

TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD, THEY HAD TO GET IN THE WATER.

# SWIM TEAM

A FILM BY LARA STOLMAN



Independent  
Standard  
Project

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WOODLAND PARK PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS LARA STOLMAN "SWIM TEAM" CO-PRODUCED BY ANN COLLINS  
DIRECTED BY LAELA KILBOURN DIRECTED BY MARK SUOZZO PRODUCED BY SHANNA BELOTT DIRECTED BY LARA STOLMAN

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## *About the Film*



### **Synopsis**

SWIM TEAM is a feature documentary chronicling the rise of a competitive swim team made up of children and teens on the autism spectrum. Based in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, the cast of SWIM TEAM is largely Latino and Asian, minorities that are underrepresented in competitive swimming and underserved in autism intervention and education.

The film follows three of the team's star athletes, boys on the cusp of adulthood as they face a future of exclusion and dependence. But everything changes when they come together as a team with parent coaches who train them with high expectations and zero pity. As the team vies for state and national Special Olympics championships, SWIM TEAM captures a moving quest for inclusion, independence and a life that feels winning.

### **Production Details**

SWIM TEAM began filming in 2014 and was completed in 2016. During the course of production, Director Lara Stolman was commissioned by The New York Times to produce a short film based on the feature, and she also won grants from New York Women in Film and TV - Loreen Arbus and the Karma Foundation. SWIM TEAM was selected for the Independent Filmmaker Project's Project Forum in 2015 and in 2016 was selected to participate in the IFP Documentary Completion Lab. Director Lara Stolman and Producer Shanna Belott have been writing regularly about the film for The Huffington Post.

## Festivals and Awards

SWIM TEAM premiered at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival in October, 2016 where it won the Best Sports Documentary award. The film went on to play at select festivals including DOC NYC, the Napa Valley Film Festival, where Director Lara Stolman was chosen for their Artist in Residence program, the New Hampshire Film Festival, the Heartland Film Festival and the Monmouth Film Festival where the film won Best New Jersey Film and the Audience Award. The film will be presented with Best Feature Documentary at Calgary, Alberta's Picture This Film Festival in March, 2017. Festival bookings for 2017 thus far include Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, Glasgow Film Festival, Reel Abilities, SXSWedu, Sarasota Film Festival, Riverrun Film Festival, Nashville Film Festival, Montclair Film Festival and more.

## Critical Acclaim and Press

Here's what people are saying about SWIM TEAM:

***"Eye-opening, thoughtful, inspiring..." --Sheri Linden, Hollywood Reporter***

***"An exceptional documentary on what it means to come together for a common goal under extraordinary circumstances..." – Anne-Katrin Titze, Eye For Film***

***"Poignantly powerful..." – Bob Makin, My Central NJ/ Home News Tribune***

***"Heartwarming, inspirational and incredibly informative." Alex Biese, Asbury Park Press***

***"A film that gives us a rare window into the essence of the heartbreak of families coping with autism, and the exhilarating healing powers of their love and devotion." Glenn Fennelly, MD, MPH, Professor and Chairman, Department of Pediatrics, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School***

***"Swim Team plunges viewers into the world of young men on the autism spectrum as they compete against other teams and race against the clock in their transition towards adulthood. A touching and real look at what young adults on the autism spectrum and their families are capable of and the challenges they face." Suzanne Buchanan, Psy. D. BCBA-D, Executive Director, Autism NJ***

***"Many swimmers, coaches, and teams are hungry for the next inspiring, heart-wrenching film to come along and make them laugh, cry, and shout "KICK!" at the screen. Now your wishes have been fulfilled." Hannah Hecht, Swim Swam***

Selected Press:

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/swim-team-949859>

<http://www.indiewire.com/2016/11/documentary-swim-team-autism-doc-nyc-1201743651/>

<http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/feature/2016-11-17-lara-stolman-in-conversation-on-swim-team-feature-story-by-anne-katrin-titze>

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/health/10000003577596/swim-team-robert.html>

## *Director's Statement*



When people ask me how I found the story of SWIM TEAM, I say it found me.

Children with developmental disabilities are routinely excluded from community activities, often as early as preschool. Being told "no," - your child can't be in the regular class, your child won't keep up in little league, your child isn't going to college - is something families caring for children with disabilities hear often.

Since children on the spectrum are particularly prone to drowning, swimming is a crucial skill but it's not easy to find appropriate teachers and programs willing to take on an autistic child. While exploring swim lessons for my own children, I stumbled upon the Jersey Hammerheads, an all-autistic team in formation and I was immediately struck by the energy and optimism of the families that were coming together to form the team. Some of the kids were teenagers and had never been on a sports team before. And some couldn't yet swim.

With the Hammerheads families, I had found a group of parents who refused to take no for an answer. They were saying YES and as a community, it was galvanizing for them. As a mother, I was so personally inspired by what they hoped to accomplish, I knew I had to share their story. I hope my film provides inspiration for families everywhere raising children with unanticipated challenges.

