

## Autism awareness film to be premiered in Stoke on Trent

Monday 13 March, 2017

A new film drama highlighting the challenges of growing up with autism is to be premiered on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> March in Stoke-on-Trent to mark the start of World Autism Awareness Week.

The film, 'Twin Brothers Worlds Apart', takes scenes from the book of the same name to portray some of the events experienced by Kevin Healey and his identical twin brother Shaun when they were growing up in the early 1980s. Kevin has Asperger, a mild form of autism; this contrasts with Shaun who has a more severe non-verbal form of the condition.

Kevin and Shaun, who are portrayed in the film by actors Callum Westbury and Anthony Fosbrook, didn't get a diagnosis when they were children. Shaun wasn't diagnosed until he was 18, and Kevin much later at the late age of 26.

The premier, showing for the cast and crew only, will take place at 6pm on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> March at the Cineworld cinema in Stoke-on-Trent. The public will be able to watch some 30 members of the cast and crew walking the red carpet before the debut screening.

Kevin, who is from Staffordshire, said, "my autobiography was written in May 2008, and for the last 5 years I've wanted to make a short film to raise awareness of this condition which is still misunderstood by so many. Over half a million people in the UK are diagnosed with autism, but many more fail to get a diagnosis or positive assessment, and consequently struggle through life, often without realising why they are different from their peers. The film highlights the daily struggles people with autism face and the impact that being misunderstood has on them. The film highlights, for instance, how I was very literal as a child and that people in my street thought both Shaun and I were eccentric. The film also portrays the frustrations felt by my parents and also contains examples of bullying; sadly, people with conditions such as autism are particularly vulnerable to such cruel and anti-social behaviour".

"The film gives examples of where autism is misunderstood. Sadly, even though we have come a long way since autism was first recognised in the late 60's, the condition is still not universally understood. The film highlights that we need to break down these barriers that cause distress to people with autism and their families, which can be achieved with the correct support and provision, for instance through the services and support provided by national and local charities such as the National Autistic Society (NAS) and the Staffordshire Adults Autistic Society (SAAS) respectively".

The film is approximately 20 minutes long and over the coming months will be entered into a series of Film Festivals in the short film category, such as the Tribeca Film Festival run by the actor Robert De Nero whose son has autism, and the Cannes Film Festival.

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