



REAL BOY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES GUIDE

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FILMMAKER STATEMENT

“Real Boy is a story about one young trans man and his family, told through my lens. It isn’t every trans person’s story, but I think everyone can relate to the feeling of wanting love and wanting to give love. That story is deeply universal.”

- Shaleece Haas

I initially met Bennett through Joe. I was filming Joe at a small concert in Sacramento and Bennett was opening the show. I was really struck by Bennett’s music and lyrics. He was talented and charming. At that time, he was at the beginning of his journey – both around his gender transition and becoming a young adult.

I was also struck by the bond he and Joe had developed, even though they had met only a few weeks prior. From my own experience as a queer woman, I have always been interested in the LGBTQ community’s long history with “chosen families,” and I saw something special in Bennett and Joe’s relationship. Then I met Suzy, Bennett’s mom, and the scope of the film broadened.

I saw instantly that there was a lot of love between Bennett and Suzy. And even though they were struggling to hear each other at first, I knew they were going to be okay. That’s when the film became about the intersection of given family and chosen family – and about both Bennett and Suzy’s stories.

Suzy starts out in a place of resistance, and by the end of the film she comes to embrace and celebrate her son. People in the audience may start out in a similar place when they begin watching. If they can go on that journey with Suzy, maybe their own thinking will shift and allow for more nuance.

Ultimately, I want the world to be a safer, more inclusive place. And that means making it safer and more inclusive for trans people. When we embrace gender diversity in our schools, our workplaces, our homes, and our public spaces, it benefits everyone. There’s more room for all of us to be completely and authentically ourselves.

I’m so grateful to Bennett, Joe, and Suzy for allowing me to be part of telling their story, and to all of you for sharing it in your community. Thank you.

- Shaleece Haas, Filmmaker



PROTAGONIST Q&A: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

What have you been up to since the filming of *Real Boy*?

Bennett: So much has changed since filming. After completing a few semesters of sociology classes, I hit the road and embarked on an adventure to explore my country. Along the way, I met a lot of people that inspired me to deepen my commitment to creating art. Currently I am living and working on a ranch in Northern California with my sweetie and our two dogs.

Suzy: I'm doing well. Still living in Pasadena and working in the school district where my kids grew up. I am fortunate to love what I do and the people with whom I work. I have the greatest friends who are supportive of me and Bennett.

Joe: I am working on a musical called "The Transcivility of Albert Cashier," set to premiere in Chicago in October 2017. I'm also touring with my own music and playing bass, banjo, and guitar for other songwriters. I plan to apply to a graduate program in Spain to study music production starting in the fall of 2018.

Dylan: I'm so grateful to be able to say that Ben and I are still close friends and that I'm still in contact with all of the wonderful people that were involved in the film. Since *Real Boy*, I was in a car accident that ultimately lead me to a find new sense of purpose in Emergency Medical Services. I am now a certified EMT in Los Angeles.

What was your initial response to participating in the film? Did you have reservations?

Bennett: When I met Shaleece through Joe, I don't think any of us knew what this film would become. Any reservations that I may have had in the beginning were overcome when I saw the ways in which this film could positively impact my community.

Suzy: I initially had some major reservations and didn't want to be a part of the film because I feared for my child's privacy and the consequences of making his story public. Bennett has always been one to go his own way. I realized that if I truly wanted to be there for him, I had to be there every step of the way. That ended up meaning I was going to be in front of a camera.

Joe: Having done my own activism within the trans community for many years as an out trans musician, I was fairly comfortable being open about my experiences. It was almost easier to share intimate parts of my life on film (rather than on stage) because I wasn't thinking about the audience. I was just going about my day and there happened to be a camera there.



Did participating in the film affect your relationship with yourself or others in your life?

Bennett: *Real Boy* has been a catalyst for healing in many ways for me. This film has given me the opportunity to understand the transition that my family had to go through to support me.

Suzy: Participating in *Real Boy* helped me come to a place of acceptance quicker because of all the wonderful people I met through filming and the stories they shared.

Joe: It was great to see the parents' experiences in the film. During my own transition I wasn't paying attention to what my parents were going through because I was so caught up in my own experience. Watching Suzy's story helped me have a better sense of my own family's journey.

