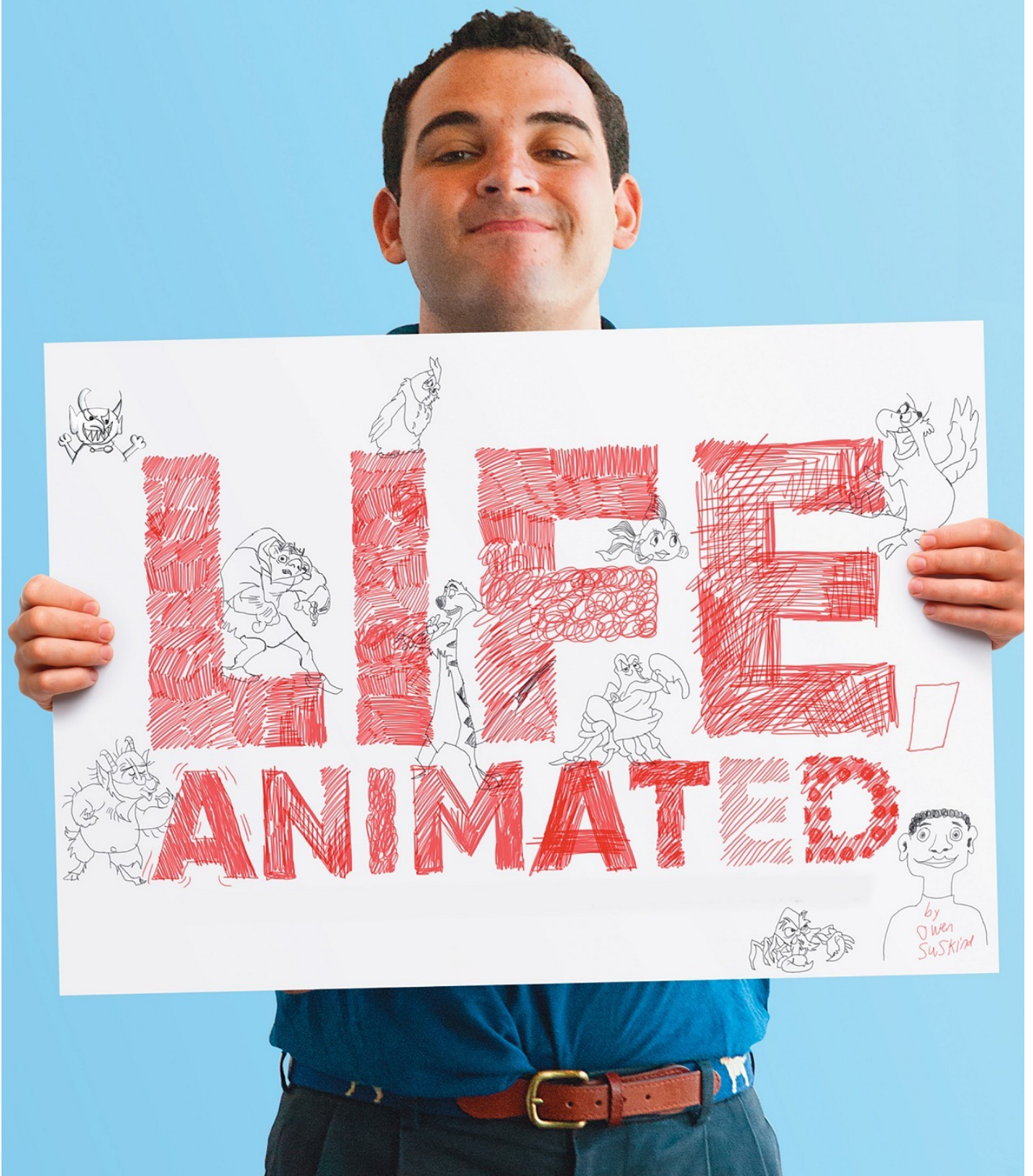
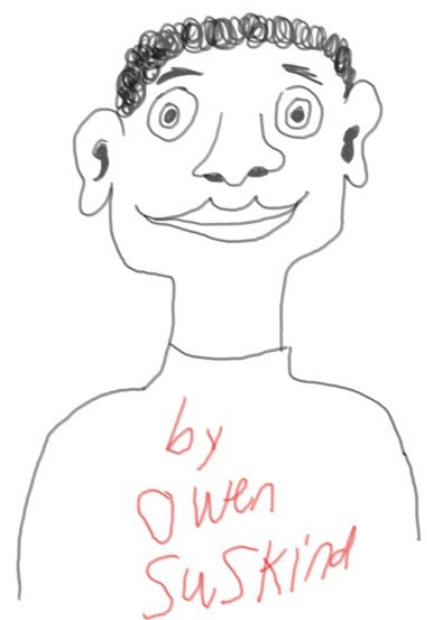


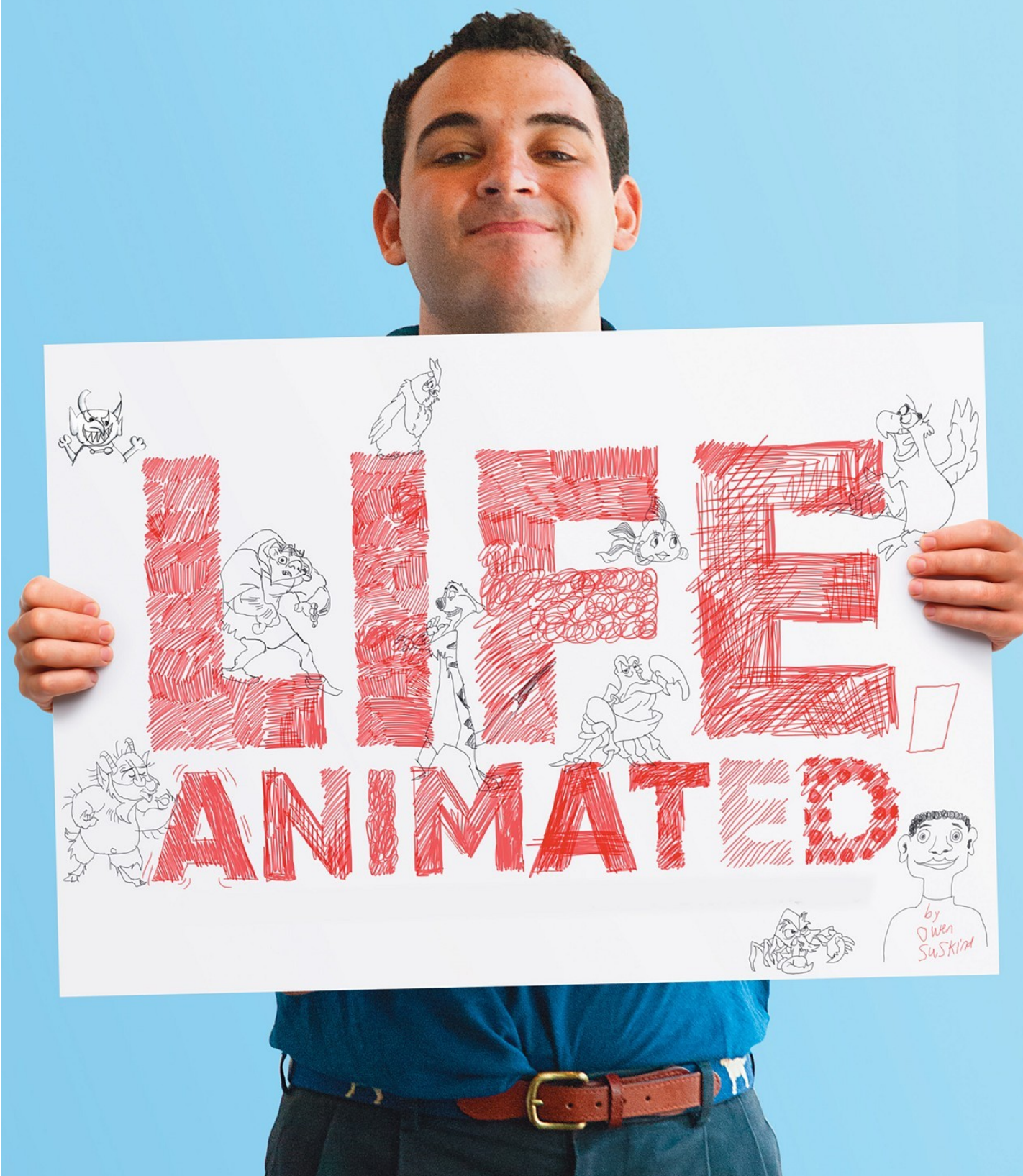
Educational Resource



No sidekick gets
left behind



Educational Resource



No sidekick gets
left behind





"A MUST WATCH"

THE GUARDIAN

LIFE ANIMATED

FROM ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR ROGER ROSS WILLIAMS



WELCOME

I was lucky enough to see *Life, Animated* earlier this year when the Sundance Film Festival came to London. The film has been a constant in my thoughts since and I'm incredibly excited that UK audiences now have the chance to see it.

The Director Roger Ross Williams has made an exceptional film and has found a hero in Owen Suskind worthy of any Disney film. To me he's up there with Simba or Ariel. Owen is undoubtedly a hero, even if he sees himself more as a sidekick, but the courage and determination we see from him cements his status.

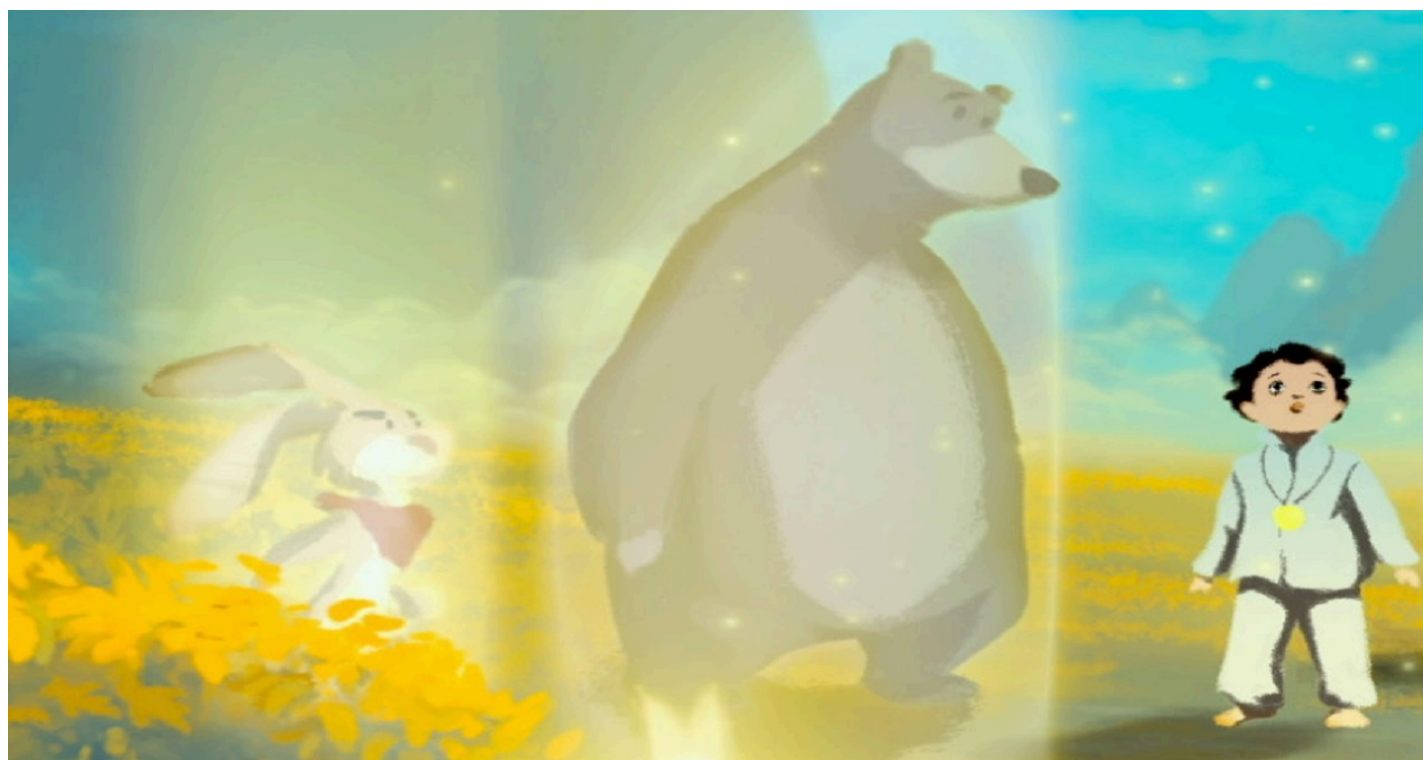
This film is bursting with love. The love we see from Owen's parents - the sidekicks in this story - isn't different from any other parent, but it's used with a determination and warmth that supports and directs Owen to be the man we know he can be.

Life, Animated is about autism, but it's also about family, love, strength, bravery, growing up and autism again. That's the thing about autism, it's always there and always will be. My Son was diagnosed with Autism at two years old. I've not heard him speak yet and I may never, but as we've grown as a family that lives with autism we've learnt that love and patience are the greatest tools you can equip yourself with and the Suskind's have a lifetime's supply.

Films can do all kinds of things to us; they can help us escape the world and help us learn about it, they can make us laugh and make us cry. The power that Disney has on Owen is enough to help him understand the World and understand himself. So watch it, see for yourself. Films are great!

- Ben Luxford, Head of UK Audiences, BFI





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ABOUT THE FILM

Life, Animated tells the remarkable story of how Owen found in Disney animation a pathway to language and a framework for making sense of the world. By evocatively interweaving classic Disney sequences with verité scenes from Owen's life, the film explores how identification and empathy with characters like Simba, Jafar, and Ariel forge a conduit for him to understand his feelings and interpret reality. Beautiful, original animations further give form to Owen's fruitful dialogue with the Disney oeuvre as he imagines himself heroically facing adversity in a tribe of sidekicks. With an arsenal of narratives at his disposal, Owen rises to meet the challenges of adulthood in this moving coming-of-age tale.

A documentary by Academy Award winning filmmaker Roger Ross Williams based on a book by Pulitzer Prize winning writer Ron Suskind.

A CONVERSATION

What inspired you to tell Owen's story?

I'm definitely drawn to stories about outsiders. Feeling like that myself — I'm a gay black man — I often seek to give a voice to those in the world who don't have one. I also strive to find ways we can live together and understand each other. Like Owen Suskind, the subject of *LIFE, ANIMATED*, I felt disconnected as a kid and sat immersed in my own fantasies, creating stories in my own head — I had to find a way to connect with a greater world like he did, and like the subjects of all of my films have had to do in one way or another.

How did this project originate?

I've known Ron Suskind for over 15 years during which he and I worked on many stories together for ABC and PBS. Ron is a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and the author of a book about his son, Owen, entitled *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*. Ron had told me about the book while he was working on it and I immediately knew it would make a great film,

so my producer Julie Goldman and I optioned the documentary rights and brought it Molly Thompson at A&E IndieFilms. That was around two years ago.

What was your own knowledge of autism before you started this project?

I had very little awareness and understanding of autism going into this. I have to admit I was a little afraid of people with autism — I was uncomfortable and didn't know how to interact or connect. But making this film totally changed the way I think about autism. I don't see it as a deficit or disability anymore; I see it as a difference. It is clear to me now that by ignoring this remarkable group of people we just aren't tapping into our true, full human potential and we are losing out as a society if we leave them behind.

