

## Life doesn't imitate art: Brisbane woman calls for better representation of autism in media

As we begin Autism Awareness Month, it is incredibly important that we give underrepresented and misrepresented groups the opportunity to share their experiences and unique stories. This is the key message that Jessica Finn, a woman who is calling for the everyday reality of autism to become known, is aiming to highlight.

Jessica is a 22-year-old Brisbane woman with autism who has a lot of say about how autism is currently portrayed in the media.

"We're not unintelligent, I've seen that shown in media a lot," Jessica said.

"People make movies about us and they will make us look like we're so incapable.

"There is no need to treat us like we're still kids, even when we're in our twenties.

"I have thought we would have better representation [by now] but sadly I'm sort of used to seeing that right now for people who are deemed marginalised.

"It makes people not very accepting towards me, but I hope it changes."

Jessica hopes that one day portrayal of characters with autism will align closer to real life, and all the success that people with autism are able to achieve.

Jessica herself is a brilliant example, having spent her last year furthering her skills at STEPS Pathways College in the Sunshine Coast. As she resided in Brisbane at the time, Jessica originally undertook the online program before moving onto face-to-face classes when she moved into the Sunshine Coast area.

"I did the online program until October of last year," Jessica said.

"When I was in Brisbane, there was no STEPS, there was nothing like it.

"I'm glad I found it, it is a really good place, for me it was the best decision I made last year."

Jessica's hopes align with the launch of a national campaign with STEPS Employment Solutions entitled #SeeME.

The campaign aims to dispel common misconceptions about hiring young people with a disability, mental health issue or other barrier to employment, and give the opportunity and space for more diverse stories to be heard.

The campaign, which also features a video series, explores the realities of nine extraordinary individuals who face barriers to employment and highlights the importance of concentrating on the abilities of job seekers.

Jessica herself is interested in pursuing a possible career path that utilises her wild imagination and steady drawing hand.

Undertaking a visual arts course at a local TAFE in her spare time, Jessica has been creating sculptures and drawing pictures.

Currently keeping her projects under wrap, Jessica looks forward to putting some of her art online sometime soon.

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Jessica hopes that she will be able to make a career out of her art, and that employers will give her the same opportunity as others.

In the meantime, Jessica is continuing to strive for her long-term goal of moving out of home and gaining her independence, which she says she is well on the way to with the help of her teachers at STEPS Pathways College.

“It’s slowly getting better now; I’ve met a few people who have brought my spark back and I’m excited to see what happens when we start to give more people a chance,” Jessica concluded.

**[ENDS]**

**About STEPS Pathways College:**

STEPS Pathways College is a first of its kind college for young adults with disabilities and autism. Offering innovative and intensive learning, the College has recently extended to include day and online learning to deliver opportunities Australia-wide. The personalised and inclusive learning experience allows students to find their path in life, achieve their goals, and lead independent lives in our community. **For more information about STEPS Pathways College visit <https://www.stepspathways.com.au/>**

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