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**Easterseals Disability Film Challenge to Announce 2024 Winners at Orange-Carpet Event at Sony Pictures Studios, May 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Celebrity Guests/Presenters Include Peter Farrelly, Siân Heder, Caterina Scorsone, Sheاون McKinney, Heather Morris & Rick Glassman**

[DisabilityFilmChallenge.com](http://DisabilityFilmChallenge.com)

LOS ANGELES — May 8, 2024 — For Immediate Release — Easterseals Southern California (ESSC) has announced the finalists of the 2024 Easterseals Disability Film Challenge (EDFC), which is celebrating 11 years of leadership advocating for diversity, equity and inclusion in the entertainment industry. Winners will be announced at an orange-carpet awards ceremony to be held May 9 at Sony Pictures Studios.

The featured genre for the 2024 Challenge was “Buddy Comedy,” which was revealed at this year’s Sundance Film Festival, with finalists to be announced May 5 at the 2024 ReelAbilities Los Angeles Film Festival. The film challenge has received a record-breaking number of entries every year since its inception, with 135 films submitted in 2024 from nearly every state and from around the globe, including submissions from Austria, Bolivia, Canada, England, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, Singapore, Timor-Leste and The Netherlands.

**CELEBRITY GUESTS/PRESENTERS:** Academy Award®-winner Siân Heder (CODA, Orange is the New Black), Caterina Scorsone (Grey’s Anatomy), Sheاون McKinney (The Neighborhood, Snowfall), Heather Morris (Glee), Rick Glassman (Not Dead Yet, As We See It), Jillian Mercado (The L Word: Generation Q); (Nicole Evans (Superstore, Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story), Danielle Perez (“Sun-Spider” in Spider-man: Across the Spider-verse, Russian Doll), Lolo Spencer (The Sex Lives of College Girls), Kurt Yeager (Sunrise, The Beanie Bubble), Nic Novicki (“Lego Spider-Man” in Spider-man: Across the Spider-verse, Boardwalk Empire), Vedanten Naidoo (The Bluff), Mia Schaikewitz (Push Girls, LA Woman Rising), Sommer Carbuccia (So Help Me Todd, Riverdale) & more to be confirmed.

**WHAT:** 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Easterseals Disability Film Challenge

**WHEN:** Thursday, May 9 – Red Carpet @ 5 p.m. / Awards Show @ 7 p.m.

**WHERE:** Rita Hayworth Room/Cary Grant Theater  
Sony Pictures Studios, 10343 Culver Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232  
Enter @ the Motor Gate / Park in the Culver/Motor Structure

**RSVP:** Vicki Greenleaf – [Vicki@GreenleafAndAssociates.com](mailto:Vicki@GreenleafAndAssociates.com) – 323.573.5111

Winners will be announced in each of the following categories: Best Film presented by Sony Pictures Entertainment, Best Director presented by NBCUniversal, Best Editor presented by the Adobe

Foundation, Best Actor presented by IMDbPro, Best Writer presented by Netflix and Best Awareness Campaign Award presented by Amazon MGM Studios.

Also being presented will be 12 \$15,000 seed fund/film finishing grants, provided by the Adobe Foundation, to selected EDFC finalist/winning submissions—including Alumni Grants to participants from previous years—to further develop their short film and/or to accelerate the development of their projects into feature films or episodic series.

According to the CDC, 25% of U.S. residents, more than 61 million people, have a disability, making it today's largest minority population. Yet, according to a study released last summer by USC's Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, the number of speaking characters with a disability in a major film was just 1.9% in 2022<sup>1</sup>. GLAAD also published a report in 2022 which found that only 2.8% of series regulars on primetime broadcast TV (22 of 775) were characters with disabilities<sup>2</sup>. And per the most-recent Ruderman Family Foundation study, about 95% of characters with disabilities in Hollywood's top films and TV shows are played by able-bodied actors<sup>3</sup>.

"As we continue to strive to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace in Hollywood, we have made advancements, but there is still much work to be done," said Novicki, who most recently voiced Lego Spider-Man in Columbia Pictures/Sony Pictures Animation's award-winning film Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse. "Disability continues to be frequently overlooked in D&I discussions and we need to be part of that conversation. I created the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge to help accelerate change and to showcase talented filmmakers and actors, providing them with an opportunity to overcome barriers and to achieve their dreams. We are proud of the outstanding films produced over the past 11 years and I am grateful that the Challenge has provided a high-profile platform that has enabled many of our participants to go on to such prominent success. This year's Buddy Comedy films are hilarious, heartfelt and they showcase the talent in the disability community both in front of and behind the camera."

Since the Film Challenge was launched in 2013, aspiring filmmakers have created and submitted more than 750 short films. Previous Film Challenge winners and participants have gone on to land roles or direct segments of such popular films and TV shows as Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, New Amsterdam, Superstore, The Good Doctor, Loudermilk, Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story, The Handmaid's Tale, Marry Me, Moxie, Special, Good Trouble, Curb Your Enthusiasm, One Day at a Time, Dollface, So Help Me Todd, NCIS: Hawai'i, NCIS: New Orleans, Dragons: The Nine Realms, Pupstruction, Not Quite Narwhal, Interview With the Vampire, Best Foot Forward, As We See It, Growing Up, Lucky Hank, Law & Order: Organized Crime and Twisted Metal, among others. Additionally, Challenge films have gone on to win awards at an array of other film festivals; and participants have earned accolades and grants from prestigious organizations around the world (including the AT&T Underrepresented Award), given Ted Talks and lectured about the experience at Harvard.

During the Film Challenge, registered filmmakers are given a span of five days over the designated timeframe to write and produce short films (one-to-five minutes), based on the year's announced genre, which promote disability inclusion. Submitted films are judged in six award categories: Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Writer, Best Editor and Best Awareness Campaign.

Winners receive invaluable access to entertainment leaders and resources, opening the door to an industry notoriously difficult to enter, as well receive as a variety of prizes to help them achieve their career goals, including:

- \$2,000 grants to each winner.

- One \$15,000 seed fund/film finishing grant, provided by the Adobe Foundation, to further develop the winning short film and/or to accelerate the development of their project into feature films or episodic series.
- Dell Technologies computers.
- Sony Cinema Line Camera FX30 including lens, microphone and memory card.
- One-year premium membership to IMDbPro, the essential resource for entertainment industry professionals.
- Screenings at Academy Award-qualifying festivals, including the Heartland Film Festival, HollyShorts Film Festival, ReelAbilities LA, and NewFilmmakers LA.
- One-year subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud, the world's best platform of creative apps and services, empowering you to make anything you can imagine, wherever you're inspired.
- Mentorship meetings with entertainment industry executives and talent, including Emmy-nominated actor Ryan O'Connell (Special, Queer as Folk); Ivana Lombardi, Director of Film, Netflix; Karen Noble, Senior Manager, Creative Talent and Content, Global Talent Development & Inclusion, Universal Filmed Entertainment Group; Steven O'Dell, President, Sony Pictures Releasing International; Gena Desclos, EVP, HBO & HBO Max Post Production, and Tiffany Smith-Anoa'i, Executive VP, Entertainment Diversity & Inclusion, West Coast, Paramount Global, among others to be announced.

The 2024 Film Challenge was judged by a diverse group of influential entertainment industry talent, including: entertainment executive Nicole Castro; director Kat Coiro (the upcoming CBS Matlock reboot starring Kathy Bates, She Hulk, Dead to Me, Marry Me); Jerome Core, head of U.S. & Worldwide DEIA Content at Amazon MGM Studios; director and activist Jenni Gold (CinemAbility: The Art of Inclusion); casting director Eric Ian Goldberg; Tim Gray, EVP of the Golden Globes; Andraea LaVant, disability inclusion expert and founder of LaVant Consulting; Stacey Wilson Hunt, Contributing Editor, The Hollywood Reporter; filmmaker and activist Jim LeBrecht (Crip Cramp, Battlefield Earth, Pitch Black); actor, producer and activist; Col Needham, founder and CEO of IMDb; actress, model and activist Jillian Mercado (The L Word: Generation Q); three-time Emmy nominated journalist Allison Norlian; actor Mark Povinelli, President, Little People of America; journalist Richard Propes, The Independent Critic; journalist Cara Reedy, CNN, NPR, The Guardian; Gil Robertson, President, African-American Film Critics Association; Juliet Romero, founder of Slamdance UNSTOPPABLE; actor, choreographer and Deaf advocate Shaheem Sanchez; journalist Lindzi Scharf, Los Angeles Times, Entertainment Weekly, WWD; actor Sue Ann Pien (As We See It); Film Independent Nominations Director Jennifer Wilson; actor and comedian Danny Woodburn (Mirror Mirror, Jingle All the Way, Seinfeld); and disability advocate, entrepreneur and content creator Tiffany Yu.

The Easterseals Disability Film Challenge is made possible by the generous support of its supporters: Adobe Foundation, Amazon MGM Studios, Dell Technologies, Golden Globe Foundation, IMDbPro, Intel, NBCUniversal, Netflix, Paramount Global, SAG-AFTRA, Sony Pictures Entertainment, The Walt Disney Studios and Warner Bros. Discovery.

#### About the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge:

As someone with a disability, actor, comedian and producer Nic Novicki launched the Disability Film Challenge in 2013 in response to the under-representation of talent with disabilities both in front of and behind the camera. Novicki created the challenge to give aspiring filmmakers the opportunity to showcase their work and provide them with meaningful exposure. In 2017, Novicki joined forces with Easterseals Southern California—the nation's leading nonprofit supporting people and families with disabilities—to expand the event, now known as the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge. Learn more at: [www.DisabilityFilmChallenge.com](http://www.DisabilityFilmChallenge.com)

### About Easterseals Southern California:

Easterseals is leading the way to full equity, inclusion and access through life-changing disability and community services. For more than 100 years, we have worked tirelessly with our partners to enhance quality of life and expand local access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities. Easterseals Southern California provides essential services and on-the-ground supports to more than 18,000 people each year—from early childhood programs for the critical first five years, to autism services, daily and independent living services for adults, employment programs and more. Our public education, policy and advocacy initiatives positively shape perceptions and address the urgent and evolving needs of the one in four Americans with disabilities today. Together, we’re empowering people with disabilities, families and communities to be full and equal participants in society. Learn more at: <https://www.easterseals.com/southernca>

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### Join the Inclusion Conversation ...

[www.DisabilityFilmChallenge.com](http://www.DisabilityFilmChallenge.com)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/DisabilityFilmChallenge](https://www.facebook.com/DisabilityFilmChallenge)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/disabilitychall>

IG: <https://www.instagram.com/disabilityfilmchallenge/>

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### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://annenberg.usc.edu/news/research-and-impact/progress-what-progress-inclusion-hollywood-limited-and-lacking#:~:text=The%20report%20also%20explored%20the,when%20the%20percentage%20was%202.4%25>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://glaad.org/glaads-2021-2022-where-we-are-tv-report-lgbtq-representation-reaches-new-record-highs/#:~:text=Series%20regular%20characters%20with%20disabilities,disabilities%20in%20the%20United%20States>.

<sup>3</sup> [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://rudermanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TV-White-Paper\\_7-1-003.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://rudermanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TV-White-Paper_7-1-003.pdf)