What were your thoughts on Owen before you started this film, knowing him already as you did?
Who was he in your mind?

WITH THE DIRECTOR

I initially met Owen when he was very young, but only briefly. I already knew that the Suskinds were a remarkable family, but I didn't know what to expect going into this project. I came in with my own feelings of being uncomfortable, but that soon changed. The great thing about making documentaries is that you have the luxury of time, and I got to know Owen over time.

My perceptions changed greatly. I'm a dreamer myself, as well as a storyteller. And no one loves the transformative potential of story more than Owen Suskind. He understands the beauty of a story or fable in a way that was very inspiring for a filmmaker.

What in your opinion is the beauty of story according to Owen's perspective?

The way Owen interprets and processes stories is fascinating to me, and it opened me up as a filmmaker in terms of the different narrative devices I could use to tell his story. I came to love the

way Owen processes media. He's looked into a television screen for his entire life and he knows the words to every Disney animated film ever made. He not only knows them intimately, he uses them to decipher the way in which the world works and, most importantly – how everyone is important to the way things go.

Owen has observed that the heroes in stories may carry out the great actions that change the world or turn the tide or fix what had gone wrong, but without the collaboration of the sidekicks – with whom Owen feels most allied – the hero could never accomplish his or her ultimate task.

In Owen's understanding of story, everyone matters, everyone is indispensable to what transpires and everyone has a right to claim the jointly held story as their own. That is the beauty of story that I learned from Owen Suskind.

LIFE, ANIMATED is as much about sound as it is about vision. Can you elaborate?



In the film you see various Disney clips playing on a screen, and Owen mouths every line. Visually, the issue was about getting inside Owen's head and bringing that to life in the film.

Soundwise, we captured Owen channeling all the different characters with their widely divergent voices and turned this into its own musical language. Dylan Stark and Todd Griffin, our composers, recorded Owen's self-talking in addition to sound effects like the sound of VHS tape fast forwarding, etc. And then the brilliant Pete Horner and Al Nelson at Skywalker Sound turned it into a mix. So the film is very much a sonic journey as much as a visual one. You use animated sequences as another way of bringing to life Owen's unique interior world.

How did you create these scenes?

Owen created the scenes. At a young age, he started drawing his beloved sidekicks — and he never drew heroes, only sidekicks. He made a story out of this called *The Land of the Lost Sidekicks*, and it's a world that is quite beautiful. I worked with Owen and an amazing team of animators in France at Mac Guff Animation to bring to life Owen's elaborate fantasy world.

The villain Owen created for his story seemed to correspond with the challenges that he faces in his own life; it came to symbolize his autism in that the creature's power was to make a person's mind fuzzy or confused. While Owen was creating this story, he was in some ways writing his own biography or narrative, so I very much wanted to animate that on screen.

Owen has raw emotions — he doesn't have filters. When he first watched it, he was jumping up and down and hugging us. Owen generally shies away from physical contact other than with family, but he couldn't hold back from showing how much he loved the animation. It was an incredible experience showing him that part of the film for the first time. You get the impression from watching *LIFE, ANIMATED* that Owen is a joyful person.

Where do you think his joy comes from?

I think it's definitely a testament to his family, and specifically his mother, Cornelia. She refused to listen to traditional medical experts, some of who advised that the family restrict Owen's access to the things that made him the



happiest, which were Disney animated movies. Cornelia knew that this would be like restricting Owen's creativity. In general, Owen's parents worked intuitively with him and protected him, giving him what he needed in order to blossom. There's such incredible love in that family, and one of the main reasons Owen is so happy is because he's surrounded by that love.

One of the key quotes in the movie is "Life is not a Disney movie." How is that represented in *LIFE, ANIMATED*?

One thing Owen learns over the course of the story is to move beyond Disney movies and deal with the real issues in his life, including romantic relationships. Characters in Disney movies don't have sex, but people in real life do. Owen faces many challenges as he moves toward independence and solutions can't always be found in the lessons learned from Disney films.

- Roger Ross Williams, director of *LIFE, ANIMATED*



The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then presents a literature review of the existing research on the topic. The second part of the paper describes the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The third part of the paper presents the results of the study, and the fourth part discusses the conclusions and implications of the findings.

The research was conducted using a quantitative approach, and the data was collected from a sample of participants. The results of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between the variables being studied. The findings suggest that the research has important implications for the field, and further research is needed to explore the topic in more detail.

In conclusion, the study has provided valuable insights into the research topic, and the findings have important implications for the field. The research was conducted using a rigorous methodology, and the results are reliable and valid. The findings suggest that the research has important implications for the field, and further research is needed to explore the topic in more detail.

REACHING MY AUTISTIC SON THROUGH DISNEY

Reaching My Autistic Son Through Disney

by Ron Suskind

In our first year in Washington, our son disappeared.

Just shy of his 3rd birthday, an engaged, chatty child, full of typical speech — “I love you,” “Where are my Ninja Turtles?” “Let’s get ice cream!” — fell silent. He cried, inconsolably. Didn’t sleep. Wouldn’t make eye contact. His only word was “juice.”

I had just started a job as The Wall Street Journal’s national affairs reporter. My wife, Cornelia, a former journalist, was home with him — a new story every day, a new horror. He could barely use a sippy cup, though he’d long ago graduated to a big-boy cup. He wove about like someone walking with his eyes shut. “It doesn’t make sense,” I’d say at night. “You don’t grow backward.” Had he been injured somehow when he was out of our sight, banged his head, swallowed something poisonous? It was like searching for clues to a kidnapping.

After visits to several doctors, we first heard the word “autism.” Later, it would be fine-tuned to “regressive autism,” now affecting roughly a third of children with the disorder. Unlike the kids born with it, this group seems typical until somewhere between 18 and 36 months — then they vanish. Some never get their speech back. Families stop watching those early videos, their child waving to the camera. Too painful. That child’s gone.

In the year since his diagnosis, Owen’s only activity with his brother, Walt, is something they did before the autism struck: watching Disney movies. “The Little Mermaid,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Aladdin” — it

was a boom time for Disney — and also the old classics: “Dumbo,” “Fantasia,” “Pinocchio,” “Bambi.” They watch on a television bracketed to the wall in a high corner of our smallish bedroom in Georgetown. It is hard to know all the things going through the mind of our 6-year-old, Walt, about how his little brother, now nearly 4, is changing. They pile up pillows on our bed and sit close, Walt often with his arm around Owen’s shoulders, trying to hold him — and the shifting world — in place.

Then Walt slips out to play with friends, and Owen keeps watching. Movie after movie. Certain parts he rewinds and rewatches. Lots of rewinding. But he seems content, focused.

We ask our growing team of developmental specialists, doctors and therapists about it. We were never big fans of plopping our kids in front of Disney videos, but now the question seemed more urgent: Is this good for him? They shrug. Is he relaxed? Yes. Does it seem joyful? Definitely. Keep it limited, they say. But if it does all that for him, there’s no reason to stop it.

So we join him upstairs, all of us, on a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon in November 1994. Owen is already on the bed, oblivious to our arrival, murmuring gibberish. . . . “Juicervose, juicervose.” It



A 12-year-old Owen at Walt Disney World. Courtesy of the Suskind family

On the way out of Magic Kingdom, when Walt spots the Sword in the Stone near the carousel, we can't help indulging in fantasy. A Disney actor dressed as Merlin is there, reciting dialogue — "Let the boy try." As we approach the anvil, someone flips a hidden switch that loosens the sword. Walt pulls it out as Merlin cries, "You, my boy, are our king!"

