

# Working With Neurodiverse Talent and Crew on a Short Film Production

*Spines: A Case Study*

Commissioned by BFI NETWORK in the South West, May 2023



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*Spines* (2023)

## Opening Remarks - Joseph Inman

My hope is that this document is genuinely helpful. Over the years I've been given a lot of things to read, talks to listen to, attended mixers and seminars on how to improve my practice and found very little to be of any practical use. Too much of the information I have been given has been either too abstract or too specific.

Obviously, as this is a case study, many of the details might be too specific, every film set is different, every cast and crew gel differently and the variables are infinite. Yet I hope this attempt to document our experience making *Spines* can at least illuminate one experience working on a film which had to have a different set of priorities to most film sets, and what we think went well and what we think we could have done better.

Firstly, I'd like to address some housekeeping. I am autistic, I was diagnosed with autism at 13 and although before this film I have had very little to do with any community or work that deals with autism, I have always been happy to refer to myself as autistic.

Our lead actor, Oscar, is eight years old and is also autistic and has an autism diagnosis. He talks about his struggles in terms of his autism and is happy with the language of being autistic and having autism. I will therefore continue throughout this document to refer to us both as autistic and not neurodivergent which I feel can get a little murky in its definition.

As a tick box on an equal opportunity monitoring form, we are banded with many other people with many different experiences. Sometimes we are monitored alongside people with one leg, blindness, and dementia (I mean not to draw equivalency between these conditions, merely to note the vastness within our category). Sometimes it's just us and people who have other neurological divergences such as ADHD.

Different people have a lot of views on the word disabled as a catch-all for all these different life experiences. I do not. I am happily disabled, and happily autistic, and hope that if this document is read by anyone working in film/TV who has a disability or who is working with others who have disabilities – then they can find some of our experience useful.

I think it's best for this case study to flow chronologically through the production process and that it captures as many voices as possible from people who were part of the production.

It will begin with my director's statement from the film's EPK. This sets out the politics behind my decision to make the film and why I think it is important that the film industry change and allow disabled people to tell their stories by producing films.

Then our producer, Lily Woodcock, will talk about the pre-production process and how we set out to accommodate Oscar and our other creatives.

For the production segment, we have conducted interviews with Oscar, his mother Natasha, Daisy (the other lead actor in the film who is not autistic), and her mother Hannah to give a wide-ranging perspective that looks also at the impact our decision had on the other people on set.

Finally, I will talk about editing and post-production and what I learned throughout the whole film.

Making *Spines* was a tough but incredible process, and I am so proud of the whole team for what we achieved. BFI NETWORK in the South West was stepping into uncharted territory with us and was terrific and open throughout. I thank them for asking us to produce this case study and I thank you for reading it.

## Director's Statement – Joseph Inman

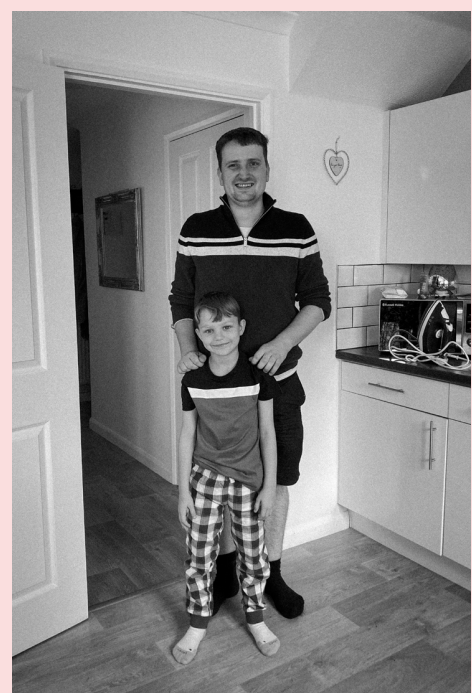
Before making *Spines* I had no real desire to mine my life and experience as an autistic person. My interests as a filmmaker had always been place-based, working with and for the community I live in to document a social milieu and the way that storytelling can be a political act in marginalised communities.

