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## ***ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival Launches ReelEducation Program in Response to Educators' Demand***

### ***Program Pairs Festival Films with School Lesson Plans Teaching Kids About Mental Health, Inclusion and Empathy***

**Toronto, February 26, 2018** – Now in its third year, ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival – the largest film festival in Canada dedicated to showcasing Deaf and disability cultures – presented by the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre – is bringing a new program, ReelEducation, into classrooms across Ontario. And it's free!

The ReelEducation program provides resources for educators and parents to teach students about inclusion, empathy, universal design, mental health and stereotypes, as well as attitudinal and employment barriers. Each ReelEducation kit comes in an accessible format (films with open captioning) with a lesson plan that identifies the theme in each film.

The films and lessons centre on the experiences and stories of people with disabilities, including people with Autism; developmental, mobility and visual disabilities; and people who identify as Deaf. The program encompasses eleven films from around the world, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Iraq, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, as well as lesson plans and activities for students of all ages, from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Launching on April 1, 2018, the films and lesson plans will be free to download at [toronto.reelabilities.org](http://toronto.reelabilities.org). If educators are interested in the program and would like to learn more, they can visit [toronto.reelabilitieslegacy.org/reeducation](http://toronto.reelabilitieslegacy.org/reeducation) and fill out a form so the ReelEducation team can get in touch.

"Teachers and students have been asking us to bring ReelAbilities films into schools to help spark discussions about disability, accessibility and how students can get involved in removing barriers and creating a more inclusive environment," said Liv Mendelsohn, ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival Artistic Director. "We're thrilled to bring back some favourites from our first two editions and pair them with curated lesson plans aligned with the Ontario curriculum. We need to get kids excited about inclusion, and film is a great place to start."

ReelAbilities Toronto, with the support of the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario and other sponsors, has partnered with the Rick Hansen Foundation School Program and Harmony Movement to develop the inaugural ReelEducation curriculum and connect with school boards, administrators, parents and teachers.

For schools in the GTA, there will be an exciting field trip opportunity at Holland Bloorview Kids

Rehabilitation Hospital in mid-to-late May, where ReelAbilities will bring together kids with and without disabilities to view the films and learn together.

"We all want to see our stories and experiences represented," said Mendelsohn. "These films offer a way for students with and without disabilities to share experiences and explore how to work and play together."

The ReelAbilities Film Festival will take place this year from May 30 to June 5, 2018.

**About ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival**

ReelAbilities Film Festival brings together the community to promote awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories and artistic expressions of people with different abilities. ReelAbilities Film Festival showcases films, conversations and artistic programs to explore, embrace and celebrate the diversity of our shared human experience. 2018 will be the third annual ReelAbilities Festival in Toronto.

[www.toronto.reelabilities.org](http://www.toronto.reelabilities.org)

**About Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre**

The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre strives to be an inclusive and welcoming hub for healthy community, anchored in Jewish values, where all downtown Toronto feel they belong.

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