Then both of them turn to Owen. "You can do it, Owie," Walt whispers. "I know you can." Owen looks evenly at his brother and Merlin, and then steps to the anvil and lifts the sword true. Did he understand what Walt was saying? Did he just imitate what he saw his brother do? What the hell difference did it make? Today, in the sunlight, he's the hero of his imagination.

It's Walt's 9th birthday, September 1997, in our new house near Chevy Chase Circle. Owen is 6½. After roughhousing with buddies in the backyard at the end of his party, Walt gets a little weepy. He's already a tough, independent kid, often the case with siblings of disabled kids. But he can get a little sad on his birthdays. As Cornelia and I return to the kitchen, Owen walks in right behind us.

He looks intently at us, one, then the other. "Walter doesn't want to grow up," he says evenly, "like Mowgli or Peter Pan."

We nod, dumbly, looking down at him. He nods back and then vanishes into some private reverie.

It's as if a thunderbolt just passed through the kitchen. A full sentence, and not just an "I want this" or "Give me that." No, a complex sentence, the likes of which he'd not uttered in four years. Actually, ever.

We don't say anything at first and then don't stop talking for the next four hours, peeling apart, layer by layer, what just happened. Beyond the language, it's interpretive thinking that he's not supposed to be able to do: that someone crying on his birthday may not want to grow up. Not only would such an insight be improbable for a typical 6-year-old; it was an elegant connection that Cornelia and I overlooked.

Three weeks after the “juicervose” dance, we are at Walt Disney World. Walt grabs Owen’s hand, and off they go down Main Street, U.S.A. There are attractions in Fantasyland — the Mad Tea Party, Snow White’s Scary Adventures, Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride — that echo movies they both love. The boys sit in the flying galleon on Peter Pan’s Flight as it swirls and dips over landscapes and figures from Never Land, the Lost Boys frolicking in their lair, Wendy walking the plank, Peter Pan crossing swords with Captain Hook. They look like any other pair of brothers, and in the trick of this light, they are.

Each time Cornelia and I feel that, we catch ourselves. After the “juicervose” euphoria and then the cold water poured on us by doctors, we try to make sure we aren’t just seeing what we want to see.

But by midafternoon, it’s clear that Owen isn’t self-talking in the streams of gibberish or flapping his hands as he usually does. Some, but not much. He seems calm and focused — following the group, making eye contact — and oddly settled, with a slight smile, eyes alight, just as he is while watching the movies on our bed. Owen seems at home here, as though his identity, or however much of it has formed, is somehow tied to this place.



Ron and Owen Suskind. Courtesy of Life Animated Documentary Productions LLC

The first of these is the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), which has been a leading voice in the medical profession for over a century. It is a weekly publication that covers a wide range of topics, from clinical medicine to public health. The second is the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), which is a leading journal in the field of clinical medicine. The third is the *Lancet*, which is a leading journal in the field of public health. The fourth is the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), which is a leading journal in the field of clinical medicine. The fifth is the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, which is a leading journal in the field of clinical medicine. The sixth is the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* (JAAP), which is a leading journal in the field of pediatrics. The seventh is the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (JAGS), which is a leading journal in the field of geriatrics. The eighth is the *Journal of the American Psychiatric Association* (JAPA), which is a leading journal in the field of psychiatry. The ninth is the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology* (JASN), which is a leading journal in the field of nephrology. The tenth is the *Journal of the American Society of Hypertension* (JASH), which is a leading journal in the field of hypertension. The eleventh is the *Journal of the American Society of Endocrinology* (JASE), which is a leading journal in the field of endocrinology. The twelfth is the *Journal of the American Society of Human Genetics* (JASHG), which is a leading journal in the field of human genetics. The thirteenth is the *Journal of the American Society of Human Immunology* (JASHI), which is a leading journal in the field of human immunology. The fourteenth is the *Journal of the American Society of Human Microbiology* (JASHM), which is a leading journal in the field of human microbiology. 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is something we've been hearing for the past few weeks. Cornelia thinks maybe he wants more juice; but no, he refuses the sippy cup. "The Little Mermaid" is playing as we settle in, propping up pillows. We've all seen it at least a dozen times, but it's at one of the best parts: where Ursula the sea witch, an acerbic diva, sings her song of villainy, "Poor Unfortunate Souls," to the selfish mermaid, Ariel, setting up the part in which Ursula will turn Ariel into a human, allowing her to seek out the handsome prince, in exchange for her voice.

When the song is over, Owen lifts the remote. Hits rewind.

"Come on, Owen, just let it play!" Walt moans. But Owen goes back just 20 seconds or so, to the song's next-to-last stanza, with Ursula shouting:

Go ahead — make your choice!

I'm a very busy woman, and I haven't got all day.

It won't cost much, just your voice!

He does it again. Stop. Rewind. Play. And one more time. On the fourth pass, Cornelia whispers, "It's not 'juice.'" I barely hear her. "What?" "It's not 'juice.' It's 'just' . . . 'just your voice'!"

I grab Owen by the shoulders. "Just your voice! Is that what you're saying?!"

He looks right at me, our first real eye contact in a year. "Juicervose! Juicervose! Juicervose!"

Walt starts to shout, "Owen's talking again!" A mermaid lost her voice in a moment of transformation. So did this silent boy. "Juicervose! Juicervose! Juicervose!" Owen keeps saying it, watching us shout and cheer. And then we're up, all of us, bouncing on the bed. Owen, too, singing it over and over — "Juicervose!" — as Cornelia, tears beginning to fall, whispers softly, "Thank God, he's in there."



WELCOME TO MY WORLD



Cornelia, Walt, Owen and Ron Suskind in 1996. Courtesy of the Suskind family

We told his various therapists about what happened. Cornelia and I could think of little else. Owen reached out, if only for a moment, from his shut-in world. We spoke to our child.

The speech therapist tamped down our enthusiasm. Dr. Alan Rosenblatt, our trusted developmental pediatrician, did, too. He explained that echolalia is a common feature in kids like Owen. It's something babies sometimes do between 6 and 9 months, repeating consonants and vowels as they learn to turn babble into words. It's also something seen in people with developmental disabilities who can't speak. Just like what the term suggests, they echo, usually the last word or two of a sentence. "You're a very smart and pretty girl," a mother might say to her daughter. "Pretty girl," the child will respond, an echo. Do those kids know what the words mean, we pressed Rosenblatt. "Usually not," he said. "They may want to make a connection, which is hopeful," he added.

"They just repeat the last sound," I croaked. He nodded. Why, I persisted, in a last stab, would he be rewinding that one part for weeks, maybe longer, and choose that phrase from so many in an 83-minute movie? Rosenblatt shrugged. No way of knowing.

gently pull the bedspread from the foot of Owen's bed onto the floor. He doesn't look up. It takes four minutes for Iago and me to make it safely under the bedspread.

Now crawl, snail-slow, along the side of the bed to its midpoint. Fine. I freeze here for a minute, trying to figure out my opening line; four or five sentences dance about, auditioning.

Then, a thought: Be Iago. What would Iago say? I push the puppet up from the covers. "So, Owen, how ya doin'?" I say, doing my best Gilbert Gottfried. "I mean, how does it feel to be you?!" I can see him turn toward Iago. It's as if he is bumping into an old friend. "I'm not happy. I don't have friends. I can't understand what people say." I have not heard this voice, natural and easy, with the traditional rhythm of common speech, since he was 2. I'm talking to my son for the first time in five years. Or Iago is. Stay in character. "So, Owen, when did yooooou and I become such good friends?"

"When I started watching 'Aladdin' all the time. You made me laugh so much. You're so funny."

My mind is racing — find a snatch of dialogue, anything. One scene I've seen him watch and rewind is when Iago tells the villainous vizier Jafar how he should become sultan.

