

International film festival for people with disability



The Focus on Ability Short Film Festival (FOA) has just celebrated the 14th annual instalment, showcasing 281 finalists from 19 countries.

This festival asks filmmakers to Focus on the Ability of people with a disability and tell a story on film for the world to view. Over the last 14 years there have been more than 2300 submissions coming from over 40 countries, making it a worldwide celebration of people with disability.

FOA was started in 2009 by NOVA Employment CEO Martin Wren. Initially, the festival was for local Sydney high schools, but Wren soon knew he had a global concept on his hands and the festival has grown year on year.

"It's great to be back for another year of 'Focus'. In a world in which bad news sadly predominates FOA brings hope and entertainment as film makers around the world showcase their talent while informing, entertaining and showcasing the contrition and experience of disability. While I suspect we shouldn't be surprised, the quality of the submissions is truly outstanding and will demand a lot from our judges." Wren said.

Each year the films are highlighted on the Focus on Ability website and audiences come from around the world to view and vote for their favourites. This years' online voting weeks were greeted with much enthusiasm, with the festival receiving much fanfare in Ethiopia, Malawi, New Zealand and Australia in particular. The two voting weeks

attracted over 31,000 registered votes and more than 250,000 film views.

After a two-year Australian live event hiatus, the festival was on the road again with packed out film screenings at Brisbane's PIP Theatre, Sydney's Liverpool Catholic Club, Canberra's National Museum of Australia, Adelaide's Hotel Grand Chancellor, Melbourne's Crown Towers and Fremantle's Esplanade Hotel.

Focus on Ability creative director Ryan Goodwin was pleased with the turnouts, "We were thrilled to be back in front of our audiences again. The energy and enthusiasm this festival creates is second to none. The inclusive nature of the festival creates a real celebration of people with disability. We received such tremendous feedback from the crowds that it has energised us to go bigger and better in 2023."

The 2022 festival is far from complete. November 5 is the first leg of the African Focus on Ability Film Festival with team FOA Malawi hosting their sixth annual event in Blantyre, Malawi. Malawian filmmakers really took on the challenge this year submitting a record 46 films.

The festival then moves onto Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 10-11 for the second instalment of Focus on Ability Ethiopia.

With over \$100,000 in cash and prizes up for grabs, the announcement of the winners is highly anticipated. Winners will be announced and celebrated at a red-carpet event in Sydney, October 16.

Head to www.focusonability.com.au for all the details and to view these wonderful films.

The major sponsor of the Focus on Ability Film Festival is the New South Wales Disability Employment Service NOVA Employment. ●