

# POV

Community  
Engagement & Education

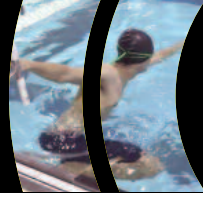
DISCUSSION GUIDE

## Swim Team

A Film by Lara Stolman



[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)



When people ask me how I found the story of **Swim Team**, I say it found me.

Children with developmental disabilities are routinely excluded from community activities, often as early as preschool. No—your child can't be in the regular class; your child won't keep up in Little League; your child isn't going to college—is something parents caring for children with disabilities hear often.

Since children on the autism spectrum are particularly prone to drowning, swimming is a crucial skill for them. Yet it's not easy to find appropriate teachers and programs willing to take on a child on the spectrum. While exploring swimming lessons for my own children, I stumbled upon the Jersey Hammerheads, a team in formation at the time that was recruiting children and teens on the autism spectrum. I was immediately struck by the energy and optimism of the families who were coming together to form the team. Some of the kids were teenagers and had never been on a sports team before. And some couldn't yet swim. But this team was determined to dominate the competition.

With the Hammerheads families, I found a group who refused to take no for an answer. They were saying yes, and it was galvanizing for them as a community. As a mother, I was so personally inspired by what they wanted to accomplish and believed that their high expectations could translate beyond the pool. I hope my film provides inspiration for families everywhere raising children with unanticipated challenges.

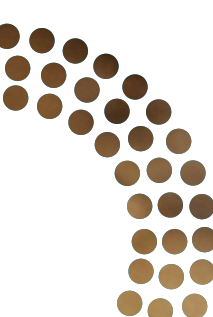
**Lara Stolman**

Director, **Swim Team**



**Filmmaker Lara Stolman.**

Credit: Andy Foster





<b>2</b>	<b>Letter from the Filmmaker</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Using This Guide</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Background Information</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Autism Spectrum</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Autism in New Jersey</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>“Falling Off the Cliff”</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Services and Programs for Adults with Autism</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Special Olympics</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Selected People Featured in <b>Swim Team</b></b>
<b>14</b>	<b>General Discussion Questions</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Discussion Prompts</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Taking Action</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>How to Buy the Film</b>

**Writer**

Faith Rogow, PhD  
*Insighters Educational Consulting*

**Background Research**

Ione Barrows  
*Associate, Community Engagement and Education, POV*

**Guide Producers, POV**

Eliza Licht  
*Vice President, Content Strategy and Engagement, POV*

Alice Quinlan  
*Manager, Community Engagement and Education, POV*

**Design:**

Rafael Jiménez

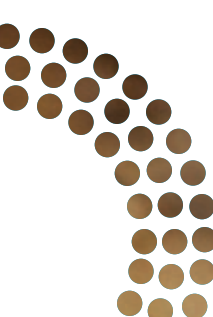
**Copy Editor:**

Natalie Danford

**Thanks to those who reviewed this guide:**

Lara Stolman  
*Director, **Swim Team***

Suzanne Buchanan  
*Executive Director, Autism New Jersey*







In New Jersey, the parents of a boy on the autism spectrum form a competitive swim team, recruiting diverse teens with autism and training them with equal measures of patience and high expectations. **Swim Team** chronicles the extraordinary athletic and social success of that team, the Jersey Hammerheads. In addition to telling a moving story about the ways that teams (and coaches) provide identity, purpose and the inspiration to achieve, the film raises questions about the wisdom of leaving parents to shoulder the entire responsibility of giving teens with developmental disabilities a life that feels winning. It suggests that we all stand to benefit when schools and communities work together with individual families to share the load.

**Swim Team/ Coach - Founder Maria McQuay with team members Kelvin Truong, Robert Justino, Mike McQuay, Jr. and Hayden Schumann.**

Credit: Nicole Chan



**Swim Team** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to autism, inclusion, special needs adults, and athletics, including *Neurotypical*, *My Way to Olympia*, *Best Kept Secret* and *The Grown-Ups***
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the “Key Issues” section**
- **Middle and high school students, youth groups and clubs**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums**
- **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries**

**Swim Team** is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- **autism spectrum disorder**
- **competition**
- **diversity**
- **education/schools**
- **IEPs (individualized education programs)**
- **inclusion**
- **developmental disabilities**
- **special needs students**
- **Special Olympics**
- **sports**
- **swimming**
- **transitioning to adulthood**

## USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Swim Team** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pov.org/engage](http://www.pov.org/engage)



