

Presentation

Edwin Farr

Good evening

I'd like to thank the organisers for inviting me here to talk to you.

First of all I'd like to introduce myself – I'm Edwin Farr from the European League of Stuttering Associations and I am a person who stutters.

I'm going to talk for about 5 minutes on how stuttering is portrayed in the media, how I think it could be portrayed – and then I'm going to show an award winning short film of about 15 minutes which I hope will show that stuttering does not need to be a taboo subject.

Let's give you a bit of background to stuttering – about 1% of the adult population stutter – so that means if there are 200 of you here then there are two stutterers. That's me then so there's another one out there!

But let's have a think about that – 1% of the population – how many casts have 1 % of the characters with a stutter. So how true to life are dramas then. How many documentaries are made about stuttering – 1%? I don't think so.

Stutterers would fully accept that it can be difficult to write in a character who has a stutter, or interview one for a documentary - and I'm thinking here of broadcast media – there are obvious problems around how much time you could have a camera focussed on one person trying to get a word out.

Also, as it's not a visible disability there may need to be repeated explanations or background given for the character. It's not like wheelchair = can't walk – what visible sign = can't talk.

So while I acknowledge difficulties in getting an accurate picture across, does every stutterer have to be made out to be stupid, or have fun poked at them or indeed be the villain. Does this sort of portrayal not influence how the public perceives people who stutter and indeed how they react to them. Does the media need to consider its responsibility.

When a film is made in a positive way about a disability such as Rainman where a `taboo` subject - autism - is taken, explained and personalised then what huge

difference it can make to the understanding of that disability.

Stuttering isn't a subject you should be afraid of.

Let me tell you a story about a young boy with a severe stutter who dreamt of being a popstar. He stood up in front of millions of people on UK TV, stuttered through his introductions, but against all the odds, because of his personality and talent he is currently one of the biggest stars in Britain soon to be a huge star throughout Europe – you couldn't really make up the story of Gareth Gates because no drama unit would probably be interested. Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction.

So a fair bit of innovation and creativity may be needed when dealing with stuttering – but please don't shy away from it.

Lets have a look now at a multi award-winning short film, directed by Belgian film-maker Erik Lamens, himself a stutterer.

This will show the discrimination and difficulties faced by one young man who stutters. I hope you will keep the video and the issue of stuttering in your mind. We have difficulty speaking for ourselves – perhaps you can help speak for us.