Because of this, I had to initially find something within the act of storytelling that would provoke me into telling a story about someone with neurodivergence. I decided that *Spines* had to be a quiet film. Quiet in the sense that I wanted to move away from the high stakes and life-changing moments shown in films about people with disabilities.

If the representation of disabled people is increasing, to my mind it is only increasing in the sellable nature of its trauma. I wanted to make a film that did not buy into this strand of filmmaking, where lives are condensed into ten or ninety minutes, and people's vulnerabilities are exorcised publicly and under the guise of 'understanding'. I wanted to make a film that was radically uneventful, that showed progress in small acts, in lived understanding, and most of all, in time.

Then I met Oscar, the young man who would play the lead in our film. Oscar struggles. Struggles in an extraordinarily similar way to how I struggled when I was his age. He struggles with routines being mislaid, with intense periods of focus, with certain lights, or sounds, sometimes it's hard to know what he's struggling with, and a lot of the time it's hard for him to know what he's struggling with.

And slowly I realised – filmmaking is not set up for me or Oscar. It is not built to allow us to tell our stories. It is a production process that equates pressure with quality, a method that is constantly creating a time/money dynamic that pushes anyone who doesn't fit into a neurotypical framework out of the way



as a behemoth called 'the industry' stomps forward like Gojira across the Toyko skyline. Oscar and I are supposed to be the rubble of ten-story buildings. The industry marches on.

Throughout the process I feel I stopped taking lots of things for granted. I am exceptionally proud of the whole crew that we worked with for adjusting to the way that me and Oscar needed to work.

I wouldn't have been able to achieve any of this if it wasn't for my producer Lily, who astounded me every day with her anticipation and problem-solving, giving me the space I needed to work.

But throughout it all, I continued to have a nagging feeling that what we were doing was different. And it shouldn't be different. We shouldn't have to work so hard to allow ourselves to tell stories. We should have to work just as hard as anyone else.

And so, *Spines* stopped just being a quiet story about one semi-fictional boy telling stories. It became a loud film about Oscar.

Hopefully, I have left Oscar on the screen, or at least Oscar as I see him. He is a beautiful young man who will go on to do great things. But he struggles. As I struggled, and as I struggle. We captured a lot of that struggle, and it makes up a large part of the film. But it meant that when we captured his smile, that was true too.

We need to change what disabled people feel they need to reveal to have their stories heard. Hopefully, *Spines* is a bit of quiet change in that. Making it changed my life. So that's good.

## Producer's Statement – Lily Woodcock

Producing *Spines* has been one of the greatest joys yet hardest challenges of my career. From the moment I signed on to the project I knew this would be the case, and I also knew it had to be made, for the reasons so eloquently laid out by Joe above.

Joe and I have known each other both on a personal and professional level for the better part of a decade, which for me as his producer is invaluable, as I can foresee his opinions and needs and aim to be a step ahead of every potential outcome of any situation before it arises.

This was my goal as producer on this project – prepare for everything and foster a sense of complete security for everyone involved since I knew so many variables would be out of our control once it left pre-production.

Since we knew we would be hiring an autistic actor to play the lead, most of my planning revolved around this. BFI NETWORK was hugely helpful with our accessibility costs and made me feel comfortable to present to them what we needed, rather than us trying to fit into any confines laid out by them.

On presentation of our budget, I made it clear how unique to our actor the requirements would be, so whilst I could estimate some costs, I wouldn't be able to finalise our plans for the access budget until we had cast. Once we cast Oscar the first port of call was to speak to him and his mother, Natasha, and put plans in place to make the production accessible for him.