Mikey at school.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

## The Autism Spectrum

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), commonly referred to simply as autism, is a neurological and developmental variation that affects learning, communication and social interaction. Autism can be found across all racial, ethnic and social groups and is associated with a wide range of behaviors and characteristics that may include intense focus on a specific subject; unconventional means of learning and problem-solving; a strong need for routine and consistency; repetitive movement or self-stimulation, such as rocking or humming; difficulty with social interpretation and expression; and under- or over-sensitivity to sensory experiences like sound, light and touch. Each individual on the autism spectrum is different, with a unique set of characteristics and behaviors that may change depending on stress or anxiety levels and sensory stimulation. Individuals on one end of the autism spectrum may be non-verbal, harm themselves or depend heavily on support from family and professionals, while other adults with autism may live and work independently.

The exact cause of autism is unknown, though genetics and environmental conditions are thought to be possible factors.

### Sources

Armstrong, Thomas. *The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain*. Cambridge: Da Capo Lifelong, 2011.

"DSM-V: What Changes May Mean." *Autism Research Institute*. [http://www.autism.com/index.php/news\\_dsmV](http://www.autism.com/index.php/news_dsmV)

Carey, Benedict. "Diagnoses of Autism on the Rise, Report Says." *The New York Times*, March 29, 2012.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/30/health/rate-of-autism-diagnoses-has-climbed-study-finds.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/30/health/rate-of-autism-diagnoses-has-climbed-study-finds.html?_r=0)

Grandin, Temple. "The World Needs People with Asperger's Syndrome." *The DANA Foundation*, Oct. 1, 2002.

<http://www.dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=2312>

Grandin, Temple and Richard Panek. *The Autistic Brain: Helping Different Kinds of Minds Succeed*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.





Jaarsma, Pier and Stellan Welin. "Autism as a Natural Human Variation: Reflections on the Claims of the Neurodiversity Movement." *Health Care Analysis*, March 2012.

<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:457919/FULLTEXT01.pdf-title=Autism>

"History of Autism Blame." *PBS*. <http://www.pbs.org/pov/refrigerator-mothers/fridge.php>

*Science Daily*. "In Autism, Age at Diagnosis Depends on Specific Symptoms."

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/04/130409173355.htm>

## Autism in New Jersey

New Jersey has the highest rate of autism in the United States—as of 2016, one out of every 41 children in New Jersey was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), while the national rate is one in 68. The reason for this is not known, although some have suggested that cases of ASD are more likely to be diagnosed in New Jersey due to greater awareness and wider availability of screening. People of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds are affected by autism at approximately the same rate, but chil-

## Perth Amboy, New Jersey, home of the Jersey Hammerheads.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

dren with ASD from minority and low-income families are less likely to receive professional evaluations before the age of three. According to researchers, lower-income children have delayed access to diagnosis and treatment services.

Autism takes a significant economic toll on families. Under federal law, public school districts must provide daytime education for children with ASD. However, families must bear the costs of after-school childcare, ASD-related therapy, medical treatments and other support services. It is estimated to cost at least \$17,000 more per year for a family to care for a child with ASD compared to a child without ASD. Parents of children with ASD have also reported higher levels of stress and many have to stop work to care for their children with ASD. Mothers who stay in the workforce end up working on average about seven hours less per week and earn 56 percent less than mothers of children without disabilities.



**Kelvin dives off block.**

Credit: Nicole Chan

In recent years, a number of states have passed laws to help ease the burden on families affected by ASD. In May 2017, the New Jersey legislature assembled a task force to study and make recommendations about the support service needs of adults with ASD. Another law directed the Department of Human Services to publish a timeline that would enable individuals with disabilities and their families to track the state resources available to them. This will help ensure that families are aware of their rights and can participate in educational and support programs before children with ASD lose their eligibility by “aging out.”

**Sources**

“Community Report on Autism 2014.” *Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network*.

