



## FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATING ABILITY SHINES

BY BRENDA C. MCCASKILL (BRENDA@ABOUTGREATERCINNATI.COM)  
PHOTOS BY ABOUTGREATERCINNATI.COM

“So many people. So many differences being celebrated and coming together in 8 days.” remarked Susan Brownknight. “Cincinnati should be very proud of itself.”

Proud of what? To what is she referring?

She’s talking about the Cincinnati Reelabilities Film Festival 2015. And, she is not the only one talking.

Organized by Living Arrangements for the Developmentally Disabled (LADD), Inc., a local nonprofit that facilitates the education of adults with disabilities to realize their aspirations, the Cincinnati Reelabilities Film Festival 2015, which ran February 27<sup>th</sup> – March 7<sup>th</sup>, immersed nearly 4,500 actual filmgoers into a week-long celebration of the stories, lives, and art of people who experience disability.

“That doesn’t count the massive amount of media and stories that were done and the people that have watched those pieces that numbered in the millions.” remarked Susan Brownknight, Director of Development and Public Relations at LADD, during the Festival closing. “We really do believe that we have made a huge impact in this city ...”

And what an impact!

The region’s largest film festival dedicated to bringing people together



*The week-long Cincinnati Reelabilities Festival 2015 closed to a packed auditorium at the Cincinnati Art Museum. The Festival returns to Cincinnati in 2017.*

(Photo | AboutGreaterCincinnati.com)

to explore, discuss, and celebrate differences and shared humanity showcased international, national, and local films with a focus on ability – not disability. Festivalgoers’ hearts swelled with pride and compassion, smiles illuminated faces, and eyes opened to the possibilities of what people with different disabilities can accomplish.

“It has been an unbelievable 8 days ...” remarked Brownknight. “With our ReelProgramming, which happened 12 months ahead of time and this week, we have reached, and in our audience, about 11,500 people

just directly through our screenings.”

The ground-breaking, eight day festival showcased nineteen films that featured disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome, blindness, hearing impaired, and mental health. Films were screened at eight of Greater Cincinnati’s accessibility friendly venues including the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati Museum Center, and Great American Ball Park. Each film screening was hosted by and benefited seventeen Cincinnati area nonprofits that enrich the lives of people experiencing disability including

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## FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATING ABILITY SHINES (CONT'D)

*Films shown throughout the Cincinnati Reelabilities Film Festival week focused on ability—not disability and drew an audience of nearly 4,500 to 19 films and other related events.* (Photo | AboutGreaterCincinnati.com)



Building Blocks for Kids, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Taylor High School Inclusion Program, and Starfire Council of Greater Cincinnati.

The powerful, eye-opening, inspiring, and award-winning films covered a variety of topics including a 19 year-old's journey in a wheelchair from Barcelona, Spain to New Zealand; a baseball star forced into early retirement struggling to adjust but finds hope through an unexpected friendship with a grocery store clerk with Down Syndrome; one man's journey to treat his mental illness through alternative methods; and the dramatic comeback story of a snowboarder with traumatic brain injury.

“Our community has united around a vision that includes all people and abilities.” Kara Ayers, Festival Co-Chair, said in a promotional video. The Ayers family was the subject of one of the local Cincinnati Reelabilities films.

The Festival closed to a capacity filled auditorium at the Cincinnati Art Museum viewing films with a focus on Cincinnati. Eight documentary shorts, created by local filmmakers, shared and celebrated the stories about local people experiencing disability, their struggles, their triumphs, and their passion for life despite the challenges they face.

Among the local films featured: Kara and Adam Ayers, two parents with disabilities, and their international adoption journey to adopt a child from

China with dwarfism; Courtney Cooper, an artist with autism, whose work is highly coveted; and Charles McDonald, an amputee, who is also a bicycle racer.

“ReelAbilities celebrates the beauty and richness of all people in our community.” Kathleen Cail, Festival Chair, said in a promotional video.

Cincinnati, which has hosted Cincinnati Reelabilities since 2013, hosts the second largest Reelabilities Film Festival, and is home to LADD, Inc., the Festival's national organizing agency, is among 15 cities to host this nationwide, unique festival. Other host sites: Atlanta, Bay Area, Boston, Chicago, Columbus (OH), Greater D.C., Houston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New Jersey, Palm Beach, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, and Richmond.

“This is about all us being valued and accepted for who we are.” Sara Bitter, Festival Co-Chair, said in a promotional video.

Cincinnati Reelabilities returns in 2017.

Visit [www.cincyra.org](http://www.cincyra.org) to learn more about the Festival, view clips of the films shown in Cincinnati, and get more information including other host cities scheduled festivals.

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