acceptance.

- Speaking *for* Ky further implies questionable autonomy; infantilising and reinforcing that disabled people are passive and must be pitied for not having a voice.

- Incorrect statistics. There is much current writing and research underway stressing the inadequacy and gender bias of autism diagnostic procedures and the increasing recognition of comparable numbers of autistic girls and women. A list has been provided below for a non-exhaustive range of sources on this topic.

- The somber narrative and choice of music promotes pity, focusing on deficit based, negative portrayal of autism.

For eg: "challenges", "difficulties", "obsession".

- Ableist representation in terms of a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality in generalizing autistic traits and depicting 'Ky's autism' as challenges from another's perspective. Eg. "his mum found it difficult", "the hardest part for Ky's Mum.." "a special acceptance".



Any representation of autism in the media needs to ensure that the perspectives of people with disabilities and our families are heard; that we are fully involved, represented and heard.

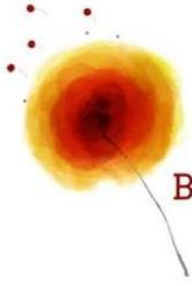
We deserve better representation in the media.

"Nothing about us without us".

Sources:

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The inaccuracy of male vs. female representation in autism statistics can be found in the following sources. Please note this is not an exhaustive list.

Websites:

<http://autismwomensnetwork.org/>
www.yellowladybugs.com.au
www.autisticfamilycollective.org.au
www.autistichoya.com
<http://www.jeanettepurkis.com/>

Books:



Rudy Simone: *Aspergirls*
Liane Holliday-Willey: *Pretending to be normal.*
Sarah Hendrickx: *Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder*
Tony Attwood ed. (Liane Holliday Willey, Jeanette Purkis et al): *Been there. Done that. Try this!*
Steve Silberman: *Neurotribes*

References:

Disability and Media Matters, 2014 'Advocacy' is not a dirty word in journalism.'
<https://disabilitymediamatters.me/tag/representation/>

Stopablesim.org <http://www.stopableism.org/>

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