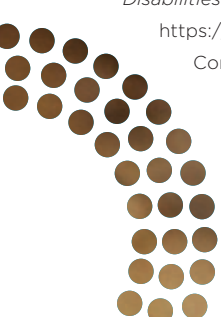
[https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/states/Comm\\_Report\\_Autism\\_2014.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/states/Comm_Report_Autism_2014.pdf)

“Autism Legislation.” *Autism New Jersey*. [https://www.autismnj.org/autism\\_legislation](https://www.autismnj.org/autism_legislation)

“Prevalence Rate in New Jersey Rises to 1 in 41.” *Autism New Jersey*. March 31, 2016. <https://www.autismnj.org/prevalence-rates>

“A Snapshot of Autism Spectrum Disorder in New Jersey.” *Autism New Jersey*. <https://www.autismnj.org/document.doc?id=1791>

“New Data on Autism: Five Important Facts to Know.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/features/new-autism-data/index.html>







### “Falling Off the Cliff”

Special education programs in the United States became mandatory in 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed by Congress to ensure equal rights and access for disabled students in the public education system. Additional rights and protections were later added and the EHA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA entitles every special needs student to free public education, appropriate to his or her needs, and sends federal funding to states and local school systems to support special education services. The federal government now requires every U.S. state to provide special education through 21 years of age, except in cases where state law conflicts and only requires it through 18 years of age.

At 22, students age out of the public school system and the “entitlement laws” that provide services such as education, transportation, subsidized housing and vocational and life skills training cease to apply, leaving family, friends and teachers responsible for seeking out support programs.

Parents and teachers refer to this as “falling off the cliff,” because of the scarcity of continuing adult

Kelvin talks about how he deals with his spontaneous feelings of anger.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

education programs and accommodations. Upon graduation, individuals with autism are assigned caseworkers from their state. Every state also has a department of vocational rehabilitation that is associated with a nationwide federal program designed to help individuals with disabilities find employment.

According to the Disability Network, experts estimate that at least 90 percent of adults with autism end up living with their parents or in institutions after they finish school. A 2015 report found that adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder were more likely to be unemployed or under-employed and to experience complete social isolation than adults with other disabilities. A subsequent study revealed that only 14 percent of adults with ASD held paying jobs in settings that also included workers without disabilities. Those who come from low-income backgrounds and/or have severe disabilities face a much higher risk of not continuing education or finding employment after high school.



Mike McQuay coaching Kelvin Truong.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

**Sources**

Allday, Erin. "Experts Brace for Wave of Autistic Adults." *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 4, 2012.

<http://www.sfgate.com/health/article/Experts-brace-for-wave-of-autistic-adults-3921071.php>

"About AFAA." *Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism*.

<http://www.afa-us.org/site/c.IIYIkNZJuE/b.5063941/k.E26E/Overview.htm>

Armstrong, Thomas. *The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain*. Cambridge: Da Capo Lifelong, 2011.

"Individualized Education Plan (IEP)." *Autism Society*.

<http://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/autism-through-the-lifespan/school-age/educational-mandates/individualized-education-plan-iep/>

James, Susan Donaldson. "Children With Autism 'Fall Off the Cliff' After Graduation." *ABC News*, Apr. 30, 2013.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/kids-autism-fall-off-cliff-turn-21/story?id=19068035>

McCarron, Bev. "Searching for Services for Adult Autistic Children." *NJ Spotlight*, Oct. 29, 2010.

<http://www.njspointlight.com/stories/10/1028/2250/>

"A Guide for Transition to Adulthood." *Organization for Autism Research*. <https://researchautism.org/resources/a-guide-for-transition-to-adulthood/>

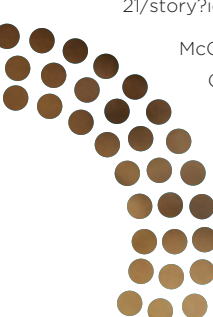
Rosen, Peg. "Special Education: Federal Law vs. State Law." *Understood*. <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/special-education-federal-law-vs-state-law>

Roux, Anne, Jessica Rast, Kristy Anderson and Paul Shattuck. "National Autism Indicators Report: Developmental Disability Services and Outcomes in Adulthood." Drexel University, May 24, 2017.

[http://www.familyvoicesofca.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Natl-Autism-Indicators-Report-2017\\_Final.pdf](http://www.familyvoicesofca.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Natl-Autism-Indicators-Report-2017_Final.pdf)

"Unfinished Business: Making Employment of People with Disabilities a National Priority." *United States Senate. Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions*. July 2012.

[http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/community/cms\\_guidance\\_around\\_sheltered\\_workshops.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/community/cms_guidance_around_sheltered_workshops.pdf)





## Services and Programs for Adults with Autism

In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of children diagnosed with ASD increased rapidly and approximately half a million of those children are expected to reach adulthood over the next decade. This drastic growth, in conjunction with nationwide budget cuts, means that the need for support programs far exceeds available resources.

