

Published Wednesday April 15, 2009

Asperger's film turns mom into a sponsor

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Business consultant Carol Blood, 48, was captivated the first time she watched "If You Could Say It in Words," an independent film about an artist struggling with undiagnosed Asperger's syndrome (a milder form of autism) on the fringes of society.

And she decided she could do a little good if she brought the film to Omaha, so more people could see it.

With a few phone calls, she arranged for three screenings this week, as well as appearances by the film's director and star, all as a part of April's National Autism Awareness Month.

She talked about how the film affected her and why it needs to be seen.

Q. Why this film, and why Asperger's?

A. My 20-year-old son, David, was diagnosed with Asperger's in December of 2008. I had always had a suspicion that there might have been something at work, but up to that point, the doctors I talked to said that his symptoms were because of brain tumors. Those were removed when he was 12, and we finally received the Asperger's diagnosis last year when we visited the Munroe-Meyer Institute (at the University of Nebraska Medical Center).

Q. What tipped you off that David might be affected by something other than the tumors?

A. Well, Asperger's is not really any one symptom, and there were several things that made me wonder. I first noticed that David had balance issues when he was around 6. Doctors first said it was because he was growing at a relatively slow rate, and then attributed it to the tumors. But there's also awkward social skills. David is extremely intelligent, and a lot of people with Asperger's are very high-functioning. But there's a level of social interaction that he lacks: using what they call one-sided verbosity, a lack of eye contact, not showing clear empathy. It's sometimes hard for people to understand why that is — that these people aren't cold-hearted, but that there's a communication loss at work.

Q. How did you find out about "If You Could Say It in Words"?

A. I was doing research after the diagnosis and came across the movie online. It's a very gritty love story — a realistic view of how society treats certain people, what it does to the odd kids. Asperger's is so very different on the autism scale. It shows how a lot of these people end up living on the fringe.

So I got in contact with Adam (Eisenstein, the film's producer) and I said, "Your movie really spoke to me. What would it take to bring it to Omaha?"

Q. Just like that?

A. We wanted to move fast, and we were able to get co-sponsors to bring the film here in time for National Autism Awareness Month, and have it coincide with the Nebraska Autism Conference. And Adam was able to get Nicholas Gray and Alvin Keith, the director and star, to come and discuss the film with viewers after each screening, along with some local autism experts and activists. It should be a really powerful experience.

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See the film

"If You Could Say It in Words" will be shown free:

Thursday: University of Nebraska at Omaha, 7 p.m., College of Public Affairs and Community Service building, Room 101, 6001 Dodge St. Co-sponsored by the UNO Department of Theatre.

Friday: The Bourbon Theater in Lincoln, 1415 O St., 7 p.m. Co-sponsored by the Bourbon Theater.

Saturday: The Eagles Club in Bellevue, 209 West Mission St., 2 p.m. Co-sponsored by Olde Towne Development Committee with Bellevue FOE Club.