Lara Stolman, Director and Producer



# *Cast*

## **Mike McQuay, Sr.**

A contractor by day, Mike and his wife Maria start the Jersey Hammerheads team for their son Mikey, age 17, who is a promising swimmer but had nowhere else to go. A former high school football player and all around athlete, Mike is a natural coach who has high expectations for his team, even for those who can't even swim yet. Mike and Maria secure free practice space at the local YMCA and recruit fellow volunteer parent coaches to help train the team to dominate the competition.

## **Mikey McQuay, Jr.**

Soft spoken, yet passionate about swimming, Mikey is a 17 year old high school senior. With graduation months away, Mikey is significantly below grade level and doesn't seem prepared for college or work. With the clock ticking, Coach Mike and Maria must consider guardianship for Mikey before he turns 18. Mikey pins his hopes for a job on winning a national swimming title.

## **Robert Justino**

Super athletic, ambitious 16 year old Robert is on two swim teams already and aspires to be captain of his high school swim team. However he is still unaware of his autism diagnosis. His mother thinks it's important that he learn to advocate for himself and has him join the Hammerheads to help her break the news.

## **Kelvin Truong**

At 22, Kelvin is the oldest team member and has "aged out" of school district services. He was lucky enough to secure a spot at an adult day program that includes job training. His parents worry though about their ability to care for him at home and he is on what seems to be an unending waitlist for state housing.

With a double diagnosis of autism and Tourette's syndrome, Kelvin's aggression, tics and blurting of obscenities threaten his very spot on the team. But his family is convinced swimming helps him like no medicine and they must strategize to keep him there.

## ***Filmmaker Bios***



### **Lara Stolman - Director and Producer**

Lara has produced news and documentaries that have aired on NBC, MSNBC, TLC, AMC, VH-1 and The New York Times' website. Her film Portraits of Survival, about coming to terms with the tragedy of 9/11 through art was selected for the Hamptons International Film Festival, aired on MSNBC and was awarded the Cine Golden Eagle.

For Swim Team, her first feature documentary film, she was named an IFP Documentary Lab Fellow, awarded the New York Women in Film and Television Loreen Arbus Disability Awareness grant and was provided with completion funding from the Karma Foundation.

Lara has guest lectured on documentary production at NYU, served as a juror for the News and Documentary Emmy Awards and writes for the Huffington Post. She has a BA in Political Science from Columbia College of Columbia University and JD from Yeshiva University's Benjamin Cardozo School of Law.

### **Ann Collins - Editor and Co- Producer**

Ann has been working in documentary film for over twenty-five years. Her editing credits include the feature documentaries The Heart of the Matter, Belly Talkers, The Charcoal People, and Sound and Fury, all of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival before receiving theatrical and television distribution. Sound and Fury was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

She teaches at the School of Visual Arts in both the Masters in Social Documentary and the Masters in Photography, Video and Related Media programs. She has guest lectured at NYU's film school and school of journalism. She has also served on the selection committee and jury of the Newport Film Festival.

She began her career as an assistant editor for Bill Moyers, George Butler, Ken Burns, and Maysles Films. She graduated cum laude from New York University where she received a BFA in film and television.

### **Shanna Belott – Producer**

Inspired by social entrepreneurship, Shanna is an award-winning, multi-platform producer and writer who combines her experience in media and technology to address social change. Shanna worked with Creative Artists Agency, 20th Century Fox, ABC Pictures and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to bring a range of TV and film programming to life. Her subsequent experience in digital media and technology was accelerated at Palomar Ventures, one of the largest funded venture capital firms in Southern California.

At strategy consulting and campaign management firm ProSocial Consulting, she co-produced cross-platform outreach campaigns for film and TV projects, with one of those campaigns earning a Voice Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. At Causecast, a social enterprise firm that helps companies engage employees in high-impact philanthropy, Shanna was an early leader who continues to help the company grow by writing thought leadership pieces on corporate social responsibility for publications ranging from Forbes, The Huffington Post, CR Magazine and Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Shanna graduated cum laude from Columbia University, where she received a BA in English and American History.

### **Laela Kilbourn - Director of Photography**

Laela's feature documentary credits include the Oscar winning *Twenty Feet From Stardom* Sundance hit *American Teen*, the Emmy-nominated *Word Wars* and *Sync or Swim*, which won the Billie Award for Journalism from the Women's Sports Foundation. Her most recent film, *How to Dance in Ohio*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 2015.

She also filmed the History Channel's eleven part docu-series *Sandhogs*, and has worked on series, specials and campaigns for NBC, FX, AMC, A&E, Nick Jr., ESPN, MTV, VH1, WeTV, the Trio Channel, TruTV, and TV One.