We rented a motorhome so that he had his own quiet space to escape to whilst on set, and we also rented a studio a day before the shoot so he could rehearse, meet everyone, try on costumes, and ask any questions about the equipment that he might have. I would recommend these measures to anyone hiring people with access requirements as they proved utterly invaluable.

Our main challenge came on set, when we quickly learned that everything needed to revolve around Oscar's needs, or we wouldn't get through the shoot day. It took us a few days to find a rhythm with him and discover the best way of working together, which led to some delays in the schedule.

On day 2 of 4 I saw that we were not going to get everything done in the time we had, so I had to quickly arrange for an extra day's shoot mid production. The BFI were true to their word in supporting us with any accessibility costs incurred and we were able to fund this unexpected day through their access fund.

If I could produce *Spines* again, I would elongate the schedule and plan for half day shoots with allotted contingency half days throughout. Although this inevitably means a bigger initial budget it should lessen additional costs incurred by unplanned time, and cause far less stress and pressure on the shoot and the actor who has the additional needs.

This pressure meant that it was often not possible to shoot to script, and Joe and Teddy, our cinematographer, would have to think on their feet and come up with emergency shotlists each day, which outlined the 'worst case scenario' minimum requirements of what we needed to have shot each day in order to get the film made.

These proved a lifeline to the shoot and I would definitely recommend this to other crews to do in pre-production to avoid the late evenings after already long shoot days that this caused us!

All of this, amongst many other compromises and workarounds that came with such unpredictable shoot days, meant that what we had to work with in the edit was not always what we had anticipated the film to be. This caused the post-production process to take far longer than planned and required patience on many sides whilst the team pieced the film we did have together.

I am immensely proud of the *Spines* that we have ended up with, and know it is far better than we can have imagined at the beginning of the project, because it tells not just the story of Thomas, Oscar, Joe, and every other person that can relate to the film, but also the immense hard work, patience and creativity of everyone involved in the project.



## Filming *Spines* – A conversation with Oscar and Natasha

*After filming, director Joseph Inman sat down with lead actor Oscar Payce and his mother Natasha to discuss what they learnt from the filming experience.*

I started by asking Oscar what it was like to audition for the film. He told me that he found it hard at first but with the support of his family filming the audition he felt more comfortable.

He said that learning the script extract was initially quite hard, but when his mum highlighted the parts that were only him it helped simplify the process. Oscar also said that he remembered the words by breaking down the syllables which then became a pattern which was easier for his brain to recall.

Before we began filming, we spent a day in a rehearsal room getting to know each other. For this all the HOD's were present so that Oscar could meet them and ask them any questions.

Oscar felt that this helped him because "they stopped just being random people". It also meant that once they explained their role, he didn't have to worry about it on set because he "finds it very difficult when someone is doing something, and if [he] didn't ask the questions they'd be buzzing around [his] head, and [he] wouldn't be able to remember the script".

Natasha agreed that it was a beneficial process for Oscar as it allowed him to quiz the cinematographer on everything and therefore lessen the need for questions on set.

Because the film starred two lead actors that were children (Oscar was 8 and Daisy was 11) we all agreed was key that they got to know each other too as Oscar can find meeting people difficult, especially in high pressure situations, and increasing this rehearsal time would have been beneficial to the production.

During our first day filming we found that one of the main tactics we decided to employ to help Oscar was not working. We had broken down the script into lots of small shots to limit the amount of time he had to spend on camera in one stretch and give him the space to take lots of small breaks.

Natasha thought that "Oscar finds transitions hard. Even things he is enjoying like Rugby or reading, transitioning between two things he finds difficult. And because there were so many transitions it was difficult for him."

This was increasingly apparent after our lunch break. We had split the day into two scenes a day with a lunch break in the middle – but I always felt Oscar was less receptive after lunch.

He told me that "I just don't like getting used to something and then all of a sudden having to do something else, and if we keep swapping, I don't get comfortable." He said his head was always in the previous scene and he found it hard to change over.

