

DIA Member Wins 'Made in NY Award'

BY PHIL BEDER



Emmy Award winning documentary filmmaker and DIA member Jason DaSilva was recently honored with two prestigious awards.

The Mayors' Office for Media and Entertainment gave DaSilva their "Made In NY" award for "significant contributions to the city's entertainment and digital media industries over the course of their careers." Past recipients include Robert DeNiro, Whoopi Goldberg, Spike Lee, Rosie Perez and Neil Patrick Harris.

On Nov. 4 Jason also received the "Catalyst for Change" Award presented by the Coalition for Asian American Children & Families. The Catalyst for Change Award "honors Asian Pacific American leaders who are a force for positive change in the community and in their fields of work."

Jason DaSilva is important in the disability community because of his success in the highly competitive field of film making. We can look at him as a ground breaker, a trail blazer and a role model that tells others with disabilities that physical limitations do not preclude living a productive life.

DaSilva is not only a successful filmmaker; he has also earned the respect of his peers in the media industry, as these most recent awards attest.

Jason DaSilva's importance goes beyond being a filmmaker with a disability and winning awards, he has taken the next step of using his skills and his platform to advance the cause of disability rights. In his 2013 film, "When I Walk," which aired on the PBS Documentary series POV, DaSilva tells his story as a man with Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis coming to terms with his disability.

In his latest film "When We Walk" he takes on one of the most serious issues facing the disability community, specifically, the inequities in the health care system. In this documentary, Jason presents himself as a father who simply wants to care for his son, but is prevented by bureaucratic regulations.

Jason lives in New York, where Medicaid allows him to live at home with the 24 hour personal assistance he needs. His son however lives in Texas, where that state's Medicaid program would confine Jason to a nursing home where his son would be unable to live with him. This powerful, personal story is also a pointed critique that highlights the unfair administration of services in the Medicaid system, not to mention a violation of the Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision.

Jason DaSilva is a self described activist who is using his art as a platform for social change. Artists and performers have often used their celebrity and public platform to champion causes. Nina Simone and Harry Belafonte were active participants in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon spoke out to oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Disabled in Action is a streetwise direct action activist organization that has a long tradition of demonstrating loud and strong on our issues of concern. We are proud of what we have done and how we have done it. We also respect all forms of activism, advocacy, and community organizing that advance social justice.

Our country is currently divided, not just along political lines but among racial, gender, economic, ethnic, and religious groups as well. As the most diverse protected class, people with disabilities, can set an example and lead the way with the task of coming together. Perhaps artists can help us bridge what divides us.