Her narrative work includes the award-winning *June Weddings*, starring Tom Noonan and directed and written by playwright Barbara Hammond; and *Hic! Open a Door in the USA*, winner of the BAMKids Film Festival Best Live Action Short Award and Prix Jeunesse International Finalist. Her work in collaboration with contemporary visual artists includes *Blind Side*, an installation at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Laela is a member of the International Cinematographers Guild and New York Women in Film & Television. She has served as a juror for the Brooklyn International Film Festival, Documentary

Feature Awards, and as a guest speaker at The New School, Department in Media Studies & Film, Graduate Certificate in Documentary Media Studies. She has a degree in social anthropology from Harvard University.

### **Mark Suozzo - Composer**

Mark Suozzo composes music for feature films and documentaries. He's had the pleasure of working with some of America's finest independent filmmakers over the years - with Whit Stillman on Metropolitan (Oscar Nomination), Barcelona, Last Days of Disco, Damsels in Distress, The Cosmopolitans and most recently the art house favorite Love & Friendship; Shari Springer-Berman and Bob Pulcini on American Splendor (Oscar Nomination) and The Nanny Diaries; and with Mary Harron on The Notorious Bettie Page.

His scores have been featured in documentaries for HBO, American Experience and Independent Lens, including the series How Democracy Works Now, Sound and Fury (Oscar Nomination), Why Can't We be a Family Again (Oscar Nomination), Thank You and Goodnight and Well-Founded Fear. As an arranger he's recorded with Creed (#1 "With Arms Wide Open"), Aretha Franklin and Britney Spears.

Mark teaches at NYU / Steinhardt, where he is Co-Director of the Film Scoring program.



# ***Credits***

**Produced and Directed by**

Lara Stolman

**Co-Produced and Edited by**

Ann Collins

**Director of Photography**

Laela Kilbourn

**Producer**

Shanna Belott

**Original Music by**

Mark Suozzo

**Featuring the Jersey Hammerheads**

Casey Burns

Vincent Chen

Wesley Flores

Christian Gutterrez

Robert Justino

Matthew Liu

Aaron Lucena

Rohith Nalamalapu

Audrin Pajarillo

Kelvin Truong

Jade Polidura

Michael McQuay

Matthew Ortiz

Hayden Schumann

Sorahb Surana

Catlyn Vargas

Armondo Velasquez

**Additional Camera**

Nicola Benizzi

Ezra Bookstein

Zachary Halberd

Lara Stolman

**Sound**

Peter Ginsburg

**Title Design**

Moniker New York

**Camera Assistants**

Megan Blackburn

Brett Checkelsky

**Production Assistants**

Kayla Barlotta

Jack Langlois

Olivia Palma

Mabel Valdez

**Still Photographers**

Nicole Chan

Andy Foster

Lewis Stolman

**Post Production Services**

Full Circle Post NYC

**Colorist**

Rob Burgos

**Online Editor**

Dustin Blowes

**Assistant Editors**

Lucas Groth

Johnny Bassett

**Post-Production Coordinator**

Carlye Reed

**Post-Production Assistant**

Amelia Underwood

**Supervising Sound Editor**

Matthew Polis

**Sound Editors**

Cody Ball  
Nicholas Schenck

**Re-recording Mixer**

Matthew Polis

**Music Assistants**

Ariel Marx  
James Newberry  
Jordi Nus

**Music published by**

Mark My Music (BMI)

**Audio Description by**

Michele Spitz

**Production Counsel**

Ben Feldman

**Production Accountant**

Barry Schechter

**Insurance**

Reiff & Associates

**Interns**

Riley Devin Burke  
Lizzie Minges  
Eva Tooley

**Thank you to our individual donors**

Katia Barker  
George Bridgewater  
Sandhya Chandrasekhar  
Christine Chessen  
Evelyn Delgado  
Karen Hamberger  
Cosmo Lee  
Jennifer Little  
Billy Munn  
Abigail Reier

Swim with Heart  
Lara Weinstein  
Joel Zand  
David Ziktowski

**Special Thanks**

Loreen Arbus  
Peter Bell  
Peter Broderick  
The Burns family  
The Chen family  
Ann Derry  
The Jersey Hammerheads  
The Raritan Bay Area YMCA  
Special Olympics International  
Special Olympics New Jersey  
Rob Burgos  
Mark Edenzon  
Henry Eshelman  
Karen Siff Exkorn  
Sue Flores  
Lee Cunningham Giblin  
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Vipula Surana  
Milton Tabbot  
Guadalupe Velasquez  
Stephanie Wernoch  
Debra Zimmerman  
Eduardo Garcia Zuniga

**Very special thanks**

The Belott family  
The Keuper family  
The Watzky family

**Completed with the support of:**

Independent Filmmaker Project

The Karma Foundation

The Loreen Arbus Disability Awareness Grant of  
New York Women in Film and Television

Woman of Her Word

Women Make Movies' Production Assistance Program

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