

STRONGER

Actor Jake Gyllenhaal figures that he finally played a real-life superhero in the movie *Stronger*. But Jeff Bauman, the man Gyllenhaal portrays, disagrees and feels relief that Gyllenhaal and the Hollywood movie in general portrays him as a human being, and not as any kind of hero of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. The film is based on Bauman's memoir of the same name. He is a bombing survivor who lost both of his legs in the attack, and co-wrote the film.

"I don't like being called a hero," Bauman said. "In my eyes, there are heroes that I look up to: the people who saved my life, the caretakers, my surgeon... I lost something but my heroes picked me up." Bauman was standing at the finish line waiting for his girlfriend to finish the race. He lost both legs above the knee in the blast. The famous news photo of him being rescued made Bauman an icon of the tragedy. He also helped the FBI identify one of the terrorists.

In the movie, Gyllenhaal renders the depths of Bauman's struggle to recover in the aftermath of his trauma. "I

was really intimidated to meet Jeff," he said. "There is no way that any of us could really match the reality of what he went through." That said, Gyllenhaal is proud to tell the story of Bauman, one of the most inspirational people he says he has ever met. *Stronger*, Gyllenhaal said proudly, showcases Bauman's vulnerability and his imperfections while dramatizing his extraordinary circumstances and recovery as he learned how to walk again on prosthetic legs.

But the film has not come without some controversy. *Stronger* has been condemned by a disability charity for

MEDIABILITY.PRO

Companies like McDonalds, Kmart, Kelloggs, Canadian Tire, Sears, Eatons and The Bay have been hiring performers with disabilities for decades and amputees, and others with disabilities, have been walking and rolling the runways around the world as models for major fashion houses and Fashion Weeks since the '90s.

Aimee Mullins, Bree Walker, Kimberley Barreda, Col. Gregory Gadson, Jim Byrnes, Robert David Hall, Amy Purdy, Reggie Showers, John Register, and Noah Galloway, are all amputees who have made a name for themselves in the entertainment world. Fashion models Tamara Mena, Sally Prior, Hydre Makabali and many other wheelchair-using beauties have made their marks on the runway, while Joanne Smith (CBC), David Onley (CityTV), George Young (Discovery Channel), Diana Zimmer (Film), and Wendy Murphy (CityTV) are all well-known in the disability community for their work in front of the camera. Other notable performers include musicians Robby Heisner and



Ricky Heisner of Van Gogh, comedians Josh Blue and Santina Muha, blind guitarist Jeff Healey and singer Justin Hines, just to name a few.

While some production companies do overlook performers with disabilities in favour of non-disabled actors, many are looking specifically for amputees and others with disabilities to fill their parts in movies, print, and on TV in both lead and secondary roles.

There are classes, programs, workshops and events specifically geared for disabled

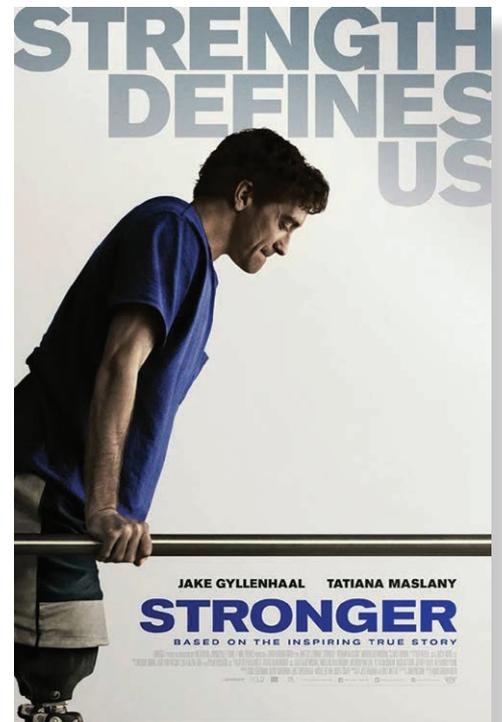
performers that provide information, training and opportunities to meet casting directors and other entertainment professionals.

casting Jake Gyllenhaal instead of an amputee actor. The Ruderman Family Foundation – an organization which advocates for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society – isn't happy that actors with actual amputations were overlooked for the role.

"The casting of Jake Gyllenhaal as the lead in the movie Stronger is the perfect example of Hollywood's ongoing systemic discrimination against actors with disabilities," the foundation's president, Jay Ruderman, said. "By not even giving actors who are amputees the chance to audition for the role awarded to Gyllenhaal, Director David Gordon Green effectively denied actors with disabilities to even be considered for the role."

Ruderman acknowledges that "Gyllenhaal's character presents a challenge since he plays a character who is able-bodied and then through tragedy acquires a disability," but goes on to say... "Gyllenhaal is made 'to have a disability' through the latest in Hollywood's technology, but an actor who is an actual double amputee could be made to walk through the same technology that was used to make Gyllenhaal disabled."

Bauman however, praises Gyllenhaal's role in the film. "Jake and I spent so much time together going over how I walked, moved and transferred. He was so invested and it showed."



Toronto-area residents can check out Drama Way (www.dramaway.com) which offers 14 programs across the GTA for individual participant enrollment, spanning the realm of the fine arts including theatre, film, dance, visual art, singing, and a drama-based life-skills program. Other seminars and class dates are posted on Mediability.pro.

If you've been bitten by the acting bug and think you have the chops, here are a few open calls to consider:

FILM - MALE, CAUCASIAN, LBE - by Forcier Casting. This is the story of single arm amputee Nick Newell, MMA

Champion. We're looking for performers to portray Nick at various ages with filming expected to start late 2017. **AGES:** Nick at birth, Nick at 8, Nick at 16 and Nick at 20 years old. Interested applicants with the **CORRECT AMPUTATION LEVEL** can send photos to forciercasting@gmail.com for consideration. Be sure your photos show your amputation level. Selected submitters will be



contacted with additional details.

TV - MALE or FEMALE, ANY AMPUTATION - by Leonardo Films. **CYBORGS** - the TV Show, a futuristic dystopian story of life in 2046. This is an ongoing production and open call with many exciting roles, fan participation options and production openings. Visit www.cyborgstvshow.com to sign up for calls.

The Ruderman TV Challenge is continuing its work in Hollywood advocating for greater inclusion of

performers with disabilities. The challenge is a simple request for television content creators to audition and cast more performers with disabilities during the pilot season based on the knowledge that audiences are hungry for representation of themselves and their family members on screen. To learn more visit <https://rudermanfoundation.org/the-ruderman-tv-challenge>.

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