Both me and Natasha agreed that it would have flowed much easier for him if we had been able to do just one scene a day.

Natasha said that one of the things she found would have been helpful for Oscar was if we had been able to provide a more comprehensive package on how the shoot days would go.

She felt that things like pictures of the set, storyboards and detailed shot lists would all help him visualise the days, work better and be more comfortable.

We thought that all this information might overwhelm him to begin with, but counterintuitively he would be able to take all that in, calming him and making it easier for him to take in information on set.

Natasha also spoke of how vital it was that we provided a separate place for Oscar to go in between filming that was just his. We hired a campervan and parked it on just off set and only Oscar and Natasha were allowed to go in it.

As an autistic person lots of sensory stimuli can lead to Oscar being overwhelmed, which can make him uncomfortable. Especially in young people this can also make them very self-conscious as they can't rationalise what their brain is doing and instead think they are doing something wrong.



By allowing Oscar to have a separate space that was private he didn't have to feel watched all the time and therefore could decompress. Whilst in the campervan, Oscar had access to a Nintendo Switch. Being able to quickly switch on a portable games console meant that he was able to concentrate on something else during down time instead of focusing on what he perceived went wrong during filming.

When we came to rehearse each scene, Oscar found it hard to concentrate on the process because they were usually the moments where set was busiest. As we were pushed for time, most of the lighting and sound set-ups would take place during rehearsal time, and Oscar found it very difficult to compartmentalise the noise and movement going on around him.

Natasha and Oscar both agreed that when we got creative about how our rehearsal sessions took place, Oscar found it much easier. Oscar is very sporty, and I decided that instead of sitting or standing on our marks and walking through the scene as part of rehearsal, all the time that we spent running lines and working on his delivery we would kick a football to each other.

Natasha spoke of how this was a revelatory moment on set saying "when I talk to people about [the filming], that's what I talk about. The day before he was so busy, looking around and taking everything in, but as soon as he was doing something simple, he can completely focus. It doesn't look like he is – but he really is. At school he has fiddle toys and I think this worked in the same way as they do to help him concentrate at school."

Oscar, like most autistic children, had tics that occur when he is stressed. These tics can be very subtle and are different to all children, so it was incredibly important that his mum was his chaperone and able to tell me when he was physically showing that he was dysregulating.

When we were shooting a scene in front of a bookcase, Oscar began to touch his left shoulder. This was a red flag to him becoming dysregulated and Natasha was able to stop the filming and move Oscar away from the set.

Natasha thought the way I handled the situation worked really for Oscar – "I think he had his head on my lap, and you just came over very quietly. You didn't ask 'is he okay?' or make a big thing about it. You just sat there quietly and showed with your body language that you weren't angry or anything."

I asked Oscar what it was like to work with the other actors. He told me that it felt "quite new, like working with partners at school". Natasha felt that because we filmed as chronologically as possible, it allowed Oscar to grow into his relationship with the other actors.

We wondered whether having more rehearsal time before the shoot would have allowed that relationship to be more solid to begin with.

We finish by talking about what we thought we could have done better. Natasha thought that one of the biggest things that could have helped us was the way it was scheduled.

She felt that if we had done essentially 2/3rd shoot days, without a lunchbreak, Oscar would have been able to focus better on the scene that day rather than having to swap between scenes.

I ask Oscar whether making the film has helped him understand himself. He tells me "That it helped me interact with new people and feel comfortable with them. I met a lot of people making it and it made me feel like I can do a lot more things that I didn't think I would be able to do."

## Experience Filming - Daisy and Hannah Ali

**Daisy (lead actress)** - 'The *Spines* experience was absolutely fantastic. The set was so calm and the whole crew were very friendly. There were more breaks throughout the process that I am used to, however I never felt as if I was hanging around and I was fully informed of why the breaks were necessary.

I am a laid back and patient person which I think worked well. When Oscar was a little overwhelmed, or had had enough of filming for a bit, Joe and the rest of the crew were amazing with him. They also allowed me to step in sometimes, even if it was just a kick around or a chat between us.

Oscar and I formed a natural bond, which the crew did not interfere with, and I feel this helped with the final scenes of the film. Even though the crew spent a lot of time with Oscar I never felt left out.

Overall, I had such a wonderful time and made unforgettable memories. It has also made me more understanding around neurodiversity and how differently we all think and how we see things.'

*I believe that the bond between Daisy and Oscar was vital to the experience both had on set. We made sure that Daisy was always aware why hold ups were happening and were clear with both Oscar and Daisy that we weren't going to simplify the experience. If Oscar was struggling, we told her exactly why and what we were doing about it.*

*We believed that both actors being in as much control as possible was paramount, even if it meant that the set moved slower than anticipated.*

*Another note being that because we shot as sequentially as we could - making sure that the last scenes of the film were shot on the last day the bond that naturally happened between them was transferable to the screen.*

*Joseph Inman*



**Hannah (Daisy's mum and chaperone on set)** - 'As a chaperone it is my responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of the children. They were certainly well looked after and respected.'

When things sometimes had to slow down a bit for Oscar, Daisy was told why and thanked for her patience. She completely felt part of it. Joe took the time to explain to Daisy that Oscar had autism and how autism is different for everyone, and why Oscar needed extra time or time out on occasions. There was an extra day added on at the end, again we were told why and thanked for being flexible and understanding.

Joe told me that he has autism which was great to know. I can be quite talkative and excitable which meant that I was mindful to reign this in slightly! Not that he made me feel this way, but down to his honesty I could adapt. Joe was particularly amazing with Oscar, and they had a beautiful and understanding relationship. It was heart-warming.'

## Post Production – Joseph Inman

As a collective, rather than a production company per se, 'Bear Behind You' tends to take credit for the editing of our films. So once filming had finished, all three of us decamped to a small dark room to begin editing the film.

Very quickly we found out that something was wrong.

We'd decided to shoot the film in Academy ratio because I had always felt that the film's focus should be Oscar's face and that by shooting in a closed-off ratio we would be highlighting that decision.

When we got to looking at the footage it was clear that this had worked and our intense focus on Oscar had given the film a striking, intense quality. But something we didn't notice during filming was how bad the continuity of Oscar's body positions was throughout the takes.

I assume that continuity is more of a problem when working with children, but Daisy's continuity was passable, and editing her parts was relatively straightforward.

To allow Oscar a lot of downtime during filming we had broken up master shots into chunks. This worked especially well during the second half of filming days when Oscar became restless and distracted.

What we didn't anticipate is this meant that even if Oscar's performance throughout a whole take was perfect, we had to match it up to several other takes to create a flowing scene. This meant that our problems with Oscar's continuity were highlighted because we couldn't just use one perfected master take when our continuity was lacking in the other shots.

Oscar, like me, has a lot of sensory-based needs, and although that gave him a lot of insight into the character – and made the story resonate with Oscar – it caused havoc with the continuity in ways we weren't noticing.

When we would set up a scene, sometimes – like in the bedroom scene – he would be uncomfortable with the way he had to sit or the clothes he had to wear. These were minor discomforts and as he wanted to not be problematic to filming, he would often not voice these to anyone, including his mum.

What this meant though was, as the filming began, he would slowly start to adjust himself, his clothes, or the props, to make it more comfortable.

Because of the intense focus on Oscar created by our shot selection and aspect ratio these differences were highlighted to the extreme and our original edit plan became unviable.

This is where collectively working wasn't going to work. With such a large rethink needed it was down to me as the writer and director, to come up with a new methodology for the film. So, we broke up the collective edit and I took the footage home to try and work out a way forward.

The story I had written was always meant to be semi-autobiographical. I didn't grow up where the film is set, and there are lots of differences between the character of Thomas as it was written and me at that age. Mainly, I loved and still love football.

