

The Directors Interview: Anthony

Michael: Anthony, I think it was more than a year ago that you first talked to Marcus about this project. What made you want to participate in it?

Anthony: When I saw the advertisement for the project through MIND, I jumped at the chance, because it was a paid role. I've got a big interest in film-making and photography. Given my background with mental illness, and being in prison, and being in the health and social care system, it seemed like the kind of project I would really enjoy, and also kind of a sense of responsibility, in that not everybody can tell their story, whether they're in hospital, lack of capacity, and actually doing something fun and creative.

Michael: One of the things we were most worried about at that time when you came forward was whether or not these films, in portraying your own experience, would make you feel distressed, and it turns out that almost the opposite is the case, that it's actually Marcus who becomes distressed, and you are actually much more stable.

Anthony: Yes. So, there were a couple of times which I did actually find pretty difficult. It wasn't because anybody else made me feel uncomfortable. When we were filming, there were questions from one of the actors about my mum, and the relationship there, and it was almost like I was trying to say to myself, 'You were aware it was abusive. You stayed so long.' Trying to almost justify that I did stay so long, that I could have took a step back and I would have been much further down the road to recovery.

Michael: What was it like to see your mum portrayed by an actor?

Anthony: What we tried to do with that was actually avoid the kind of council estate mum, because not everybody on a council estate is brought up in a certain way. A lot of systems can't actually get that inside view without actually being there. We didn't make it so much about my mum specifically, even though there were elements of her. What it demonstrated was that, actually, in any household, behind any closed door, that is the reality that some people face.

Michael: The benefit officer demonstrated empathy to you. Is there any parallel example of when your mother did demonstrate empathy to you?

Anthony: Yes, there was. She taught me to cook. She taught me to use a washing machine. She taught me to iron my shirts for school when I was young. Whether I wanted to or not, I learnt skills to be able to look after myself. There was a lack of support that I needed, which is why there's been so many ups and downs in my life. So, there are happy memories from when I was a kid.

Michael: Sure. There's a lack of support in your story from the system.

Anthony: I think that my mother lacked support as well. That, then, had an impact on what went on in our household, which was particularly unpleasant, but this wasn't about slugging my mum off. It was more about demonstrating just how difficult people's interactions can be, or people's lack of awareness of anyone's health. The wonderful thing about this project is it's actually allowed me to say, 'Look, this did happen. This is how it was.' It's given me my own truth, which a lot of people will try and deny someone, depending on what they gain from a situation, and I have been denied that, particularly with the system. I'm still being denied that. This is documenting real, actual situations. For example, that job offer. It was a

very real job offer. Benefit officers were actually told to sanction people at that time, for the most minor things, like being late, or not getting a job deliberately, i.e. ballsing up an interview. I really enjoyed working with the actor who played the benefits officer, because she did demonstrate that empathy. My benefits officer did actually do that. She did try and make things easy, and once I was diagnosed with mental health issues and illness, she then helped me with the crossover into Employment Support Allowance.

Michael: How do you think Marcus did in portraying your own experience?

Anthony: I was actually very surprised just how much emotion Marcus felt, just how loud things can feel when unwell. It was sad to see, but, actually, it was quite enlightening, because Marcus did get the reality of the situation. He might not have, kind of, hallucinated the experience, but it affected him emotionally. People are quick to prescribe medication for certain issues, and, actually, a lot of things are linked with psychology or emotional problems, and those are the things that start triggering people's illnesses. I think that change in environments and situations for people is most important, in order to improve someone's health, because it is so overwhelming. I think it's about making sure that that support is available, because it's alright, kind of, saying it's there, but if people can't access it, then their situation won't necessarily improve, which I think is a large part of why we see a revolving door system throughout all systems, whether it be criminal justice, mental health, unemployment. I think it was really important that we didn't just, sort of, say, 'The Department for Work and Pensions is a bad, bad thing,' because they help and support a lot of people.

Michael: Well, I think you stepped into the shoes of a director really brilliantly, actually, over the three days we've been working. You've assumed that role more and more confidently.

Anthony: I've really enjoyed the process, and I think it's been nice that everybody has, kind of, taken on board what I've had to say.