Back as Iago: "Funny? O.K., Owen, like when I say . . . um. . . . So, so, you marry the princess and you become the chump husband." Owen makes a gravelly sound, like someone trying to clear his throat or find a lower tone: "I loooove the way your fowl little mind works." It's a Jafar line, in Jafar's voice — a bit higher-pitched, of course, but all there, the faintly British accent, the sinister tone.

I'm an evil parrot talking to a Disney villain, and he's talking back. Then, I hear a laugh, a joyful little laugh that I have not heard in many years.

- Ron Suskind, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist
and author of "Life, Animated"



Walter and Owen Suskind. Courtesy of Life Animated Documentary Productions LLC

It's as if Owen had let us in, just for an instant, to glimpse a mysterious grid growing inside him, a matrix on which he affixed items he saw each day that we might not even notice. And then he carefully aligned it to another one, standing parallel: The world of Disney.

After dinner is over and the boys retreat upstairs to their attic lair, Cornelia starts to think about what to do now. It's like he peeked out from some vast underground and then vanished. He's done this before, but never quite like this. "How on earth," she says almost to herself, "do you get back in there?"

I feel she's asking me. She has been the one lifting the burden each day, driving him to therapists and schools, rocking him to sleep as he thrashes at 3 a.m. I'm the one who tells stories, does voices, wears a propeller hat. Her look says, "Find a way."

Soon I'm tiptoeing up the carpeted stairs. Owen's sitting on his bed, flipping through a Disney book; he can't read, of course, but he likes to look at the pictures. The mission is to reach around the banister into his closet and grab his puppet of Iago, the parrot from "Aladdin" and one of his favorite characters. He has been doing lots of Iago echolalia, easy to identify because the character is voiced by Gilbert Gottfried, who talks like a busted Cuisinart. Once Iago's in hand, I

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. More than 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum, including an estimated 700,000 people in the UK. Every person on the autism spectrum is different. It can present some serious challenges – but, with the right support and understanding, autistic people and their families can live full lives.

Although everyone is different, people on the autism spectrum may:

- Be under or oversensitive to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours, which can make everyday life extremely difficult
- Find social situations and change a challenge, sometimes leading to extreme levels of anxiety
- Experience a 'meltdown' if overwhelmed by anxiety or sensory overload
- Benefit from extra time to process and respond to communication.

Find out more about autism on The National Autistic Society's website: www.autism.org.uk



Not right for everyone

Recently, together with the National Autistic Society, my colleagues and I asked 3,470 autistic people, parents and their broader support network, about the words they use to describe themselves, their children or the people with whom they work. Did they prefer to use “autistic person”? Or “person with autism”? Or “person who has autism”?

Person-first isn't always best. The results clearly showed that people use many terms when talking about autism. The words “autism” and “on the autism spectrum” were clear favourites among all the groups added together. But there was much disagreement on the use of several words and phrases. Professionals preferred to use “person with autism” while autistic adults and family members preferred on the whole to use “is autistic”. They thought that the term allowed them to describe the centrality of autism to their lives.

One autistic woman said: “In describing someone who's autistic as ‘a person with autism/person who has autism/(or worst of all) person who suffers from autism’ you imply that autism is separate from a person, and behind their autism is a ‘normal’ person.”

Agree to disagree

But these preferences were not unanimous, of course. Instead, for autistic people, family members and professionals, the words they used often hinged on what people believed autism to be. Those who felt that autism is one trait of many in a person tended to prefer person-first language. Others, who felt that autism is central to their or their child's identity, opted to use “autistic”. Others still noted the need to use different words depending on whom one is speaking to.



There is no one way of describing autism on which everyone can agree. There never will be. In order to answer the question of who gets to decide which terms should be used, first, everyone connected to autism needs to come to accept the fact of disagreement and to respond

1 in 100 Children
Are



diagnosed with
Autism

WHEN I WAS FIRST TOLD I WAS AUTISTIC

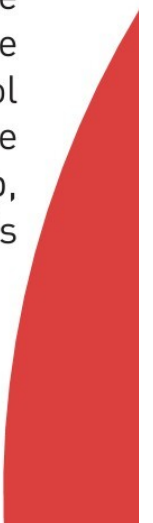
I have autism but rather than see it as a barrier, I use it as a tool to come up with great ideas. My autism can give me challenges though. Things have to be perfect in my head and sometimes I struggle to take in information, it needs to be precise. I sometimes find it difficult to explain things myself, but that is getting better now. I am always trying to improve my social skills by meeting and working with other people, but alone-time in my own space is important.

When I was first told I was autistic, I never knew what it meant but as the years went, I now know what it can do, what effects it can do to you, the good, the bad. It can make you do things that you don't really mean to do or that you can't control but it can also give you a great imagination and special skills that no normal person can do.

I no longer treat my autism as a curse that holds me back in what I want to do, I now treat it as the perfect tool to add with my skills and filming because autism may be hard to deal with but there is potential within it. I may have problems with my autism but the best I can do is deal with them and focus on using the good side of it and rise up against its problems.

I now say this directly to any other autistic person out there in the world. You may find it hard to deal with in life but I tell you now, use it to your advantage like I do and treat it not as a curse but as a tool to what you truly want to do in the future. So keep fighting and rise up from it. All of this wouldn't have been possible without the help, support and opportunities that I have been given by Beacon Hill Arts and its staff. Thank them sincerely.

- Paul (21), Beacon Hill Arts graduate





Beacon Hill Arts CIC is a multi-award winning community interest company that supports creative people with learning disabilities, autism and other additional needs to produce and exhibit their own films and music productions from concept to performance.

Beacon Hill Arts believe that people with learning disabilities and additional needs have an equal right to develop their creative talents as those without. They believe that with appropriate support, their artists can use their unique and entertaining creativity as a way to not only develop valuable skills for life and employment but to also dismantle stereotypes of disability by reaching global audiences with their amazing work.

More information: www.beaconhillarts.org.uk
[Facebook.com/BeaconHillArts](https://www.facebook.com/BeaconHillArts)

to it with openness, flexibility and tolerance of divergence of opinion. We should always seek to establish how people wish to be described – by asking them directly, if possible – and not impose external views or guidelines upon them.

Perhaps even more importantly, we need to create the conditions for debate and conversation between all of the people who are touched by autism and work in the field. It is, after all, only when we listen to each other that we discover what individual words are taken to mean and why they often matter so much.

- Professor Liz Pellicano,
Director of Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE)

The Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE) is part of the UCL Institute of Education, the leading centre for education and social research in the UK and is itself a unique initiative that has at its heart the ambition to improve the lives of autistic people and their families. It is the first centre in the UK committed to understanding which factors, programmes and environments benefit autistic children's learning and create real-life positive outcomes for autistic adults and young people by conducting evidence-based research to enhance knowledge and impact.

We work to ensure that our research is translated by working with professionals on the ground, like teachers and clinicians, and with those directly impacted by autism - autistic children, young people and adults, their families and friends, and the wider public - to promote awareness, understanding and acceptance, of autism.

Facebook.com/CRAE.IOE
Twitter: @CRAE_IOE

WORDS MATTER

by Professor Liz Pellicano

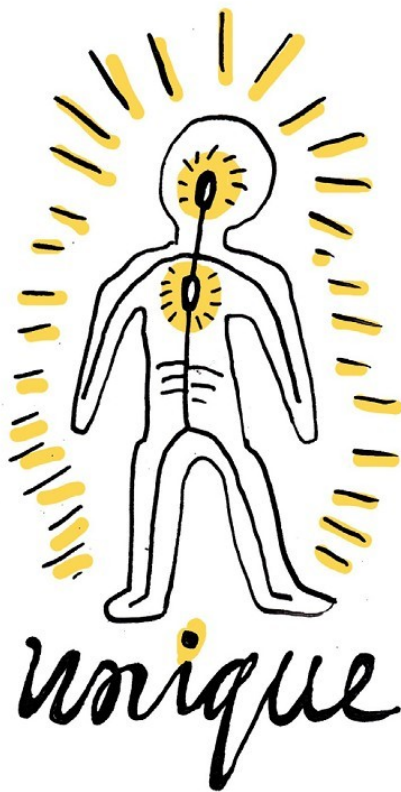
The way we use words to communicate with or about others can have a huge impact on people's lives. This is especially the case when it comes to disability. Handicapped. Retarded. Mad. Activists have campaigned hard to eradicate such terms, which are offensive and perpetuate a negative view of disabled people – one as passive, unable to take control over their own lives.