But also, and most importantly, it is not an accurate representation of autistic me at that age. I have developed more visible tics as I've gotten older. I have also developed more sensory needs. Or at least I have been able to recognise, express and deal with them more as I got older.

This has meant that the character I have created for *Spines* takes a lot of experiences from older autistic me and plants the seeds of them into the character.

I always felt that half of Thomas the character was filled up with me, and the other empty half would be filled by the actor who played him. I needed that empty half to allow the natural autistic tendencies of the actor to embellish and round that character, rather than distract the audience.

As filming went on, and I spent more time with Oscar, I found myself with a nagging feeling that the character that I wanted to represent me was slipping out of the film and that Oscar as a person was filling the screen. I also found that I liked this feeling.

Oscar as a human is so enigmatic and wonderful that I ended up wanting everyone, including the audience, to see Oscar there not this conduit character called Thomas.



It is lucky for me that I wasn't working with a new cinematographer because as these feelings kept growing, I began to ask Teddy (our wonderful DOP) to keep the camera rolling as much as possible.

Me and Teddy have worked on several films together and he was quite used to this sort of direction from me. I am always interested in the things that exist in the margins of the filmmaking process and we've made several films where I have asked him to surreptitiously record rehearsals or action beyond the cut.

This meant that when I took the footage home, looking for a new way to construct the film, I found I had reams of footage of Oscar. It could be Oscar taking instruction from me in between takes, it could be Oscar bored whilst some light is adjusted on set.

In my want for this footage, even with no intention to use it at the time, I had made sure I kept the shots clean of the crew and therefore usable.

The new film construction had to home in on Oscar. I wanted to try and tell the audience what it was like to be in Oscar's company and to work with him.

Oscar has a lot of similarities to me at that age, and I guess I felt like this was a more present and authentic way of showing people an autistic experience than trying to raid, then twist, my memory banks into something shootable.

So, I started with the kitchen scene – where the continuity errors in the character movement were at their worst. The scene was supposed to play in a classical shot reverse shot between him and his brother.

It wouldn't work as to get the performance we needed we would have to use two different takes from Thomas but in those two different takes Oscar's body position was too different.



*Thomas talks to his brother at the dinner table*

The essence of the scene was that the character Thomas is tired of his brother interfering with his life and that his obsession with reading was evident to everyone, so it was something that his brother would pick to try and hurt Thomas' feelings.

I decided to implement an editing style that I've used previously that I can only refer to as chunky. I guess it's influenced by the methods Godard uses in *A Bout de Souffle*, but I haven't seen that film in years, so I think it comes from a lot of animation that I watched at university by the likes of Jan Svankmajer.



*Using different takes of Oscar's performance to create an inner world*

This was essentially to show the scene as Thomas experiences it, rather than as it chronologically happens. It meant I was able to intercut the shots integral to the scene with 'feeling shots' – which created an interior to Thomas' senses rather than a third-person perspective. The bulk of these shots happened to be taken from the front or back of takes – when we were supposedly not shooting and showed an Oscar without pretence.

By putting this method at the very start of the film, I was allowing myself the wiggle room to continue this method wherever I thought it necessary for the audience to jump into Thomas' head but also wherever continuity got tricky.

I hope that to the audience this style looks planned and that it gives them a real sense of what it is like to be inside a head that is continually overloaded sensorily, but it was not planned in the slightest as we had hoped that this would be our most classically shot and edited film to date.

I would be remiss to not also mention our experience making the film more accessible for audiences to watch. When we embarked on the journey of making *Spines* I knew I wanted to create a sound mix that was more accessible for autistic children to experience.

Our attempt to get into our lead character's headspace means that the soundtrack to *Spines* is often intense, using syncopated rhythms and the heightening of diegetic sounds to enable an audience to understand better what it is like to have sensorial-affected autism.

