

Q&A: Tait's Focus On Ability

👤 Joshua Scicluna / 🕒 February 21, 2018 / 📄 POP CULTURE, Uncategorized, MASTERS OF CINEMA / 💬 0 Comments

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The 10th anniversary of 'Focus On Ability', a short film festival raising awareness for people with disabilities, is coming up mid-year. I sat down with Sydney accounting student and former International Boccia athlete Tait Jenkins to have a chat about the film festival, the shifting societal view towards disability, and what it all means to him as a young individual aspiring to push through the barriers of discrimination.



Not only does the festival please audiences, the prerequisite of having a disability-themed short film is to create a huge amount of awareness, much to the delight of those that are living with a disability in the broader community.

Tait Jenkins, for example, was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy at an early age, and has been in a wheelchair since he was four years old. This is what he had to say about why the film festival is vital to his community:

Q: In your lifetime do you think that society has adapted and is now more inclusive of people with disabilities?

A: Um, I'd say throughout my childhood and growing up society is definitely shifting to be more inclusive of people with disabilities, ranging from accessibility in public areas to general interaction, friendliness and behavioural aspects towards myself and others like me... although I still feel there is a long way to go.

Q: When you say there is a long way to go, what type of things are you talking about?

A: The same things, but just generally you still have experiences where you might be out in public and people stare at you or you go to a bar and you can't get in. The social stigma associated with disability is still there.

Q: How detrimental is this 'stigma' to your mental health?

A: Personally I've worked on my self confidence quite a lot over the years, I just believe that people stare at me because of how good looking I am (laughs). Although, like anyone else I have my days where you doubt yourself and wonder why you're so different, and I know this effects a lot of people in the disabled community – especially those with physical disabilities.

Q: Do you think events such as 'Focus On Ability' are beneficial to the cultural shift in disability and inclusion?

A: Um, I'd say... (pause) The more exposure the general public has to disability, especially in popular culture and entertainment, the more subconsciously accepting society will become to disability. That's why I think events such as 'Focus On Ability' and the broadcasting of the Paralympics on major TV channels are integral to breaking down the barriers that people with disabilities face everyday.

Q: It's a pretty controversial topic, but I'd love to hear an inside opinion from someone part of a community that often faces adversity and discrimination. What is your take on the current media environment and sensitivity towards general minorities, and specifically ableism?

A: From my personal experiences as someone with a physical disability I find that filtering out and avoiding discussion around disability or segregation in general has an inverse effect on inclusion. The only way you can truly be included in broader society is to be treated exactly the same as everyone else. Regardless of your ability.

Hearing from Tait was eye-opening and insightful, and I hope that you as a reader took as much out of it as I did. The 'Focus On Ability' short film festival is an excellent showcase of both talent and awareness, and if you're a budding filmmaker you should certainly consider entering.

Look out for the short film festival, and for any more information head to their website:
www.focusonability.com.au

In the meantime, check out the Focus On Ability winner from 2015, an effective, emotional short film that follows a young, deaf ballerina:

