



Visibility Podcast



## Lights! Camera! Advocacy! Episode transcript

Fiona

Hi everyone. And thanks for listening to Visibility, the monthly podcast produced by CID, the Council for Intellectual Disability.

Here, we will be telling our stories, and exploring some of the issues that impact people with intellectual disability. To find out more about our work visit <http://www.cid.org.au>.

Now, settle in and enjoy.

Music

[CID's podcast tune]

Adele

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Council for Intellectual Disability acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Alex

Hello and welcome to Visibility, the podcast of the Council for Intellectual Disability. Today, we'll be talking with Gerard O'Dwyer about his experiences as a person with



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intellectual disability who is also a working actor and performer in film, television and on the stage.

Gerard is also a committed advocate for people with intellectual disability. My name is Alex Elliott. I will be your host today. With me is my co-host Adele Tashkin

Adele

Hi, welcome. Thank you, Alex, for the lovely introduction. We're so excited to have you here today, Gerard.

Gerard

Thank you.

Adele

So, Gerard, just a few weeks ago, you presented at the Australian Directors Guild Awards. You were surrounded by leading directors, actors and film industry people. It seems that you have really arrived as a prominent actor in the community.

Gerard

Yes, that's right. Yes, I did. And I said I was so happy to present this award today. And all I said was it was when meeting director Craig Smith that kick started my acting career since twelve years.

Adele

That's fantastic. That must have been a really great experience for you, Gerard.



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Gerard

It was the best experience.

Adele

So the director, Genevieve Clay Smith, yes, discovered you for the 2009 short film, Be My Brother. Do you feel like this was your breakthrough role?

Gerard

I met Genevieve in the spring of 2008. Genevieve was aged 19 and I was 23 years old. We took first in 2009, and it's a seven minute film. It's about two brothers who don't get along so well that particular film won best filmmaker and best director and I got best male actor. And when her name was called and my name was called, it was so emotional, couldn't believe that we won. And David Wenham gave me the trophy.

Adele

Gerard, we spoke a little bit about your close relationship with Genevieve.

Gerard

Yes.

Adele

And you've worked with her since 2009. Yes. How important for an actor is that relationship with the director?



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Gerard

I got that question. I do. Genevieve is always and always will be my director. Genevieve encourages me to slow down and take my time, stop at the full stops and commas. She would want me to bring that one up, bring back more and deliver the good side to me. Genevieve would say to me, 'Put some emphasis on set of words', she said. 'Take your time. I have you back, I asked you about 1%. You've got this.' We make a difference to spread the word out there to get our message across. And it's all about having a voice and being included.

Alex

So I want to ask, have you always seen yourself as a performer?

Gerard

I always wanted to be in front of the camera and in front of the stage. I love my acting. I enjoyed it. It's fun. Acting is what I do best. Good for the heart and good for the soul. I am a committed to it and I'm going to continue with my acting career.

Alex

Did you have favourite actors on TV or film that you were inspired by?

Gerard

My favourite actor would have to be Alan Rickman. He played one of the professors in Hogwarts years ago, whose name was Snape. I loved him as an actor. I would impersonate him.



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Alex

So let's talk about how you really started. Did you get into drama through school?

Gerard

That's a good question, Alex and I thank you. Actually, it all started from a young age. I would have videos and activities, and I would play stop, play stop, play stop. And I would copy them. I would imitate them.

Gerard

I would impersonate them by playing them over and over until the lines were fuzzy. I still do it because I enjoy it.

Adele

So when you have a script that you have to learn it helps that go for you.

Gerard

Well, it's not nerve wracking. I'm not nervous, but when I'm given a script and I have the script in my hands and I have lungs as well, I would read them over and over. I know that I'm too I have it. After I've learned from them, I had my tape recorder and I would typically record the whole conversation, and I didn't need the script then because I know the lines.

Adele

The idea of the recording is fantastic. So you've found your way with, you know, learning scripts and learning lines.



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Gerard

Thank you.

Adele

You've done lots of different types of acting. I understand that you've been a voice actor for an EBook.

Gerard

Yes, it's very exciting.

Adele

Yes.

Gerard

Yeah. I went to Los Angeles. Genevieve and her husband, Henry, went along. The name of the eBook was "I Didn't Like Hubert". But I was one of the voices you can get on the iTunes App Store that was for the Humpty Dumpty Foundation to buy hospital equipment, to buy an incubator for the other babies who are in hospital.

Gerard

So it's because I would download that app, watch it and enjoy it.

Alex

An actor is often followed by an agent. Can you explain in simple terms what it is?

Gerard

An agent might help an actor like my agent.



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Her name is Sue Moss. She is very helpful and supportive. She gets me to do a few auditions. Sue, uploaded my show reel and my CV and my bio and my new updated website.

Alex

Sounds like it's quite important to have a close and supportive relationship as part of your success. And I was wondering if you could talk about how you get support from your brother, Dennis. I believe it is.

Gerard

Dennis. Yes, that's correct. My brother, Dennis, he has been a huge help to me with all the love and support he has given me. Dennis does things on my behalf. Dennis was the one that helped me to get my agent. He helped me with some TV work and voice work. I'm surrounded with friends and family who love me for who I am.

Alex

When you're not acting, is there any work that you do?

Gerard

I work with Beyond the Square, and Beyond the Square is all about creative opportunities like drama workshops, theatre making, dances and performances and on stage. I had my first creative development with them with Anne Louise Wintell. She has her own theatre ensemble.

I did my first creative development with her and two more people. That was paid work. I'm about to do another one for next year, 2022. It's within the NDIS plan and we're going to get some funding for it.



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I'm going to do a live Show at the Riverside Theatre, which is called the Currency Brothers and Tony Mecum and I have a few ideas for that show, and it's scripted. I have the material for it. I have the ideas for it. The sound of the song and told you to recite to people and myself. We are working towards that.

Adele

Thanks, Gerard. It's great talking with you today. We're now going to take a quick break before hearing more about some of the issues and complexities of being an actor with an intellectual disability.

Fiona

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Alex

Welcome back, everyone. You're listening to CID's podcast Visibility. And today we're talking to Gerard O'Dwyer. He's filling us in on the joys and challenges of being an actor and performer with an intellectual disability. Many of your short films are available on YouTube, and one in particular has had millions of views.

How does that make you feel?

Gerard

Yeah, I love that question. OK. So for example, be my brother. It makes me feel wanted for who I am. It inspires me, and it's uplifting.





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Alex

Most of the films that I've known you from Short-Form productions, but I also say some feature length films like What about Cell? And can you tell me about your experiences with those?

Gerard

I will answer to your question, Alex, about my effort to film the one that I'm working on with John Gerard. But that's how John Joe came up to me and said to me, 'What your title is'?

I said Down syndrome. I don't want to give much away, but it's about a 30 year old man with Down's Syndrome. His mother is ill. There are different elements to the film. It's good acting. It's funny. It has a lot of laughter and humour in it.

Gerard

Other bits are confronting and powerful and emotional. All I can say is that the Premiere won't start until February next year.

Adele

So, Terrence, you were just mentioning that in a feature film, it's a big production. You're working with John Jarrett. Do you feel that you're treated differently to other actors or team members because you are your person living with Down syndrome?

Gerard

I wouldn't say that. I don't know. In the past, I have been judged and mistreated, but doesn't does not stop me from doing anything. Doesn't that not stop me from acting and achieving in life? Because I'm not a label?



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Gerard

No levels at all. All the actors and directors, they treated me with respect. That's what I think.

Adele

So the short film we mentioned before, the one with millions of views.

Gerard

Yes, the interview.

Adele

All that has had a strong theme. We're talking about advocacy and inclusion. What's that? Can you tell us briefly what that stories about?

Gerard

I think one of the themes was acceptance: Feeling accepted and to be included and to have the voice and being heard. I think those were the themes in the film.

Adele

We have a program at C.I.D. The Council for Intellectual Disability pulled more than just a job. And as part of that training, we show you a short film to show how businesses can be more inclusive and giving people with all different abilities a chance to sort of show their skills.

Adele



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So how does that make you feel?

Gerard

I just love it. I love the experience. I actually did a NDIS training video. What you should do or what you shouldn't do in the Theatre Code of Conduct. I love the whole experience.

Alex

So you really are proud to see yourself as an ambassador for people with an intellectual disability.

Gerard

Yes, I am one of the ambassadors of [Bus Stop Films](#). [Bus Stop Films](#) is a non-profit organization. On my job as the ambassador for [Bus Stop Films](#), I had to go to Government House and I met David Hurley, a governor of New South Wales. David Hurley was one of our patrons for bass films. I was interviewing him.

My brother, Dennis and I were interviewed in the Good Morning Show, which is Studio Ten Morning Show. That was for # Down Syndrome21YourWay a campaign to do 21 things that you like to do. Like monologues.

And then I had to do a rendition of Liam Neeson. I did that with my brother on our team. We did a double act.

Alex

If there is a person out there with a disability who feels the urge and passion to have a career on stage or on film. Do you have any advice that you can give to them?



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Gerard

I will say to them, Go for it. For your genes, your or your heart tells you to do. Follow the passion. It's all about confusion to be considered to find a voice and to be heard. And it's all about making new friends and making a difference.

Gerard

Go out there and have fun.

Adele

So, Gerard, for four people who are listening, yes, and who might be interested in getting into acting? We understand that [Bus Stop Films](#) have acting classes.

Gerard

Yes and support.

Adele

Yeah. And support. Yeah. Where would you go? Where would you recommend people go to if they wanted to contact [Bus Stop Films](#) or have a look at their online stuff?

Gerard

Yes. You have to enroll for next year. And then after you enroll, there are different workshops. one in Moore Park in Sydney, one in Canberra, one in Parramatta, one that would have gone. It's all about making new friends there.



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Adele

Thanks, Gerard. We'll put a link to postop films, but its [Bus Stop Films](#)' second hour AEW if anyone wanted to check it out.

Gerard

You go onto that website and check it out and learn about a bit more and all the homework will be on the portal.

Alex

Thanks for joining us today and sharing such incredible insights.

Gerard

Thank you for today. You have a good Christmas and Happy New Year and all the best for 2022. Thank you again.

Adele

To those listening. Thank you as well. Please join us next month for another episode in our arts and culture series where we'll be talking with another creative professional with an intellectual disability.

Fiona

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