


**Worthy: A History of Down Syndrome**
Documentary Feature by Dashiell Meier
D21 Creations
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Application Resources
Pitch Deck
Early footage reel
Work Sample

# 2025 AXS FILM FUND APPLICATION

Application Resources

*To center Dashiell's voice, this application consists of transcriptions of Dashiell's videos and conversations. The videos capture the heart of the film more accurately than the transcribed words. Some sections, including the logline, story/concept summary, and budget, were heavily rewritten for clarity, depth and brevity by Kristin Meier, Dashiell's mom/assistant/producer, and are indicated by her name in parentheses.*

***Project Logline**
Dashiell Meier, a passionate storyteller, makes a documentary about the history of his disability to understand why people feel sorry for him when the vast majority of people with Down syndrome and their families feel it enhances their lives. Through interviews with historians, conversations with families, and visits to former asylums, *Worthy* captures the often unexpected reality of life with Down syndrome and illustrates how the erroneous assumptions of the past profoundly affect people today. (Kristin)

***Topic Summary (250 to 750 words)**

https://youtu.be/HhukGWR-rWo
Transcription:
So the reason why I want to tell this story is because we have had a terrible history and I really want to understand why people assume that Down syndrome is a bad thing. And since I'm a total history buff and I love learning about history, and I really genuinely want to understand how people's perspectives about certain things affect the world and each other. And that's what is important to me personally.

https://youtu.be/610cMq60Z3U
Transcription:
I feel like this is the perfect time to tell the story mainly because of a few reasons. One, people with Down syndrome are doing extraordinary things like pursuing their dreams. There's also negative political things going on like Medicaid being cut and things like that. And there's new technologies that will try to get rid of Down syndrome. But I value my disability and it's a part of who I am. It's something that I choose to cherish with my life. I do not want my disability being cured. I just want to be seen for who I am. I can only be myself and that is what is important.

Down syndrome activist Frank Stevens told Congress that people with Ds are the canary in the eugenics coal mine. As the current administration cuts funding, services and protections, many in the disability community fear for their futures and, literally, their lives. People with Down syndrome are already targets. Attempts to erase us show that people don't think our lives are worth living.

Families should get to choose whether to keep a baby with Down syndrome just like any other baby, but people don't really understand that it's not terrible. Scientists showed CRISPR can remove the extra chromosome in a cell so I wonder if there will be anyone with Down syndrome born in the future. Some countries like Finland don't have any babies with Down syndrome being born. We add a lot of joy and love to the world even if there are lots of things we don't do well. Joy and love are important and valuable to the world.

An NIH study of hundreds of adults with Down syndrome showed that 99% of us are satisfied with our lives. Most of our parents and siblings are happy with their lives as well. A lot of us have health problems, but mostly it is the laws and prejudice and stereotypes that make our lives harder. I want to understand why people think these stereotypes even though that history is disturbing because it just seems like people have a wrong idea and that is still hurting us. So I hope my documentary film can help people see that we are worthwhile and amazing people.

***Story or Concept Summary (250 to 750 words**

Worthy opens with scenes of me working on the documentary -- making phone calls, sketching out ideas, having a meeting, talking about what I wish people knew about Down syndrome/Trisomy 21 -- to show that I am making the film, with help, of course.

Adults with Down syndrome will interview their mothers about what doctors told them when they were born to show what people think about Down syndrome. I will work with a film crew of students with intellectual disabilities while another crew films us making the movie, and the footage will be interwoven in the documentary.

To show the history of Down syndrome, I will interview historians, anthropologists, and people who worked at the asylums. Archival footage and photographs and graphics will help tell the story of the history, mostly focused on the United States 20th century and will include eugenics, Aktion T4, institutionalization, medical testing and lack of education and medical care. I will visit Pennhurst and Agnews where I probably would have lived if I were born in an earlier time.

The next section will give a snapshot of what it's like living with Down syndrome is like now in the US. Even with health and education issues and lacking social services, having a person with Down syndrome in your family brings an unexpected perspective and joy. Infographics will show the results of Harvard/Brian Stotko's surveys showing extremely high happiness and life satisfaction for people with DS, their siblings and parents. Call to action: shift the narrative.

Worthy will return to the adults interviewing their mothers, this time asking their moms what they wish the world knew about them. Worthy will show people with Down syndrome explain how they feel about having this disability and show that our lives are worth living. Call to action: shift the narrative. (Kristin)

I want to show that everyone has worthwhile lives. We don't have to be good at school or be able to talk or have a job or be good at anything to be awesome and amazing.

While we have the main beats of the film, we don't know what will come up in the interviews and visits to Pennhurst and what I will learn from other people.

***Artistic Approach (250 to 750 words)**

https://youtu.be/y-obxQk9Tnk
With this film, my artistic direction, I'm going to have two film crews. One with me directing a team of intellectual disabilities making the documentary itself and a professional film crew filming me making the movie to show that we are making this movie together. And I'm gonna have infographics. I'm going to have interviews. I'm gonna visit asylums.I really want to show people with Down syndrome living their best lives.

I've seen the Marlee Matlin movie Not Alone Anymore recently. And it's a similar format because of the behind the scenes aspects, and that's what I love about film making. And I really want to give people with Down syndrome the opportunity to speak to the world about who they are, and that's what matters.

**Worthy** will follow my story as I try to make a documentary, so it will be a movie within a movie. One crew will be mainly people with intellectual disabilities and people with Down syndrome who want to help with support from the professionals. A second crew will film us making the movie. It will be realistic so people can see that it is challenging to have Down syndrome sometimes but they can also see how we are friendly and work together and how we can do important things.

**Worthy** will center people with Down syndrome so we can let people know directly what we think.

- Some handheld cameras
- Composer
- Archival photos and footage
- Interviews with historian and anthropologist
- Interviews and footage of families
- Open captions, accessible screening

I want people to feel proud for being in this movie and feel good about watching it.

https://youtu.be/-f60fbxSeQA
Transcription
I love storytelling and I love making movies and I want to showcase that people like me are amazing people and that's the beauty of film making that you can really show that everyone is unique, everyone is special and that we are are amazing community and we look after each other and that is what drives me to continue to make films.

***Creative Control**

Dashiell Meier and Kristin Meier have creative control. Our corporation, D21 Ventures Inc, has legal ownership of the project. Kristin Meier and Malcolm Fleschner (Dashiell's parents) are the sole owners of D21Ventures Inc. (Kristin)

***Project Stage and Timeline (50 to 100 words)**

**2025**

**May - December:** Research, development
**July - October:** Concept trailer, family interviews
**October:** release trailer
**November:** fundraising, partnerships
**January - July:** Production

**2026**

**January:** Pennhurst Asylum; David Wright, Montreal; Amy Julia Becker, New Jersey; Brian Stotko, Boston
**February:** Langdon Down Centre, London, Denver family interviews
**March:** Thomas Pearson, Madison, Lucky Few, L.A.
**April:** NDSS Capitol Hill Day/Interviews
**July:** film booth at NDSS, Orlando
**July 2026 - Feb 2027:** Post-production, prep impact campaign
**September:** Times Square

**2027**

**March 21, 2027:** Release date (World Down Syndrome Day)
**March - October:** Impact campaign
**June:** World Down Syndrome Congress Screening
**July:** National Down Syndrome Congress Screening

**CONNECTION, ACCOUNTABILITY, & COMMUNITY CARE**

***Connection and Point of View (125 to 250 words)**

https://youtu.be/U1ZbcL7HxQ0
As a person with Down syndrome, I, we are great people, and I want to make films that that really support the community, but most importantly, we need to be understood by the world and our community so we can be true to who we are.

As much as I can, I want people with Down syndrome to tell the story or at least people connected to us. All of the people I am interviewing have a family member with Down syndrome, and many of the people on our professional crew want to help tell this story and help me because we know that Down syndrome is not something bad even though a lot of people think that way.

I want to show what it's really like to have Down syndrome so for a lot of people we need a lot of help and support, and that will be in the movie too. I want to be realistic so

What is your connection to the story (i.e., to the participants, themes, community, location, archives, etc.)? How do your interests, motivations, and/or worldview shape your approach to this story? What lens, perspective, insights, or bias do you bring to the story?

***Accountability and Community Care (125 to 250 words)**
https://youtu.be/HTd_vEfzBaA
I just want to address the fact that the topic that I'm covering is a very dark and heavy topic. I want people to be comfortable with exploring this topic, and that's very important to me because I want everyone to have the space that they need to not only be comfortable, but also, I want to be able to make sure that everyone's on the same page and that we get the best result possible, but also having it be fun and mainly just having this be a very fun learning experience.

For the adults with Down syndrome interviewing their parents about what doctors said will be hard to hear. Most of the interviews are about how those doctors were wrong and how proud the parents are of us so that people leave the interviews feeling happy and good about themselves. I think it might be hard for people to talk to me about these terrible things that happened., so everyone will have the questions in advance so they know what to expect.

It will help to have a crew that has disabilities or is experienced around people with intellectual disabilities so they will be patient and kind.