Support services for adults with autism vary by state and may include health and rehabilitation services, residential programs, employment training, day programs, recreational activities and home care. The majority of long-term government services fall under the following programs: Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and Medicare. However, to qualify for these programs, most adults must be able to prove that their condition is such that they are unable to work, and the payments are often not sufficient to cover day programs, job coaches or other support programs that could otherwise help prepare individuals for employment and/or independence. In New Jersey, for example, state funds provide an average of \$22,000 per high school graduate, but residential and support programs can cost anywhere from \$35,000 to \$90,000 per year.

**Mike and Maria meet with a disability attorney to discuss their son's legal status as an adult.**

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

Eligibility for services varies from state to state and families/individuals must reapply if they cross state lines. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and IDEA are intended to ensure equal access to support programs, but cannot guarantee that individuals will be provided with adequate services. Adults can qualify for Medicaid community waivers, which provide additional services designed to keep them out of institutions and in the community, but these waivers can have a waitlist of more than 8,000 names, and some individuals face a wait time as long as 10 years.

### Sources

"Adults with Autism: What Services and Programs are Available at Twenty-Two?" *Autism Speaks*.  
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/community-connections/adults-autism-what-services-and-programs-are-available-twent>-

Burke, Cassie Walker. "When Autistic Children Are Children No More." *Chicago*, Feb. 18, 2013.

<http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/March-2013/When-Autistic-Children-Are-Children-No-More/>



**Team on deck.**

Credit: Lewis Stolman

Davis, Linda H. "Still Overlooking Autistic Adults." *The Washington Post*, Apr. 4, 2009.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/03/AR2009040303169.html>

Goehner, Amy Lennard. "A Generation of Autism, Coming of Age." *The New York Times*, Apr. 13, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/health/healthguide/esn-autism-reporters.html>

McCarron, Bev. "Searching for Services for Adult Autistic Children." *NJ Spotlight*, Oct. 29, 2010.

<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/10/1028/2250/>

"A Guide for Transition to Adulthood." *Organization for Autism Research*. <https://researchautism.org/resources/a-guide-for-transition-to-adulthood/>

**Special Olympics**

Special Olympics is an international organization that provides sports programming for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. The organization stages the Special Olympics World Games, bringing together athletes from around the world to compete in a different

host country every two years. Special Olympics was founded as a summer camp in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Its mission is to give intellectually disabled children opportunities to participate in sports "to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community." In 2016, more than 5.6 million athletes participated in year-round Special Olympics sports programs.

**Sources**

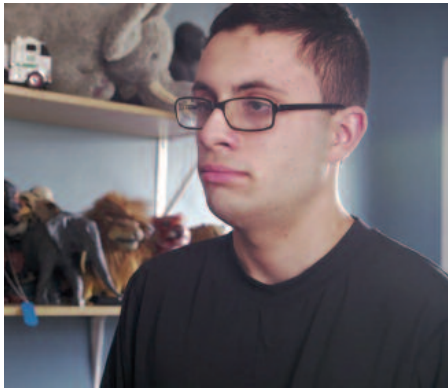
"2016 Reach Report." *Special Olympics*.

[http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/reports/reach-reports/2016\\_ReachReport\\_Final\\_4Pager.pdf](http://media.specialolympics.org/resources/reports/reach-reports/2016_ReachReport_Final_4Pager.pdf)

"Our Mission." *Special Olympics*.

[http://www.specialolympics.org/Sections/What\\_We\\_Do/About\\_Special\\_Olympics.aspx?src=navwhat](http://www.specialolympics.org/Sections/What_We_Do/About_Special_Olympics.aspx?src=navwhat)

### Selected People Featured in **Swim Team**



**Michael (Mikey)** – the coach’s son; makes the national Special Olympics; finds a job at a zoo



**Mike and Maria** – Michael’s parents and the team’s coach and manager, respectively



**Robert (Robbie)** – team leader who also earns the position of captain on his high school swim team; interested in computer animation



**Rosa** – Robbie’s mother



**Kelvin** – struggles with Tourette syndrome and violent outbursts; at one point quits the team, but returns; in a job training and coaching program



