



50 years

Canadian
Association for
Community Living

Diversity includes.

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Movie reinforces stereotypes and encourages use of derogatory language

The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) is disheartened to learn that people with intellectual disabilities are being used as fodder for comedy in the new Hollywood film, *Tropic Thunder*. CACL denounces the film, its portrayal of intellectual disability based on demeaning stereotypes, and the repeated use of outdated, inappropriate language.

Bendina Miller, CACL President commented: "While we appreciate that the film is supposed to be a satire, we feel the portrayal of intellectual disabilities and the use of derogatory language crosses a line. It exploits terminology that has a very fixed, negative, dangerous and stereotypical connotation in our culture. It does nothing to unsettle the stereotypes, it simply reinforces them. We find it extremely offensive on those grounds. If we don't question this, who will?"

People with intellectual disabilities have long rejected outdated and inappropriate labels such as the "r" word. The use of the word has evolved to a point that in common language it is used to describe something or someone as bad, stupid or negative in some way.

Shane Haddad, President, People First of Canada, stated: "This film sends a message that it is OK to make fun of people like me. It's time to question the common use of this kind of language. I like to think that people don't know the history of its use or how harmful it is to people and their families. Perhaps this is an opportunity for people to really look at how people with intellectual disabilities are being disrespected in our society. But, enough is enough. If people don't know how bad and hurtful it is, we need to let them know."

There is a distinct difference between comedy which uses satire and irony to unsettle stereotypes and actually illustrates the absurdity of hate and discrimination, sometimes in a shockingly funny way; and comedy that is simply exploitative, victimizing, and at another group's expense. The use of this word in a comedic film, validates and perpetuates bullying, abuse, and hate towards people with intellectual disabilities. We as a society have to ask ourselves why is it that we do not understand this experience of marginalization? We understand very clearly how dangerous, demeaning and hurtful it is to use racist or sexist slurs. It's time we understand this community's history of oppression and fight back against it today.

In November 2008, award-winning filmmaker Pierre Tetrault will be screening* a film at CACL's 50th Anniversary entitled The "R" Word. The film explores the impact and consequences labels have had on people with intellectual disabilities and their families. It is a groundbreaking film that sheds new light on the experience of having an intellectual disability and seeks to change the perception of people with intellectual disabilities.

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The Canadian Association for Community Living is a Canada-wide association of family members, people with intellectual disabilities and others working to advance the human rights and inclusion of persons of all ages who have an intellectual disability. CACL is committed to defending the rights and advocating for the interests of individuals with intellectual disabilities, and to promoting research and information that will further these objectives.

People First of Canada (PFC) is the national voice of people labelled with an intellectual disability. PFC is about rights – human rights, citizenship rights, accommodations rights and language rights. The right to freedom, choice and equality for all. PFC's goal is to raise public awareness regarding disability issues by providing opportunities for people labelled with an intellectual disability to share their experiences and help advance the agenda towards inclusive communities across Canada.

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* screening by invitation only.