

# NYC film competition seeks young artists' take on mental health issues

Anyone between ages 15 and 25 can submit a film before Aug. 31, and films cannot be longer than 10 minutes.



*“Pigeon Holed”* was a 2017 submission to the Changing Minds Young Filmmakers Competition, and was filmed in and around Brooklyn. Photo Credit: Daphne Parkhill

Film can be a powerful weapon to help shatter the myths and stigmas surrounding mental illness — especially when a young person is behind the camera.

One nonprofit group is encouraging more New Yorkers to submit short films for its Changing Minds Young Filmmakers Competition. And some of the submissions could end up in a new mental health awareness initiative set to launch in city schools later this year.

Community Access, a mental health support, housing and advocacy organization, started the competition two years ago as a natural outgrowth from its annual

NYC Mental Health Film Festival.

“We developed the festival as a place for people to share true-to-life stories about mental health,” said John Williams, chief development and communications officer at Community Access. “We wanted to bring this filmmaking to a younger audience because when you are having a conversation about fighting stigma, it’s really important to start as early as possible.”

“When you have the opportunity to share your story in a really open, honest and joyful way — we believe that can spark change,” Williams added.

The Young Filmmakers Competition launched in 2016 with about 20 entries. That number grew to over 300 in 2017. The deadline for this year's contest is August 31.

The competition is open to young filmmakers between the ages of 15 and 25. Submissions can be no longer than 10 minutes and should address mental health issues that impact young people.

Some of the recognized films have taken on such topics as depression, panic attacks and eating disorders.

With a grant from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, Community Access is curating a DVD with several films, and developing a special activities guide to help lead classroom lessons.

"We saw an important opportunity to reach young people," said Rick Luftglass, executive director of the Illumination Fund. "New York City schools are inherently diverse and mental illness doesn't discriminate. This is a way to use the arts to encourage discussion."

Jon Curtis, deputy director of development and communications at Community Access, said while the competition emphasizes positive depictions of mental illness, the films don't shy away from the uncomfortable reality.

"These are things young people are thinking about, eating disorders, gender and sexuality issues, bipolar disorder," said Curtis. "Being a teenager under any circumstances is difficult."

Several winning and shortlisted films are available on the group's website, [mentalhealthfilmfest.nyc](http://mentalhealthfilmfest.nyc), including "Pigeon-Holed," which was shot in Brooklyn and asks young members of the LGBT community to comment on the different labels used to describe them.

"I wanted to give a voice to teens trying to figure out their own identities in a world that wants to box them in and label them," said director Daphne Parkhill on

the group's website. She was 16 years old when she submitted the film,

Director Rafe Karen was 24 years old when he entered "D.N.G.U. (Do Not Give Up)" to help describe the internal stress of a panic attack, he said on the website. It was shot around the city and on the subway in Queens.

"Just because you can't see what is happening, doesn't mean they don't feel it," he said.