UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

April 18, 2017
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Actors for Autism

For young adults with autism, wading into the job market is a daunting task, particularly after leaving the security of high school. Patrick Doran, a Pasadena resident in his mid-20s, has found work he enjoys thanks to vocational training he received from the non-profit organization Actors For Autism.

To raise public awareness about opportunities in the film industry for people with autism, UC Santa Barbara's Carsey-Wolf Center will present Actors For Autism: Selections from the Actors For Autism 2016 Film Festival. The event will showcase the work of those on the autistic spectrum in the entertainment industry by screening short films they produced for Actors For Autism.

The event is slated for Saturday, April 22, in UCSB's Pollock Theater. It will begin at 2 p.m. Admission is free, although seating is limited. Reservations are recommended. Presented in conjunction with National Autism Awareness Month, the screening is co-sponsored by the Koegel Autism Center at UCSB.

Glendale-based Actors For Autism educates and trains people with autism to work in the fields of visual effects, film and television, animation and video game design. The organization also hosts an annual film festival in December to celebrate its students' work.

"The struggle is trying to find opportunities for adults with autism," said Patrice Petro, director of the Carsey-Wolf Center and a professor of film and media studies. Petro will moderate a post-screening discussion. "The struggle is how they can be

engaged, how to fund opportunities for advancement for them after high school, how to develop their skills, how to help them keep being creative."

Following the series of short films from the Actors For Autism 2016 film festival, a discussion and question-and-answer session will focus on Actors For Autism and the role of people in the entertainment industry who have autism. Panelists will include Actors For Autism Executive Director Alisa Wolf, who founded the non-profit organization in 2004; animator Santosh Oommen, who has employed young adults from Actors For Autism to do animation work; Patrick Doran, who has worked as a film and TV editor; and Mary Doran, Patrick's mother, a UCSB alumna, artist and advocate for her son. According to Petro, Mary Doran will offer advice for other parents based on her family's journey.

Petro noted that the event will be of interest to families of people with autism or those with a disabled loved one, as well as others seeking to learn about Actors For Autism and working in the entertainment business. Many early intervention programs and services exist for young children diagnosed with autism but not as many opportunities and services are available to them as adults.

"I was trying to expand what we think of as precarious labor in media industries," Petro said. "For young adults with autism, to be able to express themselves in media and be behind the scenes, this is a story people may not be familiar with. It's really about adults working on the margins or in the industry and learning skills. I don't want a false narrative of hope but I think there are opportunities."

More information about the event can be found at http://www.carseywolf.ucsb.edu.

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