I was aware that this would make certain scenes difficult for audiences to experience, and I didn't want to put off people with autism or upset them by viewing the film. Therefore, we created an 'autistic friendly' mix of the film where we essentially crushed the extremities of the soundscape and levelled everything out, creating fewer disturbances, whilst putting fades on more noises and music to allow the audience to have more time to adjust.

When I came up with this idea I was not working within an existing framework. It would seem that 'autistic-friendly' screenings are facilitated by the cinemas themselves, amounting to turning the sound down and leaving the house lights up a little bit, rather than the filmmakers making accessible versions of their film.

This is an institutional problem and not something I can fix, but I hope that our attempt will help push other filmmakers to consider taking similar measures and help inspire the industry to celebrate and facilitate the artistry of creating accessible films.

Since we had become keenly aware of accessibility needs, we also took the chance to create an Enhanced Audio Description (EAD) soundtrack with University of York. EAD is a new experimental type of accessibility for visually impaired audiences pioneered by Mariana López and Gavin Kearney.

Audio Description is usually an audio track recorded by a clear voice, which tells visually impaired audiences the action that is happening in the film that they would be unable to ascertain through dialogue.

EAD instead focuses on creating an artistic audio-based portrayal of the action of scenes by carefully placing, creating, and enhancing audio, allowing visually impaired people to gain more creative information.

For this process we asked Oscar to record an internal monologue that I wrote, that would be spoken in the scenes where no dialogue was being spoken because the film was moving inside Oscar's head.

This process has made me think about accessibility in such a different way and shown me that making a film more accessible is a creative challenge that should be thought about before filming, rather than just the laborious process of creating subtitles.

I am so grateful to Mariana and Gavin for this experience, and it will hopefully allow a whole new audience to be able to experience *Spines*.

## Final Comments - Joseph Inman

I think the first thing to say is that the whole crew had an extraordinary experience making *Spines*. It was unlike any filmmaking experience we had had before, and it is honest and true to say that it being extraordinary was due to the subject matter and the cast.

Any attempt to create best practices to allow filmmakers, or cast, that are disabled to engage with the filmmaking process must be first and foremost about listening.

Everyone's experience and needs are going to be vastly different and anything I can say about our experience can be, at best, a pointer or starting point for a process.

We started out with the best intentions, but we got lots wrong. We needed to be able to change things from day to day, to find new strategies in the moment.

I therefore believe that after listening the most important thing institutions, production companies, and crews can do is to be constantly tenacious and evolving in their pursuit of best practice.

It was through our ability to change incredibly quickly that we were able to make *Spines*. It is also incredibly important to say that to enact these changes we needed more money.

The budget for *Spines* was initially written in March 2021. We didn't cast Oscar till January 2022 and didn't shoot till July 2022. We had an awful lot of thinking time, but that was time spent without any real knowledge of the obstacles we would face.

Natasha knows her son inside out but couldn't know what it would be like for him to turn up to a film set. We lived every day knowing that that evening Oscar could decide he didn't want to do it anymore. We couldn't force him – he doesn't know what contractual obligations are – he's a child.

The tenaciousness of the whole crew – and especially the BFI to know that we couldn't anticipate every problem – is the reason that *Spines* exists today.

Knowing that BFI NETWORK were aware of our changing circumstances and that we needed to apply for more accessibility money was vital in allowing us to continue filming.

I have spent my life not really knowing what accessibility money is for apart from a ramp for a wheelchair user, but now I know what the incredible role it plays in allowing all kinds of disabled people to engage with all kinds of things. Without it, we would never have been able to facilitate Oscar's experience.

I don't know what making a disabled, or autistic, film really means. But it must mean something different from normal filmmaking practice because the process of making *Spines* was different.

Since making a disabled film, I have realised, accepted, and become proud of the fact that I am a disabled filmmaker. I wear my divergence, and needs, as a badge of honour.