**Patty and Stanley** – Kelvin’s parents



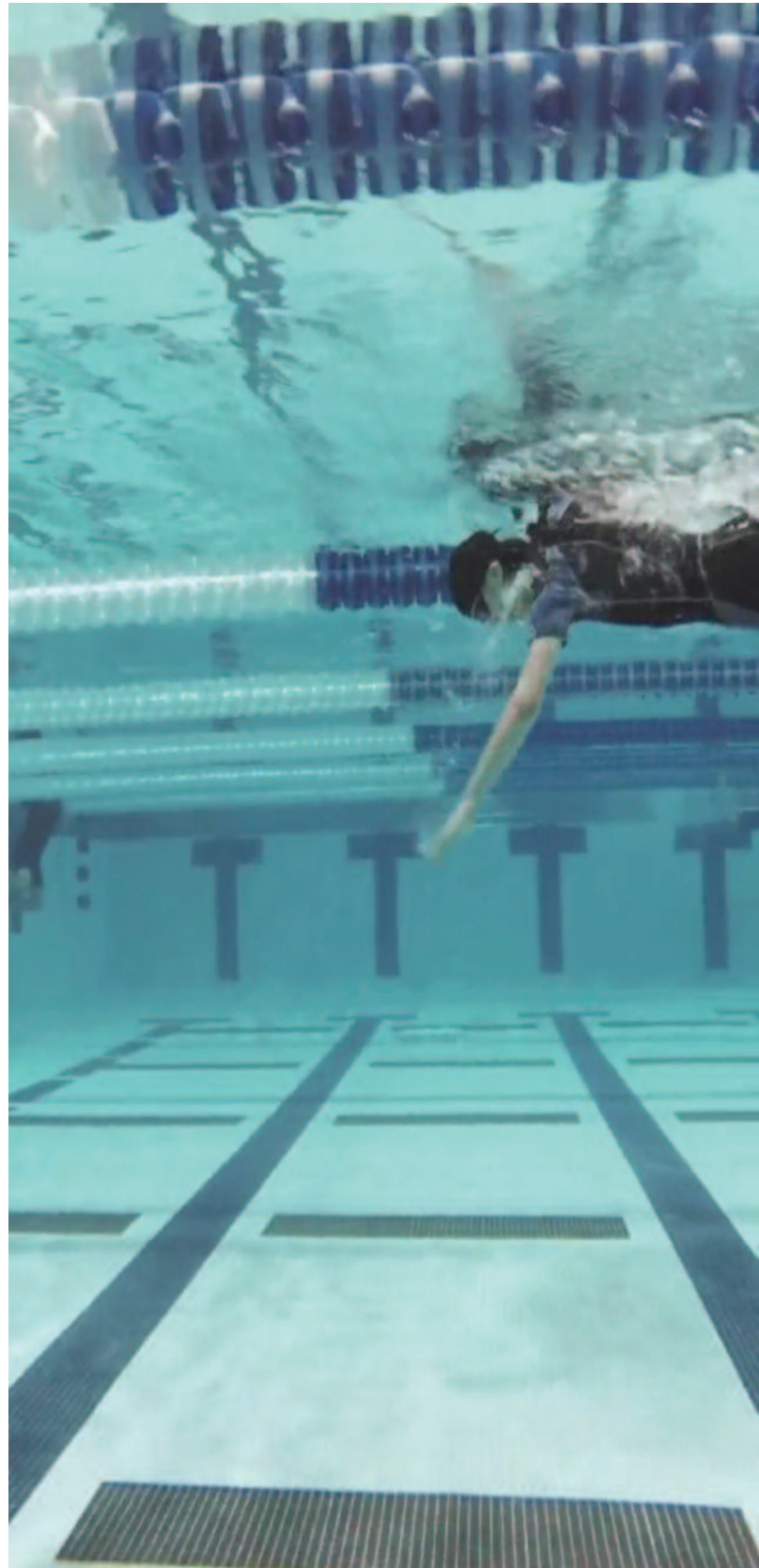


Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- In a word (or phrase), what was your initial reaction to the film?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to \_\_\_\_\_.



Kelvin swimming at practice.  
Credit: Lara Stolman





The Hammerheads with gold medals.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

## Beyond Stereotypes

A Special Olympics announcer says, “We encourage the world to view our children as we do: strong, accomplished individuals who have the potential to change the world, one perception at a time.” How did “meeting” the members of the Jersey Hammerheads influence your perceptions of people with autism? What did you learn from this film about autism that you didn’t know before?

Rosa asks, “Robbie, do you see yourself as different from other children?” Robbie responds, “They’re different.”

Coach Mike acknowledges, “At one time or another all our kids have been ostracized.” Why do you think kids with autism (or other disabilities) are so commonly ostracized? What role does culture or human nature play in that dynamic? What do you think could be done to make acceptance or inclusion the norm?

High school coach Scott says, “Robert’s a captain in just about every sense that you’d expect... Here we’ve got a captain who does what the rest of the people should aspire to do.” How would you describe Robbie’s

leadership style? Does he display the qualities you expect from a leader?

