

Changing Minds Film Festival Addresses Young Adult Mental Health



Stills from "Nobody But Myself" by Kat Nolan (Courtesy of Community Access)



Community Access, a New York City-based mental health nonprofit, presented its second Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival virtually this year. Changing Minds celebrates the work of teen and young adult filmmakers who, through their short films about mental health, challenge the stigma that too often surrounds mental health concerns.

The Festival, which aims to facilitate dialogue and center the lived experiences of young people, came at a time of enhanced need; teens and young adults, in particular, are reporting increased mental health concerns amid the social isolation of COVID-19 lockdowns, a loss of independence, missed time in school and an uncertain job market, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported.

"While we will miss gathering in person, we are excited that

our virtual Festival will allow us to connect with a global audience at a time when connection and community are so needed," said Cal Hedigan, CEO at Community Access. "We are grateful to these talented filmmakers for sharing their stories and look forward to celebrating their important work."

Screenings were followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers moderated by Shadille Estepan of Lady Gaga's Born this Way Foundation, a non-profit that connects young people with mental health-related resources.

Community Access first launched a Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Competition in 2015 as a part of its New York City Mental Health Film Festival, the oldest and largest film festival of its kind. In 2019, the organization, with support from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, transformed its competition into a second festival, presenting the young filmmakers' projects

on the big screen at Manhattan's Village East Cinema and offering an opportunity for young people to gather in person for great films and conversation. The Festival was held virtually this year for COVID-19 safety precautions.

"The arts have the power to transform the way that we think and talk about mental health," said Laurie Tisch, founder of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. "Mental health stigma has detrimental real-world impacts, and programs such as Changing Minds not only challenge this stigma but ensure that people with lived mental health experience are heard, respected and valued in their communities."

"We are proud to support Community Access and the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival again this year," said Rick Luftglass, executive director at the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund. "The Festival is an important platform for

young people to have an impactful role in changing conversations about mental health."

The eight films to be showcased at the Festival were selected from more than 700 submissions and represent a variety of genres, from spoken word poetry to stop motion animation. This year's Festival features young filmmakers from New York City, North Carolina, California, Massachusetts and Ontario, Canada.

The winning film, "Nobody But Myself," by Kat Nolan, is a love poem to a young woman's depression. Other films explore mental health as it relates to COVID-19, technology, food, art and intrapersonal struggles. By sharing and discussing these mental health stories, the Festival aims to foster a dialogue and change the way we talk about mental health issues among young people.