Responding to this demand, recent government guidelines have encouraged clinicians and teachers to use positive and inclusive language, including the use of language that does not define people by their disability.

“Person-first” language has become what's called for: that is, calling someone a “person with autism” – describing what a person has, not what a person is. This has become the recommended way to speak with or about disability – in the press, journal articles, hospitals and schools. It is difficult not to see the good intentions behind this approach. But perhaps it is not really as inclusive as it claims to be.

Many disabled people have argued vehemently against the use of “person-first” language, instead preferring “disability-first” language, such as he or she is an “autistic person”. Nowhere is this issue more hotly debated than the field of autism. Many autistic activists argue that person-first language is dehumanising, as if they can somehow be separated from their autism, that there is a “typical” person affected by autism, rather than a person whose life is in part defined by being autistic.

These are difficult questions. But it is surely not difficult to argue that truly inclusive language should be defined by the people who are actually autistic. Not by well-meaning outsiders, no matter how powerful. Take a look at the #actuallyautistic and #describingautism twitter handles to see some of these debates.



Secondly, Disney movies had a way of simplifying the complex social world into recognizable themes: the villain and the hero, how to resolve a moral dilemma, good versus evil, love versus hate or envy, savior versus oppression, etc. These are the archetypes of all stories from the Bible to Shakespeare, and Hollywood's greatest writers had inadvertently helped kids with autism by packaging these themes into neat, entertaining, repeatable, and simplified bite-size chunks, which could give a child with autism a foot-hold into the otherwise confusing social world.

Our autism research has confirmed that these key principles do work.

For an effective therapy for autism the material should be repeatable, predictable, help reduce social complexity to a simpler format, be intrinsically rewarding, and be based on the child's own interests – child-led. We showed how the kids' TV animation series *The Transporters* had all of these characteristics – a movie about vehicles with emotions, but where the vehicles were entirely predictable and a source of pleasure and fascination for many kids with autism. Our research showed that watching *The Transporters* for just 15 minutes a day for one month led to significant gains in emotion understanding.

In a separate study we showed that Lego Therapy also led to benefits for children on the autism spectrum. Putting kids into groups of three, where they could do what they love, which is to build Lego constructions whether simple or complex, led to them gaining confidence in social skills within the intrinsically rewarding, predictable, logical world of Lego.



AFFINITY THERAPY

by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen

Life, Animated contains an inspirational and revolutionary message for professionals working with the autism community, and for parents of children with autism, because it outlines a new way of making a connection with such children, and it offers a new method to help them make sense of the world and to communicate.

Unlike traditional methods for teaching children with autism which are often didactic forms of social skills training or involve extrinsic rewards to shape the child's behavior, led by the teacher or therapist, Life, Animated is led by the child's own interests and is intrinsically rewarding. Ron Suskind goes so far as to coin a new phrase for such an approach, which he calls "affinity therapy". But whatever we call it, let's have a closer look at what's going on.

In the case of his son, who was not communicating as a young child, the key that unlocked communication and that gave the young boy a way to make sense of the confusing social world was Disney movies. It may not be Disney movies for all kids with autism, but it worked for this particular child, because he was 'obsessed' with Disney movies. And that's the first key principle. Find something that your particular child is 'obsessed' with, or (to use less stigmatizing language) what might be better described as being passionate about.

For this particular child, Disney movies also had a few other key elements: they were repeatable and therefore predictable, over and over again, and kids with autism love predictability. He could learn word, every action, every character, every inflection in the voice, and he could echo the lyrics back endlessly. And because he loved the movies, he didn't need any external reward to engage with the material. It was intrinsically rewarding.

THE LION KING AND I

By Angela Gallagher

The National Autistic Society has been working closely with Disney, organising Autism Friendly performances of the award winning musical Lion King. Here, the mother of Kieran, a child with autism, recounts the experience of watching the performance:

“As a family, we have attended the Autism-Friendly Performance of Disney’s The Lion King twice now with our son Kieran who is nineteen. Like a lot of people who live with autism, Kieran had never been able to visit the theatre before, let alone to see a musical on the scale of The Lion King! We will be returning again on the 30 August when The Lion King hold their third dedicated Autism-Friendly Performance - we can’t get enough of it! Here’s why...

Like a lot of families Disney has played a big part in entertaining us, the films and characters have always been popular in our house. Like most people, Kieran knows all the films, songs and characters but unlike most people, if Kieran hears one of the popular songs he’s likely to run from the room with his hands on his ears. He would find it hard to sit through a film and would find a trip to Disneyland almost impossible because he likes these things too much. They overwhelm him.

When we first heard about the Autism-Friendly Performance of The Lion King we had a lot to think about before booking. When you’re accompanying someone who lives with autism to anything, you try to prepare for every eventuality. This is really hard when you’re introducing them to something completely new because what if he simply couldn’t bear to be in the room when it started? Which one of us would miss the show when we had to take Kieran outside? This is all the usual stuff we have to think about.

The second time we went to the show we were all far more relaxed and Kieran spent far less time under his coat! He didn't try to run away either. Instead, we were able to sit and enjoy the show with no worries at all - Hakuna Matata! We've been to other relaxed performances since - including plays we would never have considered if we hadn't have been able to experience The Lion King. It's now as important a date in Kieran's calendar as Christmas or Halloween.

All the family will be at the show again on the 30 August. From George Asprey's introductory speech on how the performance has been adapted to suit the needs of those with autism to the exhilarating final curtain, we will experience every emotion together. Kieran will still hide when Rafiki tells us that Simba is still alive and we will have a fantastic time."

- Angela Gallagher, teaching assistant and mum

The article was published in the Huffington Post in May 2015.
The next Lion King AFP is on 4 June 2017.

The key to what Ron Suskind calls affinity therapy is that the professional or parent has to identify what their particular child's affinity is with. Is it trains? Is it Disney characters? Is it Lego? Or is it something entirely different? In all likelihood it will be with a topic that is highly predictable, highly repeatable, but critically, is something the child has latched on to of their own accord, not something imposed on the child by a well-meaning adult but who has ignored what that particular child loves to do all day every day.

When we listen to the child, observe the child, and follow their lead, harnessing their interests and building the therapy around that specific passion, we are three-quarters of the way to success. Ron joined in with his son's passion, and through that they made their connection. That is the revolutionary and inspirational message of Life, Animated.

- Professor Simon Baron-Cohen
Director, Autism Research Centre, Cambridge University and
Trustee, the Autism Research Trust

The Autism Research Trust raises funds to predominantly support research conducted at the Autism Research Centre (ARC) at Cambridge University. The ARC is at the cutting edge of autism research. Their goal is to develop our understanding of the causes of autism and to evaluate interventions, to ensure that people affected by autism receive the best possible support. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, characterised by difficulties in the development of social relationships and communication skills and the presence of unusually strong and narrow interests, and repetitive behaviour. Our understanding of autism has developed extensively over the past 20 years, and through research we hope to improve the prognosis of people diagnosed with the condition in future years.

Please donate now and make a difference via: www.autismresearchtrust.org
The Autism Research Trust is a registered charity (1136737).
Facebook.com/AutismResearchTrust
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The first part of the paper discusses the importance of understanding the cultural context of the research. It highlights the need for researchers to be sensitive to the values and beliefs of the communities they are studying. This is particularly important in the field of education, where cultural differences can significantly impact learning outcomes.