## The Power of Teams and Competition

Coach Mike notes that for the boys, “to be a part of a team is unbelievable.” How does team membership benefit the teens featured in the film?

Mike says that the parents benefit from the team by “seeing that their kids can do something and socializing with other kids that are special needs. That’s a big thing for us because a lot of these kids don’t have friends. They’re all isolated at home.” What do you think the parents learn about their children from watching them train and compete?

Coach Mike observes, “The kids are going to have a good time whether they’re good, they’re bad, they come in first, they come in last.” But Robbie exhorts his team to win and



**Robert and his mother at home.**

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

the boys are disappointed when a mistake results in a participation medal rather than the gold. How do the kids and coaches reconcile the drive to win with appreciation for effort? In your view, how much should winning be emphasized in youth athletics in general? What are the benefits and drawbacks of programs that prioritize effort and fun over winning?

What did the coaches learn from Hayden swimming the wrong stroke and the team being disqualified? What did the kids learn from the coaches' responses?

Rosa says, "Meeting these other moms has been a learning lesson for me and it has taught me that I am not alone." Patty adds, "We parents can get together. We can share our experience and laugh and cry together." Why is gathering with peers as important for the parents as it is for the boys?

## Parenting

Coach Mike says, "I think I became a better teacher and a better father by having an autistic son, by spending more time and being around more, always wondering and caring about how he's doing and how he's performing." What did you learn about parenting from watching the parents in the film?

Coach Mike recalls that doctors told him his son would never talk, never be able to change his own pants, never write his name, never be self-sufficient. But, he notes, "Here it is, 11 years later, and look what he's doing. The whole thing is you can't give up on your child. I mean it's an old cliché—everybody says it, but I've lived it. I live it every day." What would you do if your doctor or school or community gave up on your child? Where would you find help and support?

What was your reaction to the story Mike tells about finding Michael in his room crying: "I go, 'What are you crying for?'"





**Patty talks about her son's struggles with anger.**

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

And he looked at me and he said, 'Why did God make me different, Dad? Why am I autistic? What did I do wrong?' Oh my God, what are you supposed to say to your kid? And Michael knows he's autistic, he knows he's different. You know, me and my wife looked at each other with tears in our eyes and we said, 'Because you're special. God made you special and that's why you're different, not every kid can be special.' And he was good with that. And that was the truth, you know he is special... And I told him, 'You keep swimming the way you're swimming. A lot of normal boys can't do what you do.'"

Rosa explains that her son "doesn't know right now that he has autism. Robbie feels that he's a typical kid and he has never asked me that, is there something different about him." Compare and contrast Rosa's experience with that of Mike and Maria, who were always clear that Michael was different, but that that difference wasn't an excuse: "in our house, we never said can't. Never. You always had to at least try." How did each approach benefit each boy? What were the drawbacks of each?

Short on ideas about how to handle Kelvin's physical strength and anger outbursts, Patty explains, "I don't really have a strategy. Sometimes we just try to scare him, say, 'Kelvin we're going to call the policeman. If we call 911 and police found you hurt us, hurt anybody, you're going to be in jail and you cannot come back home.' And Kelvin likes policemen, but he also understands jail life is not that pleasant, so he says, 'Please don't call police. No, don't call police.'" What did you think of this strategy? What other strategies did you notice parents and coaches using to coax Kelvin's compliance or encourage good behavior? Which seemed to be effective?

Robbie's mother is surprised to find that he's getting sex education as part of his health class. Robbie doesn't want to talk about it—it makes him uncomfortable. What makes this interaction different than the interactions between parents and neurotypical kids talking about sex?





## Schools, Communities and Public Policy

The YMCA gives the team free pool space. How does the entire community benefit from efforts to support young people with disabilities and their families?

Maria says, “We had to fight every step of the way to get the service that we needed for Michael: speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, a trained aide. We had to hire an advocate. Everything is a cost and it’s a big cost, but we do what we have to do. We borrowed money. I even told my husband if we have to sell the house, we’ll sell the house.” Is it good public policy to make individual families bear the financial burden to meet their children’s basic needs? What should happen to families who don’t have adequate resources (like a house to sell or the ability to advocate for services)?

Despite a history of Kelvin seeing different doctors and using various combinations and dosages of drugs, Stanley reports, “Medication has no impact. We’ve seen his reduction of tics and anger through swimming.” How would society change if doctors prescribed (and insurers covered) participation in athletic, artistic or social programs instead of (or in addition to) drugs?