I hope that reading about our experiences gives you a kindred sense of hope that making films that show the lives of disabled people is an incredibly rewarding and beautiful experience.

Of course, it was stressful and difficult but if we are to truly represent the lives, we, the people, lead – then it is of paramount importance that these stories aren't marginalised.

BFI NETWORK allowed us to not be marginalised – and for that I am truly grateful.



# SPINES Filming Checklist

*Obviously, all film sets are different, and all people are different, so the following checklist is only a guide. It is meant as a conversation starter, the things to look out for, but engaging and listening to the autistic people and the people that know them best is paramount.*

## Pre-Production

- **Budget:** ensure a flexible accessibility budget is agreed with funders
- **Schedule:**
  - Make sure you are realistic and factor in breaks and shorter than average working days to keep the quality of work at a maximum consistently.
  - If possible, schedule one scene per day so each day the plan can be clear with minimal disruptions and changes.
  - Plan enough time to allow the pace to slow down. It can take time for people to regulate themselves again if they've needed to take a break.
- **Casting:**
  - Ensure you have clear wording detailing what is needed from the cast/crew member, so they can apply for role with full context.
  - Once hired ask the person, or if a minor ask their legal guardian, what additional support you can provide for them. Only they know how best you can help them!
- **Planning:**
  - When prepping for the shoot, have both your ideal and your emergency shot list, with worst case scenario minimum requirements, and plan to film those first.
  - Be prepared to make bespoke information packages for the person with additional needs to accompany the script.

- Think about the sensory implications of equipment on set. For example, hot lights can be sensorially difficult for autistic people to work with so wherever possible use LED lights or natural light. Lapel mics can also cause discomfort which might detract from performance if they are not adjusted properly. Always make sure that exits from enclosed spaces are available to the actors with cables and other visual noise kept to a minimum.
- Discuss with the person how they want their difficulties to be shared with the crew, and then make sure everyone on set knows their boundaries.

## Production

- Ensure you have time before the shoot to rehearse, and get your neurodivergent actor(s)/crew acquainted with any equipment, costumes, hair and make-up, locations and colleagues that will be on set, to allow for comfort and minimum surprises on the shoot.
- Be prepared to get creative with on-set rehearsal methods.
- Plan for a quiet space for the cast/crew member to use as their calm zone, be that a separate green room or a private trailer.
- Provide activities such as a football, board games or a games console for the cast/crew member to use to keep them occupied and engaged whilst not filming.

## Post-Production

- Allow ample time in post in the knowledge that you may not have been able to shoot exactly what you had planned for.
- Think of creative solutions to make your films more accessible to people with disabilities.



# Spines (2023)



## Credits

### CAST

Thomas	Oscar Payce
Agnes	Daisy Ali
Brother	Leland Robbins
Mum	Bryher Flanders

Composer	Felix Taylor
Colourist	Cam Sander
Book Illustrations by	Amy McMillan

### BFI NETWORK

Executive Producer	Alice Cabanas
Executive Producer	Alix Taylor-Searle
Project Coordinator	Jo Strachan
Talent Coordinator	Mason Robinson

### FOR SCREEN CORNWALL AND FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY'S SOUND/IMAGE CINEMA LAB

Executive Producer	Laura Giles
Executive Producer	Simon Harvey

### BEAR BEHIND YOU

Executive Producer	Teddy Freeman
Executive Producer	Joseph Inman
Executive Producer	Lucia Maňáková

### CREW

Writer and Director	Joseph Inman
Producer	Lily Woodcock
Director of Photography	Teddy Freeman
1st Assistant Camera	Simonas Jakovlevas
Camera Trainee	Lily Coney
Production Designer	Lucia Maňáková
1st Assistant Director	Charlie Davies
Production Trainee	Oscar Harrison
Sound Recordist	Matthew Collington
Editor	Bear Behind You
Post Production Sound	Tereza Králiková



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