The second part of the paper focuses on the methodology used in the study. It describes the process of selecting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the results. The authors emphasize the importance of using a mixed-methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The third part of the paper presents the findings of the study. It discusses the results of the quantitative data analysis and the insights gained from the qualitative interviews. The authors conclude that there are significant differences in learning outcomes between the two groups, and these differences can be attributed to cultural factors.

The final part of the paper offers recommendations for future research and practice. It suggests that educators should be aware of the cultural context of their students and tailor their teaching methods accordingly. Additionally, it calls for further research to explore the underlying reasons for the observed differences.

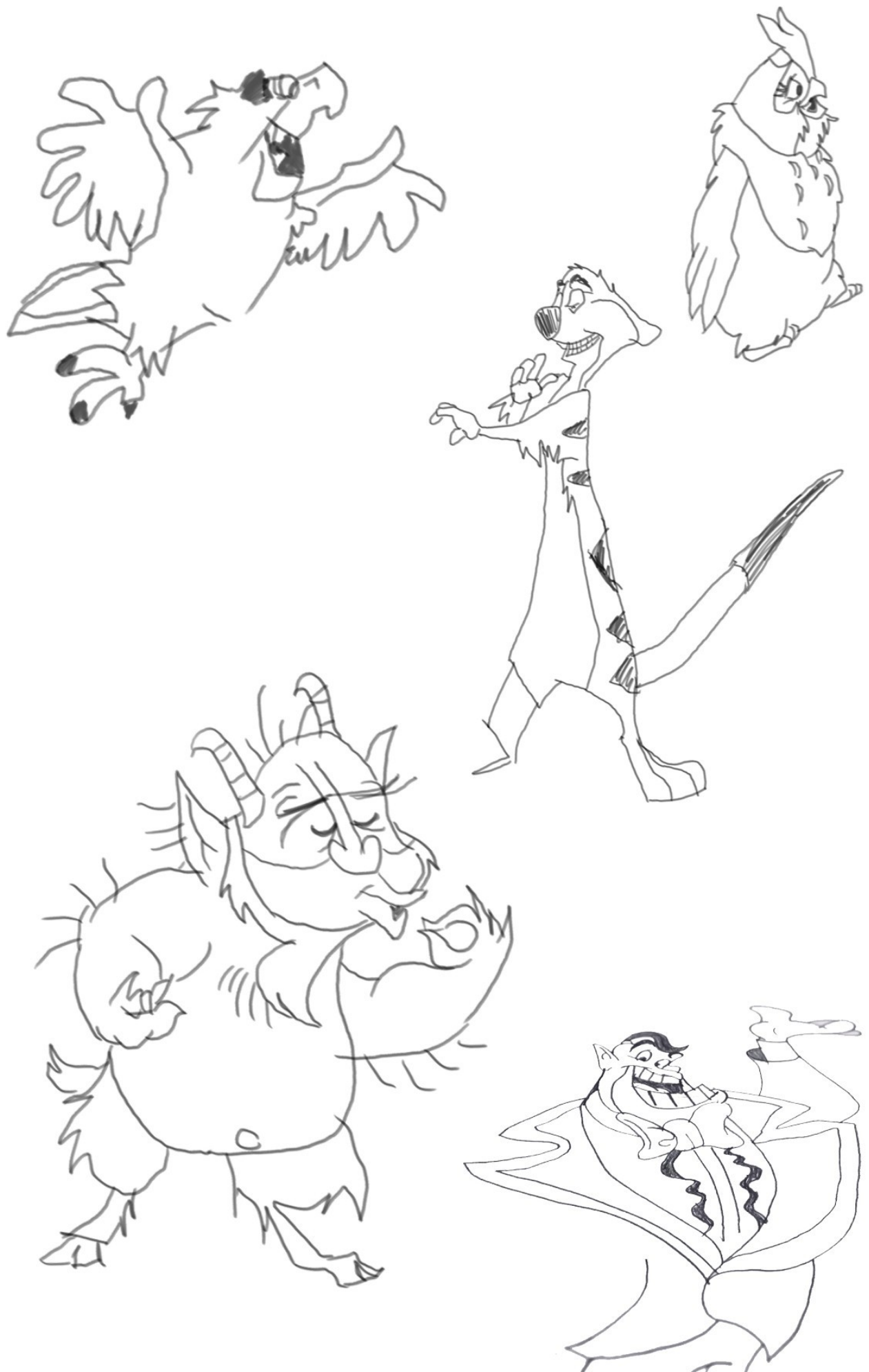


The National Autistic Society is the leading UK charity for autistic people (including those with Asperger syndrome) and their families. They provide information, support and pioneering services, and campaign for a better world for autistic people.

Get involved! Do you want to support autistic people and their families? There are loads of ways to join in and be part of our autism community. You can fundraise, campaign, donate, volunteer, work for us and much more! Whatever you decide to do, thank you for being there and making a difference.

More information: www.autism.org.uk
Facebook.com/NationalAutisticSociety
Twitter: @Autism

COLOUR ME



The train and tube journey was straightforward; Kieran is a good traveller and loves London. Before you attend the Autism-Friendly Performance of The Lion King, you are invited to look over the visual story which details your entire trip to the Lyceum Theatre - from what the theatre looks like when you arrive to how you get to your seat. This helped us prepare Kieran for his visit to The Lion King so he was familiar with the process before we arrived. Despite this, there was still an underlying nervousness.

This started to disappear when we got to the theatre and were greeted by theatre staff and NAS volunteers who were on hand throughout the afternoon in dedicated quiet areas should anyone have needed to leave their seats during the show. This was really appreciated - we were made to feel really welcome in a place that we wouldn't normally visit.

We took our seats, apprehensive still. Before the performance began George Asprey and Brown Lindiwe Mkhize who play the roles of Scar and Rafiki came on to introduce the show - they made us feel very welcome too! The opening song, The Circle of Life where the audience witness an extraordinary array of animals parade down the aisles, is something we knew Kieran couldn't cope with! We expected him to run away but instead, he hid under a coat. He hid under a coat for several parts of the show and only tried to run away a couple of times. Although Kieran has very limited speech, he is enthusiastic when talking about The Lion King - Simba, Nala, Scar and Mufasa and all the colourful costumes, masks and puppets!"

Going to see The Lion King on stage was a real treat. For a few hours you can forget the worries of your child whooping, calling out and assisted toilet visits because everything here is normal behaviour. Even before you go through the door, the streets and cafes near the theatre are buzzing with theatre-goers. It's difficult to describe the feelings of solidarity this gives when you're in a 2,000 seat theatre surrounded by people in a similar situation to you and what an enormous weight is lifted when you don't have to worry about the attitudes of others.

SPECIAL THANKS

WELCOME TO MY WORLD

In my experience, living with Autism is a bit like being the only sane person in the asylum. I am often told to act in a certain way, and when I question the reason behind this I am told “because that’s what you’re supposed to do”. This line of thinking confuses me as being autistic means I think differently from other people. Just because I don’t think in a mainstream way shouldn’t mean that others should be able to mock me or make me feel uncomfortable. Luckily I have a very supportive family who accept me for who I am. I find having close friends other than those on the spectrum is difficult, but I am very happy with the friends I’ve got.

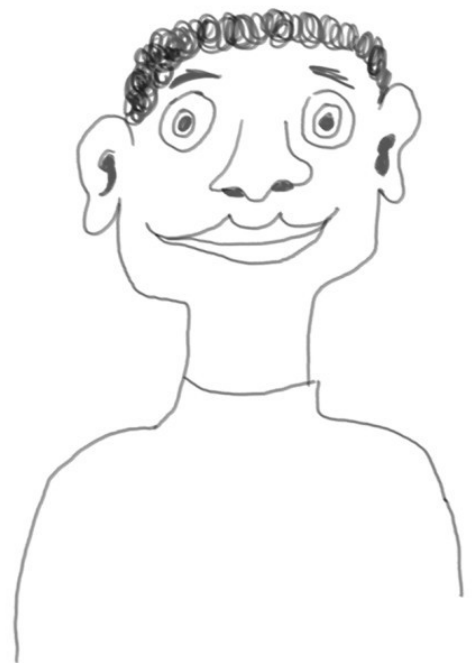
I’ve decided that I am the way that I am, and whilst there have been times when I wished I wasn’t autistic, I have come to accept it. Leaving school, which wasn’t a pleasant experience for me, and going on to do a media degree helped me to be more comfortable with myself. I didn’t tell my fellow students about my autism at first as I wanted them to see me as “Phil” and not the autistic boy. By the time I told them, they had guessed that I had something wrong with me but it didn’t bother them.

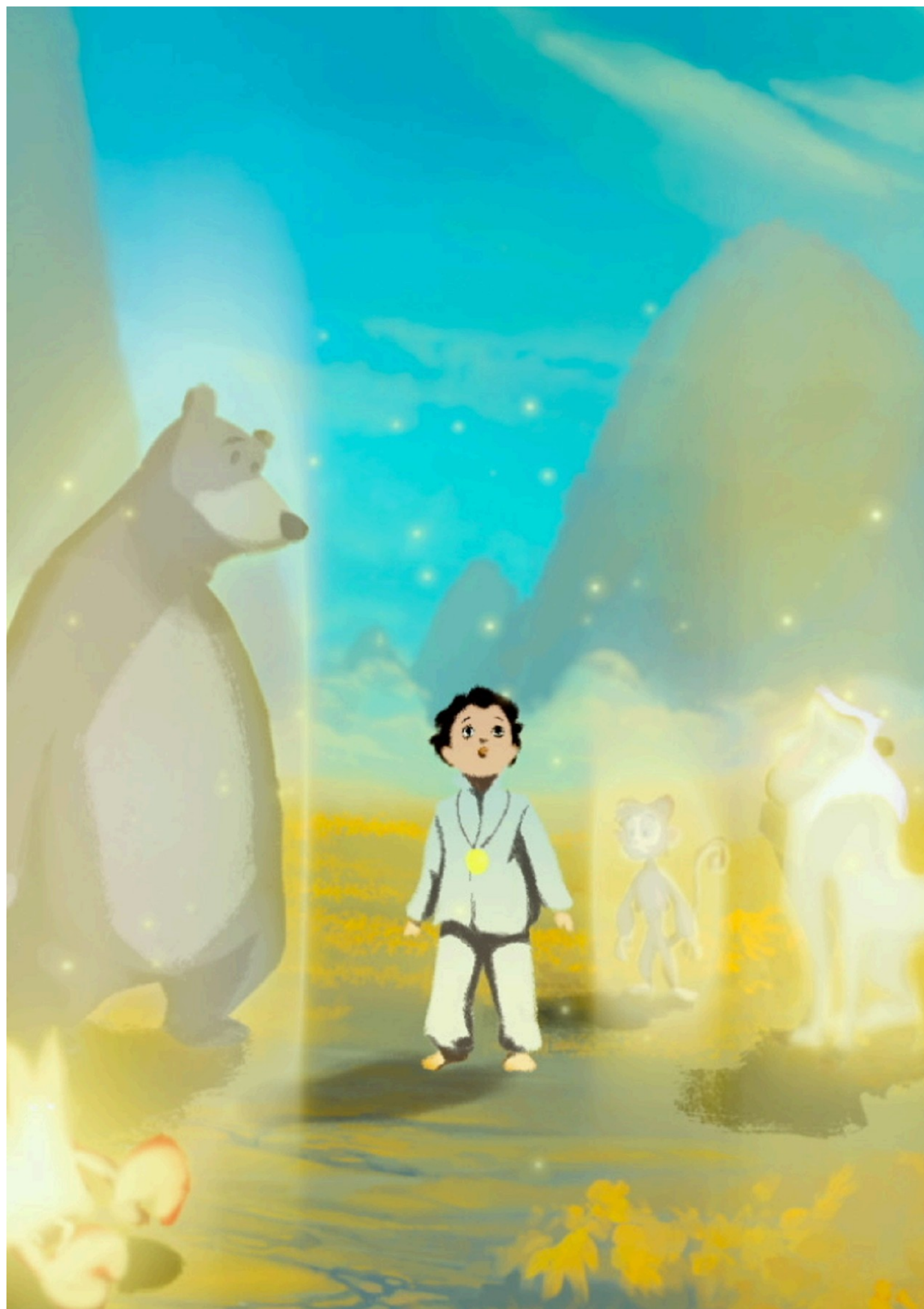
The Beacon Hill Arts project is the only place where I’ve never had to apologise for who I am. This has made the feeling of being accepted for who I am and not feeling that I don’t fit in was satisfying, and I think that this gave me the confidence to make me go to college and do a degree in media. My next hurdle to overcome is convincing the world of employment that Autism isn’t the hindrance they might think it is, it can be a useful skill to embrace. One day I hope to achieve my dreams, and work in the world of film.

When I was younger, I felt that I was living in a parallel universe to everyone else and would frequently say “welcome to my world” when others were puzzled by things they didn’t understand.

I am Phil. I am autistic. Welcome to my world.

- Philip Coghill (21), Beacon Hill Arts graduate







No Sidekick gets
left behind

The BFI Distribution Fund invests in increasing access to, and awareness of, high-quality British and international independent films in order to boost audience choice and to enrich film culture UK-wide.

The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) is made up of nine Film Hubs that work with cinema exhibitors, film festivals, educators, film societies, community venues, film archives and other organisations in their regions, to bring diverse and exciting films and events, to audiences right across the UK. The BFI FAN collaborates with filmmakers and distributors to raise the profile of British and independent film, develops projects aimed at engaging the next generation of film fans and offers sector led training in areas such as programming, marketing, fundraising and technical delivery. Find your local film hub here: dogwoof.org/FilmAudienceNetwork

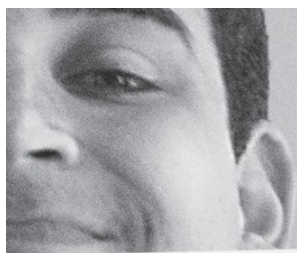
THIS WAY UP's Exhibition Innovation Fund supports projects, ideas, pilots and initiatives that build and develop audiences for specialised films. THIS WAY UP is committed to supporting new models of exhibition and cultivating collaboration across regional boundaries. It is an annual two-day conference for film exhibitors, which explores new ideas in audience behaviours, looks at emerging trends, and discusses the future of cinema. The conference is jointly organised by three hubs within the BFI's Film Audience Network: Film Hub North, Film Hub North West Central and Film Hub Scotland.

Dogwoof has established a first-rate reputation as the go-to company for global distribution of cinema documentaries. Young, driven, and innovative, Dogwoof was the first company in the world to do a multi-platform release in 2005. Our content ranges from social issue films to broader themes like fashion and music. Dogwoof's film campaigns are renowned for having significant social impact, as well as commercial success.

Besides its UK theatrical and international sales operations, Dogwoof is progressively increasing its number of executive productions, and co-productions, steering the company towards vertical integration. Dogwoof has recently closed a film investment fund, which will focus on development & production of feature docs, remake rights, and series.

Dogwoof's films include 'Blackfish', 'Cartel Land', 'Dior and I', 'The Look of Silence', 'The Act of Killing', 'The Queen of Versailles', 'Marina Abramovic, the Artist is Present', 'Cutie and the Boxer', 'Restrepo', 'Dark Days' and many more.

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