The local YMCA where the Jersey Hammerheads practice.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

Coach Mike notes, “Michael wouldn’t have had the opportunity [to swim or succeed] if it wasn’t for my wife and the other people that got involved. There would be no opportunity.” What do you think should happen in communities where there is no one individual who gets involved in this way? Are special needs kids in those communities just out of luck?

Robbie has expressed an interest in designing computer games, but his mother says, “I don’t feel the school is doing their job with him. There’s no resources for these children. They talked to us about, well, we’ll send him to Walmart so he can learn how to stock. That’s not what we want... They’re just going to pass him through a system where you took math, reading and all these courses and here you go, you graduate with a diploma, but they’re not really giving him what he needs. Where’s he going to work? What’s he going to do for a living? They’re not giving him the skills and they’re not targeting where it will help him maybe get a job

in something that he has a passion for.” What services and programs does your school offer for students like Robbie? How could you work with the district to ensure that available services are based on each student’s capabilities, not on stereotypically low expectations?

### Transitioning to Adulthood

Maria and Mike make the decision to let Michael graduate from high school with his class. Later they discover, as Maria reports, “The district could have provided for Michael some type of education or program. It’s called, like, transitioning school. They could have paid for him to go there. But because it costs money, everything was hush hush. They didn’t say anything to us about it... I didn’t know that once you accept that diploma, you’re done.” Who is responsible to ensure that families like Michael’s have what they need to make fully informed decisions about graduation and next steps?

Patty reports that she and Stanley “applied to a group home through our state [but] the total list is like 8,000 something. Even the priority list, that’s like 4,000 something and our first year they just placed like 20 of them, so I figure when Kelvin turns 220 years old he may get a spot at our state group home.” What should families and communities do to make sure there are enough spots available to meet needs?

Despite the fact that Michael displays some capacity for independent living, Maria and Mike decide to apply for legal guardianship of their son. What do you think will (or should) happen to Michael when Maria and Mike pass away or are no longer capable of exercising guardianship?

What’s your best hope for the futures of the young men in the film? What do you hope will happen for Michael, Robbie and Kelvin? What could communities do to help make your vision a reality?

How can schools, employers and communities work together so students like Michael and Robbie have more appropriate “onramps” to employment after high school?



Kelvin Truong.

Credit: Nicole Chan

**Additional media literacy questions are available at:**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php)





Mikey in the pool.  
Credit: Lara Stolman

## Taking Action

- Host a screening of the film as part of a fundraiser to sponsor local Special Olympians to attend regional, national or international competitions.
- Show the film in your school as a way to debunk stereotypes and launch an initiative that helps neurotypical students get to know their autistic classmates a bit better and vice versa.
- Follow the model of the YMCA in the film and work with local athletic facilities to set aside time and free access for teams and activities serving families with special needs children.
- Use the film as part of an effort to help coaches develop the skills to include children with developmental disabilities on their teams.
- Find out the employers in your area that recruit and hire employees with developmental disabilities. Create a flyer about the benefits of employing diverse staff and hand them out in your community.

## FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

### SWIM TEAM

[www.swimteamthefilm.com](http://www.swimteamthefilm.com)

Information about the film and filmmakers.

## Original Online Content on POV

To further enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The **Swim Team** website—[www.pbs.org/pov/swimteam](http://www.pbs.org/pov/swimteam) — offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmaker; a list of related websites, articles and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and special features.

## Autism Basics

### NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS AND STROKE: “AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER FACT SHEET”

[www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail\\_autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm)

This division of the federal government’s National Institutes of Health provides basic information about autism—what it is, what research is underway and where to find support. The website includes an extensive set of links to organizations that focus on autism. It also includes information in Spanish, as well as English.

### POV: “AUTISM MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS”

[www.pbs.org/pov/neurotypical/autism-myths-and-misconceptions/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/neurotypical/autism-myths-and-misconceptions/)

The website for the POV film **Neurotypical** includes an overview of myths and facts about autism.

## Advocacy and Resources

### AUTISM NOW

<http://autismnow.org/>

This website serves as a clearinghouse for information and resources related to living with autism spectrum disorder and includes sections on employment, education, family life and community, as well as a searchable collection of relevant articles.

### AUTISM SOCIETY

[www.autism-society.org/](http://www.autism-society.org/)

This grassroots organization provides support, advocacy and research for people living with autism. The site’s rich resources include clinical information, statistics and research reports, strategies for living with autism and family stories.

