

## Videocamp Film Fund 2018

### Final Five Q&A: Olivier Bernier, director of *Forget Me Not*

Hundreds of filmmakers from across the globe applied to the Videocamp Film Fund 2018 with their proposed films about inclusive education with one selected entrant receiving \$400,000 to produce their incredible film. After some difficult decisions, the judging panel narrowed it down to a Final Five and they will announce the selected project on 21st September.



One of the films to make it to the Final Five, *Forget Me Not*, is directed by New Yorker Olivier Bernier. We chatted with him about his work and why inclusive education means so much to him.

#### **How does it feel to reach the Final Five of the Videocamp Film Fund?**

It's amazing, it was a big surprise! I think that Videocamp's goals are very aligned with the kind of story that I want to tell, which is to make a global story that can really inspire change.

#### **Tell us about the inspiration behind *Forget Me Not***

The story starts with my family's own journey. My son Emilio was born with Down syndrome and my wife Hilda is an educator, so this story about searching for inclusive education is an important one for me to tell. The one thing I want for my son is for him to be included.

Like lots of people, I didn't go to an inclusive school and I didn't know enough about disability. So when Emilio was born I was unprepared; I didn't fully know what it meant for someone to grow up with Down syndrome. As someone without a disability the fact that my education wasn't inclusive failed me, and my son too. I want to tell an emotional story that people connect with, whether or not they have a disability, because this affects us all.

#### **What will be in the film?**

My family's story will be the entry point, but beyond that it will tell the stories of two children who have had an inclusive education, and one who has not. We'll show the differences between their experiences, speaking with experts and exploring how inclusive education

has a positive effect on everyone. I'd like to do little vignettes travelling around the world and just seeing what the situations look like in different areas. I really want to make it feel like a global film and show the differences in inclusive education across the world. Some countries, for example France and Germany, don't practice inclusive education, so we want to see their perspective, and experience what it's like for a child not in an inclusive setting. That's an important part of the story too, because I think from the US we always think of Europe as being so progressive.

And we're not going to shy away from the challenges. My wife works with children with disabilities every day at the high school level, so she is on the front lines and I hear a lot of stories from her. That's an important part of this story to tell; only by knowing and showing the challenges can we overcome them. I'm also keen to interview parents of kids without disabilities to understand their perspective. Inclusion can be controversial, and I want to have everyone's voices represented, because that's the only way we can educate and help people understand.

### **What do you want the audience to take away?**

I really want the audience to leave with the question of "why isn't inclusive education everywhere?" We want the film to shine a light on the people who are doing great work despite all the challenges, and really making a difference in children's lives.

### **How will you make the filming process inclusive?**

We will have people with disabilities in the the production teams. They are the experts on what the film is about, so having them on set is essential. Another thing is the style of filmmaking. We're not looking to dramatise people's lives; we want to show it how it is and really hear their voice in the film. With any documentary it's important to gain the trust of the people you're filming, and especially with children we want to make it a playful experience to really get to understand who they are as people. We would give the children we're filming a camera of their own too, so they can film from their perspective and show what their world looks like.

### **What's your background in filmmaking?**

In my everyday work I'm inspired to tell the stories that you might walk by every day and not notice, really about exploring the human condition. For example recently we made a film called *A Sharper Sword*, about fencer Daryl Homer, who grew up in the Bronx and went on to win a silver medal at the 2012 Olympics in Rio. I started in more narrative filmmaking but I've moved to a more documentary style now. I feel like there's a lack of authenticity and truth in the world now so audiences are craving that honest approach in the films they see. This is a story I live every day so it feels natural to share it with the world. The search for inclusive education isn't just a documentary to me; it's my life as a father as well as a filmmaker.

**So what would it mean to you to win the Videocamp Film Fund?**

In many ways it feels like every moment in my life has led up to the point where I must make this film. This is my opportunity to make a difference to the world my son will grow up in, and I'd be honored to be able to do that.

***About Olivier Bernier***

*Olivier Bernier is an award-winning director based in New York. He is also co-founder and creative director of the production company, Rota6 Films, which specializes in documentary and commercial films for clients such as Pepsi, Ford and Conde Nast. After completing his well received first feature length narrative titled, The Sunset Sky, about a grown up with Autism, he has since put his focus into documentary filmmaking and commercial work. In the past 12 months his films have been shown at prestigious festivals including including two films at DOCNYC, Big Sky, Bend Film Festival, and two films at Rooftop Film Series. Most recently one of his films, A Garbage Story, was selected as a Vimeo Staff Pick with over forty thousand views.*