Bennett, have your other family members seen the film?

Bennett: My dad has seen it, and I think he's proud of us for sharing this story. My relationship with both of my parents has evolved so much since we started this project, and I'm grateful to say that today they are my biggest supporters.

Joe, the film includes some vulnerable moments about your experience with addiction. What was it like to have that part of your life filmed?

Joe: When we were filming, I didn't really think much about it. I just felt like I was talking with my friend Shaleece, and she had a camera with her. It felt good to have someone to talk to who wouldn't judge me in the middle of some really awful times. I didn't think I would keep drinking as long as I did. I thought surely the consequences would have shaken me out of it. But they didn't for a long time. My path with addiction hasn't turned out like I expected it to. But I have less judgement now – of myself and of other people's struggles.

What impact do you hope the film will have on the communities who watch it?

Bennett: My hope for this film is that it serves as a resource for families in transition. I want the parents of trans youth to have better support systems to deal with the journey. I want viewers that have felt rejected by someone they love to know that there is a community of kind and loving people waiting to meet them. We can all heal ourselves, together.



Suzy: I hope that people use this as a resource to educate and to show that acceptance is a process. It's hard for me to watch *Real Boy* because I cringe at some of the things I said early in the film – clearly I had a lot to learn! Have compassion for those that are different and accept your children for who they are.

Joe: I hope the film will give hope to trans, LGBTQ, and questioning folks and their communities of all ages, and show that there is life after the hard times. I also hope it will show folks who aren't familiar with trans/LGBTQ issues that we have far more in common than they might think.

SCREENING CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

Real Boy offers audiences a glimpse into the life a young musician as he and his family navigate his gender transition. Bennett's journey to self-acceptance includes experiences that many in the LGBTQ community can relate to: dangerous coping mechanisms of self-harm and substance abuse, alienation and rejection within his family, and the transformative power of finding a "chosen family" or peer support network. Your screenings of *Real Boy* can provide an important platform for trans youth and their families to tell their own stories. In addition, the strategies in this guide help to meet these broader engagement goals:

- Raise awareness about the experiences of trans youth and open a community conversation about gender identity.
- Build family and community support for LGBTQ youth – especially trans youth – and discuss ways to create a safer community.
- Provide a safe space for LGBTQ community members and their parents or caregivers to connect with one another.
- Connect audiences with local resources that support LGBTQ youth and their families, including mental health and recovery services.

RELEVANT TOPICS & ISSUES

- Gender identity
- Gender expression
- Trans teens and young adults
- LGBTQ experiences
- Mental health
- Family acceptance
- Mentorship and peer support
- Self-harm and coping



- Medical interventions for transition
- Music and healing arts
- Substance abuse and recovery
- Parenting
- Relationships

POTENTIAL AUDIENCES

- LGBTQ community, especially youth
- LGBTQ artists, musicians, actors, etc.
- People with LGBTQ family members or friends
- Parents or caregivers of transgender or non-binary youth
- Service providers for youth, the LGBTQ community, and more
 - Educators
 - Social workers
 - Pastors/Faith Leaders
 - Counselors
- Medical/health providers and public health professionals

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

Make sure your facilitator is sensitive to the fact that your audience members will be at different states of being “out” to their friends, family, co-workers, or the community. It is important that no one feel pressured to share information about themselves that they had not intended. If you are taking pictures, video, or audio at the event, get people’s permission before recording and inform them about the ways it will be shared.

It is important to establish a safe environment for audience members to share openly and feel supported at your event. You can set the tone by asking people to use respectful language and to speak from the first person, for example, “I think that...” or “My experience is...”, rather than generalizing statements such as, “They must feel...” or “We believe that...”

Encourage proper pronoun usage by inviting people who speak at your event, whether they are trans or not, to state their name and preferred pronoun when they introduce themselves. This activity can help to normalize pronoun identification and provide a model for audience members to use in other public spaces.

No single story can represent an entire community, and Bennett’s story in *Real Boy* is not meant to represent trans experiences broadly. For example, Bennett has access to privileges that not all trans youth enjoy, such as access to supportive medical care and gender reassignment surgery – not to mention a mother who,



albeit reluctantly, opens her heart and mind to her son’s transition. Other aspects of Bennett’s identity (e.g. race and ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and geographic location) also impact his experience of transition. Acknowledging this at your event can help create a welcoming environment for all people to share their experiences, and perhaps find similarities that they didn’t recognize at first. We have included discussion questions in this guide that can help navigate conversations around these complex issues at your screening.

The film or discussion may trigger intense emotions or memories for some of your audience members. Consider designating a space at your event where people can collect their thoughts, such as a quiet corner in your venue’s lobby. You could also invite a counselor or distribute hotline information for people to call if they need support during or after your event. Here are a few recommended hotlines:

- The Trevor Project’s 24/7 Lifeline: 866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)
Texting and live chat may also be available during the hours of your event.
Learn more: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now>.
- Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)

For more facilitator tips, including a guide to helpful terminology, see the film’s Discussion Guide created by the *Real Boy* team (<http://realboymovie.com/materials/>). For additional resources related to the film’s themes, see the Resources page on the film’s website (<http://realboymovie.com/get-involved/resources/>).

POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND/OR SPEAKERS

A panel of guest speakers allows you to bring in additional experiences to the conversation and provide a local perspective on the issues presented in the film. Be sure your speakers have a chance to view and reflect on the film before the event, and that they are comfortable sharing personal information with your audience during the panel discussion.

- Invite a diverse panel of **trans youth and adults** to talk about how their experiences are similar to or different from those of Bennett, Joe, and Dylan in the film. Be sure to have your facilitator review the questions with each speaker in advance to make sure they are prepared to share their experiences openly. See the Panel Discussion Questions section for suggested prompts.
 - Find a local GSA (Genders & Sexualities Alliance):
<https://gsanetwork.org/national-directory>
 - Find a local chapter of Black Trans Advocacy:
<https://www.blacktrans.org/get-involved/local-chapters.html>



- Find a local PFLAG chapter: <https://www.pflag.org/find-a-chapter>
 - Find a local chapter of GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network): <http://www.glsen.org/chapters>
 - Contact the Trans Latin@ Coalition for a member referral near you: <https://www.translatinacoalition.org/contact-us/>
- Ask **parents or caregivers of trans youth** to join the panel with their children to talk about their family relationships and their experience navigating transition alongside their child. Your local community leaders from the organizations listed above will likely have referrals of families who are experienced speaking about the issues.
 - **Mental health or substance abuse counselors** may also be appropriate for your panel. However, make sure to seek out people who are experienced in working with the trans community. Your local LGBTQ organizations may be able to refer you to a trusted counselor in your area. You can also reach out to ambassadors for The Trevor Project located in a few major cities around the U.S. (<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/regional-cities>) or find a chapter of Active Minds, a network of student mental health leaders, at a college near you (<http://activeminds.org/our-programming/chapters/find-a-chapter>).

Invite **advocates** to your panel to educate your audience about current campaigns. Perhaps there are policies or court cases making headlines in your area that community members want to discuss. For issues by state, check the Human Rights Campaign (<http://www.hrc.org/local-issues>) or the National Center for Transgender Equality (<http://www.transequality.org/action-center>). You can also look for a local member of the Equality Federation (<http://www.equalityfederation.org/members/>). Remember that your screenings cannot include any direct advocacy. You should be transparent about this from the onset with your speakers. The focus of the discussion should be on education and awareness. More information about advocacy guidelines and restrictions for screenings is included in the Indie Lens Pop-Up Program Toolkit on page 9 ([http://independentlens.s3.amazonaws.com/indie-lens-pop-up-program-resources/Indie-Lens-Pop-Up Program Toolkit FINAL 2016.pdf](http://independentlens.s3.amazonaws.com/indie-lens-pop-up-program-resources/Indie-Lens-Pop-Up%20Program%20Toolkit%20FINAL%202016.pdf)).

CONVERSATION STARTER

Your *Real Boy* DVD features the following conversation starter on the menu screen before the film starts:

When did you first become aware of your gender?



Project the conversation starter before the film begins as guests are taking their seat at your venue. Prior to the film or your panel discussion, encourage participants to turn to a person sitting near them to share their answers for two to three minutes including any recent examples that come to mind. If time permits, invite a few people to share with the entire group.

PANEL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are recommended as conversation starters for the guest panelists you invite to speak at your event who have already expressed willingness to share openly about their experiences. Review questions with them in advance and invite them to modify as needed. If you are looking to create a general audience discussion, we recommend using the *Real Boy* Discussion Guide (<http://realboymovie.com/materials/>) created by the film team for questions that do not directly ask anyone to share personal information.

Trans Youth and Adults

- What parts of the film *Real Boy* resonated with you and why?
- Being trans is just one aspect of Bennett’s identity. His experience is also influenced by, among other things, his race and ethnicity, his socioeconomic background, and the place he was born. Can you speak to the ways your identities have shaped your own experience?
- In the film, we meet Bennett’s mom, Suzy, from his family of origin, and we meet Joe and Dylan from his “chosen family.” Do you have a chosen family, and if so, how has it influenced your life?
- Suzy struggles to use Bennett’s correct pronoun in the film. Can you talk about your own experience asking people in your life to use your correct pronoun?
- What would you like to see allies do to make your community a safer place for trans youth? What changes would you like to see in your community, if any?

Parents or Caregivers of Trans Youth

- Can you talk about the process you went through when your child first told you they were trans? Have your feelings shifted over time? If so, how?



- What practices are important to adopt as a parent, caregiver, or loved one of someone who is trans? What are some practices to avoid?
- Where have you found support for navigating your child's transition? What would you recommend others do to find support in our community?

Mental Health or Substance Abuse Counselors

- Bennett used cutting and substances as coping mechanisms before his transition. How prevalent are these issues in the LGBTQ community? If someone is concerned that an LGBTQ individual in their life is at risk of harming themselves, what should they do?
- What factors contribute to healthy outcomes for trans youth? What can families and communities do to be part of the journey?

Advocates

- More trans characters have been appearing in mainstream media than ever before. What effects has this increased visibility had for the trans community?
- Trans rights have increasingly been in the news in recent years. For example, a number of states have considered bills that would require trans people to use the bathrooms of the gender on their birth certificate. What rights and protections do trans and LGBTQ people have at our local and state level? Is there any legislation being considered in our state that would affect trans or LGBTQ people?
- What resources are available locally to support trans people and their families? How can our public institutions work with LGBTQ organizations to make our community safe for trans youth?

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES BEYOND A PANEL

The following activities could be organized in addition to or in place of a post-screening panel discussion at your event. We encourage you to consider these strategies as another opportunity to feature the voices of trans youth in your community.

- June is **Pride month**, when communities across the country organize LGBTQ events. Connect with organizers early to have your program included in the official calendar of activities. Many of the organizations



- listed in the Potential Partners and/or Speakers section will likely be involved in coordinating Pride month activities. Add a social component to your screening, such as a reception, to allow LGBTQ youth and mentors to network. Consider keeping social activities “dry” from alcohol to be sensitive to those who are recovering from addiction.
- Organize a **resource fair** to connect audiences with local organizations and services that support LGBTQ community members and their families. Look to the Potential Partners and/or Speakers section of this guide for ideas on who to invite. Be sure to include mental health and/or substance abuse counselors in your resource fair for people who may need support.
 - Celebrate the healing power of the arts by hosting a **music performance, open mic, or art showcase** featuring trans artists. Circulate an open call for artists among your local LGBTQ organizations. You can also look to this list of musicians created by the *Real Boy* film team that may be touring in your area: <http://www.realboymovie.com/the-music/>.
 - Invite your LGBTQ audience members to record their **oral histories** in the StoryCorps OutLoud initiative. Learn how to find or bring a StoryCorps audio recording booth to your venue (<https://storycorps.org/participate/>). Or launch your own media creation project using video, audio, photography, or illustration to document trans stories in your community. When recording or sharing media, be sure to arrange proper permissions from participants or their parents or guardians and alert them as to where content will be posted.
 - Host a **workshop** to help people in your community. Local LGBTQ organizations may already offer these workshops in your area. You can also find advice from the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University (<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/training>) or look into the family support services offered by Gender Spectrum (<https://www.genderspectrum.org/we-can-help/>) and Gender Diversity (<http://www.genderdiversity.org/family-support/>). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) also provides a resource guide for helping families support their LGBTQ kids (<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>), and TransFaith offers self-guided online courses (<https://app.ruzuku.com/courses/19289/about>).
 - Organize a **professional development training** for educators to help them create a safer school environment. Check out the educator resources provided by the GSA Network (<https://gsanetwork.org/yearstart>), GLSEN (<https://www.glsen.org/educate/professional-development/toolkits>), The



- Trevor Project (<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/lifeguard>), or PBS Learning Media's Growing Up Trans Professional Development Collection from FRONTLINE (<https://ca.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/growinguptrans/>). You may also consider organizing a professional development training for those in the healthcare industry by using the affirming hospital practices guide from Lamda Legal (http://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/fs_transgender-affirming-hospital-policies), or for local journalists by using the GLAAD guide for media professionals (<http://www.glaad.org/transgender/mediareources>).
- Help increase awareness of trans experiences by creating a **literature and media display** at your event. This works particularly well if your venue is a library that will lend out materials. For recommendations, see the book list for all ages from Trans Youth Equality Foundation (<http://www.transyouthequality.org/tyef-recommended-books/>). You can also consider downloading and printing copies of the Gender Booklet (<http://www.thegenderbook.com/the-booklet>) to distribute at your event. For film and television recommendations, see the list created by GLAAD for the *Los Angeles Times* (<http://timelines.latimes.com/transgender-characters-film-tv-timeline/>).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.realboymovie.com/> - The website created by the filmmakers for the documentary *Real Boy* where you can find more information about the key themes in the film and a discussion guide (<http://realboymovie.com/materials/>).

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/real-boy/> - The companion site created by *Independent Lens* for *Real Boy* with additional content to support Indie Lens Pop-Up screenings and the PBS broadcast.

<http://www.activeminds.org/transgender-college-student-mental-health> - Active Minds is a nonprofit organization that empowers students to speak openly about mental health in order to educate others and encourage help-seeking.

<https://www.gaychurch.org/affirming-denominations/> - Gay Church offers a list of Christian denominations that are welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ identities.
<http://www.genderdiversity.org/> - Gender Diversity provides family support, community building, and awareness campaigns to improve the well-being for people of all gender identities.



<https://www.genderspectrum.org/we-can-help/> – Gender Spectrum offers an online community, a national call-in support group, and a Spanish-language support for trans youth and families.

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender> - GLAAD works with media professionals to fairly and accurately tell the stories of trans lives and raise awareness about trans issues.

<https://www.glsen.org/students/tsr> - GLSEN (pronounced "glisten") works to improve the education system by ensuring safe and affirming schools for LGBTQ students.

<https://gsanetwork.org/trans> - GSA works to ensure that all trans students – especially trans youth of color – have equal opportunity to succeed in school.

<http://www.hitops.org/> – HiTops promotes the health and wellbeing of young people, including transgender youth.

<http://www.thetaskforce.org/> – National LGBTQ Task Force works to advance basic rights such as housing, employment, healthcare, and retirement for the LGBTQ community.

<https://www.pflag.org/transgender> - PFLAG works with LGBTQ people and their families, friends, and allies to advance equality, support, education, and advocacy.

<http://www.transfaithonline.org/> - Transfaith is a nonprofit working to support transgender spiritual/cultural workers and their leadership in the faith community.

<https://transgenderlawcenter.org/> – The Transgender Law Center is an advocacy organization working to change law, policies, and attitudes around gender identity and expression.

<http://www.transgenderlegal.org/> – The Transgender Legal and Education Fund is an advocacy organization. It includes the Name Change Project, which helps low-income trans people with name change applications.

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/trans-gender-identity> - The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth.

https://youtu.be/7MgIkDOoG-s?list=PLFS4s3pfLP1xEfB_1Rsi52EwbOdR3hCK2 – The Gender Tag Project is a collection of YouTube videos from users discussing gender identity and expression.



Credits:

ITVS ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, Independent Lens, as well as other series and our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit itvs.org.

INDEPENDENT LENS Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens)