### AUTISM SPEAKS

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

This advocacy organization supports research about all aspects of autism, including educational practices, as well as suggesting advocacy strategies and ways to support families of children with autism. The website includes links to social networking opportunities for people raising or helping children with autism.



**EASTERSEALS****[www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com)**

The resources provided by this organization include a state-by-state listing of services for families dealing with children on the autism spectrum.

**SPECIAL OLYMPICS****<http://specialolympics.org/>**

Through athletic competition, this organization seeks to show the world the true nature and capabilities of people with developmental disabilities.

**WRIGHTSLAW****<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>**

This group's website serves as a resource for news and information on legal aspects of special education for parents, educators and legal practitioners.

**Support Groups and Networking Opportunities****ADVANCING FUTURES FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM (AFAA): "CORE ISSUES"****<http://www.afa-us.org/site/c.IIYIkNZJuE/b.5076217/k.EE66/Resources.htm>**

AFAA is a consortium of organizations committed to supporting individuals with autism and their family members. The website offers extensive resources, including links to key organizations across the nation for adults with autism.

**AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK****[www.autisticadvocacy.org](http://www.autisticadvocacy.org)**

The website for this organization run by and for people with autism offers a range of resources, including networking opportunities, policy briefs and a variety of projects that give voice to members.

**GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ASPERGER SYNDROME PARTNERSHIP****[www.grasp.org](http://www.grasp.org)**

This group serves as a support network for adults and teens on the autism spectrum through education, community outreach and advocacy.

**WRONG PLANET****[www.wrongplanet.net](http://www.wrongplanet.net)**

This is an online community and discussion forum for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other neurological differences, as well as for their friends, family members and professionals in the field.

**Transitioning to Adulthood****AUTISM AFTER 16****[www.autismafter16.com/](http://www.autismafter16.com/)**

This is a wide-ranging source of support for teens with autism and/or learning disabilities and their families and includes information on the transition to adulthood, such as employment, housing, finances, health, community support groups and the arts.

**AUTISM SPEAKS: "TRANSITION TOOL KIT"****[www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/transition-tool-kit](http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/transition-tool-kit)**

This free tool kit is geared to assisting families of individuals with autism on their journeys from adolescence to adulthood.

**AUTISM WELLBEING****<http://autismwellbeing.org/>**

The organization supports research and advocacy efforts that contribute to enriching the lives of adults with autism, and offers reports, guidebooks and other resources.

**DANIEL JORDAN FIDDLE FOUNDATION: "SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERISM TRAINING MANUAL"****[www.djfiddlefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/alpine\\_employment\\_manual.pdf](http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/alpine_employment_manual.pdf)**

This manual assists employers who have newly hired employees or volunteers with autism by sharing insight on the disorder's characteristics and practical strategies that will enrich workplace experiences and promote positive interactions with new employees or volunteers.



The Hammerheads before a swim meet.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

**ORGANIZATION FOR AUTISM RESEARCH: “A GUIDE FOR TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD”**

<https://researchautism.org/resources/a-guide-for-transition-to-adulthood/>

This guide, available in Spanish and English, is intended to help develop a plan for adulthood. The guide provides information on employment, postsecondary education and life skills.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: “A TRANSITION GUIDE TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES”**

[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ose/transition/products/postsecondary-transition-guide-may-2017.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ose/transition/products/postsecondary-transition-guide-may-2017.pdf)

This guide provides an overview of obligations and available government/school services for students graduating or aging out of the system.

**Education**

**NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION: “AUTISM RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS”**

<http://www.nea.org/home/15151.htm>

This teachers’ union site provides an archive for educators who have students with autism in their classrooms. To enhance the classroom experience for both teachers and students, the website offers links to material on autism, effective teaching methods and strategies.

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: “SPECIAL EDUCATION”**

[www.nj.gov/education/specialed/](http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/)

The website for the department of education in the home state of the Jersey Hammerheads covers statistics, mandates, available programs and services and related resources.



## HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order **Swim Team** for home use, go to <http://swimteamthefilm.com/>.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television's premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. on PBS from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world's boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 36 Emmy® Awards, 19 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

### POV Digital [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS's first program website and its first web-based documentary (*POV's Borders*) and has won major awards, including a Webby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

Front cover: Mikey swimming.

Credit: Laela Kilbourn

### POV Community Engagement and Education

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

### American Documentary, Inc. [www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding comes from Nancy Blachman and David desJardins, Bertha Foundation, The Fledgling Fund, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Ettinger Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee, and public television viewers. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

### You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage

for the latest news from  
POV Community Engagement & Education.



Media Sponsor:

