

New Beverly cable series educates public about autism



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A new public access television program is opening some new doors and creating plenty of opportunities for individuals with autism.

“Amazingly Autistic” is not only allowing individuals on the autism spectrum to educate the public about their abilities, but it is also providing them with television production experience.

“I came up with the idea because I wanted to educate the community,” said Marc Jamieson, Bridgewell’s career specialist. “I wanted to let them see all the great skills our folks with autism have. I knew that if we created this show, we could reach a larger audience.”

Though only a few episodes in, “Amazingly Autistic” has already seen some of the success Jamieson had hoped for when he approached BevCam and other cable access stations with the idea.

“It’s been going really well,” he said. “Employers have been really receptive ... A couple of our partners have been willing to try out our guys and employ them.”

Bridgewell is a private, non-profit comprehensive human services organization that has been providing support to individuals with developmental and psychiatric disabilities for more than 50 years.

Rosewood II, the organization's employment and day habilitation program, provides opportunities for young adults with autism to gain experience both at the program location in Danvers, as well as offsite with Bridgewell's community partners.

As a career specialist, Jamieson is responsible for helping those folks at Bridgewell break into the workforce.

"We work towards the goal of finding what our guys' interests are so they can have gainful employment in the future," he said.

Five people from Bridgewell were selected to help produce and star in the series.

"We did an interest assessment," he said of recruiting people to be involved. "These individuals expressed a desire to pursue a career in film."

In addition to being in front of the cameras discussing their career goals, the "Amazingly Autistic" cast does quite a bit of work behind-the-scenes.

"We sit and edit the film together," he said, adding the crew also helps with setup and audio. "They're very involved in the process."

In the first episode of the series, the public is introduced to three of the show's cast members, who are interviewed briefly by Jamieson.

Jamieson asks each one a little bit about themselves, their strengths, weaknesses and job skills.

Matt Richardson, who lives on his own, tells Jamieson that he is very handy around the house.

"I do cook for myself," he said. "I do vacuum my floors. I do my own laundry. I do my dishes, too ... I do everything that's house-cleaning related."

In addition to the cleaning, he does at home and at the Rosewood program, Richardson said he also enjoys shoveling and landscaping jobs, as well as helping out with Meals on Wheels in Ipswich.

Upcoming autism conference

For the second year, Bridgewell will be hosting an autism conference focusing on young adults' transition from educational services to adult services will be held this fall.

WHAT Building Bridges: Autism Journey into Adulthood

WHEN Friday, Sept. 22, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

WHERE Sheraton Framingham Conference Center, 1657 Worcester Road, Framingham

MORE INFO This is a full-day conference for human service leaders, professionals and family members. The keynote speaker will be Frank Campagna, also known as "Autism Daddy" and producer for "Sesame Street." There will be breakout sessions on best practices and treatment approaches, services, medical/health and legal/administrative. For more information, visit www.bridgewellconference.wordpress.com.

Jamieson asks another cast member, Connor Johnson, what his overall goal is when it comes to seeking employment.

“Getting money and saving it,” he replies.

In total, Jamieson expects only about six or eight episodes will be produced with the current group. However, if there’s continued interest from other folks who come to Bridgewell, he would be more than willing to continue the series.

Walt Kosmowski, executive director at BevCam, said he was excited about the possibilities when Jamieson came to him with the idea for the series.

“Marc’s done a phenomenal job working with the people here and at Bridgewell to get them to do this,” he said. “And we were pleasantly surprised at how well they took to it all ... We’re so happy to be able to work with them.”

And Jamieson said he is extremely happy with the results so far, especially seeing some of the cast members come out of their shells a little bit.

“I’ve been able to see a couple of their personalities come out,” he said. “It’s amazing to see them laugh. We want them to have fun and enjoy this experience.”

Each “Amazingly Autistic” episode runs about 30 minutes. The first episode aired on Wednesday, May 17, on the public access stations in Beverly, Salem, Woburn, Ipswich and Peabody. Check local listings for airdates and times.

For more information about the autism services provided by Bridgewell, visit www.bridgewell.org/what-we-do/autism-services.