***Safety and Security (50 to 100 words)**

- Use Safe and Secure Checklist with our team to identify risks
- Hire legal representation
- Hire Accessibility Consultant to enhance safety as well as accessibility on locations
- Provide participants with interview questions in advance to ensure the families are prepared for the emotional content and remind them they can withdraw participation.
- Use secure/encrypted file transfer and storage to protect digital privacy

***Accessibility (50 -100 words)**

- We will hire an Accessibility Consultant
- Crew from Options for All accompanied by teachers and facilitators
- Our sets and screenings will be accessible, if possible with ASL interpreters
- Questionnaire for the interviewees and crew to ask about accommodations
- Worthy will have open captions, transcripts and we hope to afford audio description
- Infographics will be simple
- Impact campaign will have an accessible website and education materials, including simple text
- Written communications in 16 pt. Font
- Personal assistant for Dashiell to help with typing, dictation, organization, uploading documents, reading pdfs

***Audience Consideration (50 - 100 words)**

- Down Syndrome community
- Teachers, paraeducators, doctors, therapists, caregivers -- people who work with us but sometimes underestimate us
- Wider disability community
- Wider public -- these are the people I really want to have see Worthy so I plan to show my film at festivals, on PBS and streaming. I hope I can make a good enough film so people want to watch it.. I love public speaking so I can show the film in schools or community events and do a presentation with other people with Down syndrome.

***Intended Impact (50 - 100 words)**

Video
My goals for this documentary film, um, I want to show the world that our history doesn't define who we are. It's what we choose to be now. And that's important. Also, we can only be ourselves and that I think is enough. I want everyone to know that having Down syndrome is a gift. And through this documentary, I really want to capitalize on just how amazing we are and that the history of our disability doesn't define us.

**SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

Video link
Since I have Down syndrome, I have grown as an advocate for all people with disabilities and not just down syndrome. And I have really felt like making movies is an extension of that actually. And because I am a storyteller and I want to communicate how important it is to understand all perspectives and I think film is the right way to do that because you can actually you see how other people see the world and that can be life-changing for a lot of people. Like when we watch movies today like, for example, the Peanut Butter Falcon movie, it really changes how we view the world and ourselves, and that's what I want to do with my films.

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

*Fundraising Strategy (50 to 100 words)

My producers, my mom Kristin Meier and Tony Gapastione, are helping me with fundraising. This started as a smaller project with just me and my mom, but when I told people about my plans, they wanted to help fund the project. We have some private investors helping us make the concept trailer. We will connect with local Down syndrome groups to host fundraising events when we travel for the interviews and try to get the national groups to partner with us and we will apply for grants. We will also try to get more private investors. We can do crowdfunding.

***Grant Impact (50 to 100 words)**

We raised enough money for the concept trailer, so if any more grant money will pay for the production, hiring the film crews and paying for the travel and research. I would like to film all of the interviews in person. Worthy will cost more because we have double film crews and we need to have more time to do things because it usually takes me and other people with intellectual disabilities longer to do things. We also need to hire editors and people to help us make the infographics and compose the music. We also need to raise money for the impact campaign.

***Funding Detail**

Private Investor, $25,000, confirmed
Private Investor, $2,000, confirmed
San Andreas Regional Center Grant, $5000, to apply
Magical Bridge Foundation Grant, $1000, to apply
National Down Syndrome Society, $1000, to apply
Global Down Syndrome Foundation, $5000, to apply
BraveMaker Grant, $1000, to apply

***Comprehensive Line-Item Expense Budget**

https://d21creations.com/worthy-application

**VISUAL SAMPLES**
***Description of Director's Prior work (50 to 100 words)**

This Is Me is a documentary that I made all by myself, including the animations. I learned a lot from this project because I made some mistakes, but I am proud that I let people know how I feel about having Down syndrome. My mom showed it to a new mom and she said that she would remember that I said, "we wear it like a badge of honor' for the rest of her life, and that makes me feel like I made a difference in the world. It won Audience Choice Best Documentary Short at BraveMaker Film Festival.

This Is Me

***Current Sample/Rough Cut (50 to 100 words)**
This is very rough footage without the professional audio of my shoot with Zack Gottsagen interviewing his mom Shelley. A second camera filmed a shot of Zack and his mom, and you can see the behind the scenes where I am getting help to make the movie. There is also some footage of my trip to the California State Library to see archives of Agnews Asylum where I probably would have lived if I had been born a generation earlier.

Sample Footage

**Pitch Deck Upload (optional, limit 1 file)**

https://d21creations.com/worthy-application