

# A NEW KIND OF LISTENING

[www.anewkindoflistening.com](http://www.anewkindoflistening.com)



## A NEW KIND OF LISTENING

A documentary film by Kenny Dalsheimer

Running Time: 57 Minutes  
USA Color Video 4x3 English w/English subtitles  
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## **Tagline:**

The story of a visionary director, a one-of-a-kind theater group, and a young man who could not speak, yet found the voice he had been looking for all his life.

## **Synopsis #1**

A NEW KIND OF LISTENING takes us inside the creative work of the Community Inclusive Theater Group, as director Richard Reho inspires cast members, some with disabilities, to be writers, actors and dancers. In the process, Chris, a young man who has never spoken a word and has been mislabeled profoundly mentally retarded, breaks through into stunning self-expression. Together they prove that a small community arts initiative has the power to transform lives. (73 words)

## **Synopsis #2**

A NEW KIND OF LISTENING takes us inside the creative work of the Community Inclusive Theater Group, as director Richard Reho inspires cast members, some with disabilities, to be writers, actors and dancers in an original collaborative performance piece. In the process, Chris, a young man who has never spoken a word and has been mislabeled profoundly mentally retarded, breaks through into stunning self-expression. Together they prove that a small community arts initiative has the power to transform lives.

*A New Kind of Listening* weaves together deep feelings, playfulness, vulnerability, and unexpected loss into a joyful, painful celebration of our connection to each other. The result is a groundbreaking film that will change your beliefs about intelligence, disability and what it takes to be heard. (125 words)

## **Synopsis #3**

A NEW KIND OF LISTENING takes us inside the creative work of the Community Inclusive Theater Group, as director Richard Reho inspires cast members, some with disabilities, to be writers, actors and dancers in an original collaborative performance piece. In the process, Chris, a young man who has never spoken a word and has been mislabeled profoundly mentally retarded, breaks through into stunning self-expression. Together they prove that a small community arts initiative has the power to transform lives.

The film is witness to Christian Mueller-Medlicott's early, unrecognized attempts to communicate, and to his journey from a lonely, withdrawn adolescent to co-director of the theater group. Using intimate footage of rehearsals and performances, synthesized voice recordings of Chris' words, archival home videos and interviews with cast members, the film is a remarkable record of events culminating in the group's performance of "The Song that Greens the Earth" at one of Raleigh's most prestigious theaters.

*A New Kind of Listening* weaves together deep feelings, playfulness, vulnerability, and unexpected loss into a joyful, painful celebration of our connection to each other. The result is a groundbreaking film that will change your beliefs about intelligence, disability and what it takes to be heard. (201 words)

Running Time – 57 min

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## Film Credits

Director, Cinematographer, Editor – Kenny Dalsheimer

Co-Producers – Polly Medicott and Kenny Dalsheimer

Theatrical Director – Richard Reho

Additional Camera – Lindy Chicola

Assistant Editor – Erika Simon

Editorial Consultant – Michael Davey

Online Editor – Ian Krabacher

Sound Editor – Aaron Keane

Executive Producer of Music – Eric Johnson

Original Music – Annie Graves and Aaron Keane

Pianist – Annie Graves

Sound Post – Blazing Music + Sound

Fiscal Sponsor – Southern Documentary Fund

Photography – Ava Johnson and Alison Latimer

Running time: 57 minutes

Release date: 2009

Subtitles/Captions in English

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## About the Film

**A New Kind of Listening** began its journey in January 2005, when Kenny Dalsheimer began documenting the year-long work of the Community Inclusive Theater Group in Durham, NC. The group's director, Richard Reho, brought a unique philosophy and vision to this work. His goal from the beginning was a collaborative process – one in which participants came together with no script and worked individually and collectively to develop a performance piece. Since its release, the film has supported the creation of the inclusive arts campaign, a grassroots effort to build community and inspire inclusive arts projects across the US and around the world.

Committed to radical listening and new ways of using the arts to build community, Richard Reho invited people with significant disabilities who were non-speaking to join the theater project. The group performed its original piece, "The Song that Greens the Earth", in November of 2005 at the Center for the Performing Arts in Raleigh, NC.

After several starts and stops with the film project, Kenny saw the potential to make a film that would be a catalyst for essential social change around issues of inclusion and the right to self-expression for people with disabilities. Kenny and co-producer Polly Medicott wanted the film to challenge unquestioned assumptions many people have about the intelligence and competence of people who are non-speaking. We felt strongly that the film could best convey this message by sharing Chris Mueller-Medicott's story of living with significant disabilities, and his intense struggle to be heard.

We see **A New Kind of Listening** as a vehicle for initiating dialogue about how diverse members of a community can support each other to express their unique perspectives. The film demonstrates and celebrates the power of inclusive arts to transform separate, unconnected individuals into a close-knit group of friends.

Our purpose in showing the film to as many people as possible all over the world, is to inspire and encourage inclusive arts initiatives in every community. In order to realize that vision, Polly has taken the film on the road in her tiny Teardrop camper, using community screening events to raise the level of accessibility to inclusive arts for people with disabilities and their fellow citizens. The film is being made available to advocacy and arts organizations, house party screenings, faith communities, universities and schools, conferences and trainings.

**A New Kind of Listening** is a powerful tool for making communities more inclusive and fostering a sense of real belonging for everyone. We welcome your ideas and input and invite you to join and support the inclusive arts campaign.

Kenny Dalsheimer,  
director/co-producer

Polly Medicott  
co-producer

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## Bios

**Kenny Dalsheimer** (Director, Cinematographer, Editor) is an award winning filmmaker, video producer is an award-winning filmmaker, video producer, and media educator and founder of The Groove Productions in Durham, NC. He has been producing locally inspired documentaries since 1996. His first film, *Go Fast, Turn Left* (1997), aired on UNC-TV's NC Visions '99. *Shine On: Richard Trice and the Bull City Blues* (2000) has screened and won awards at film festivals and tours across NC as part of NC Humanities Council's Road Scholars program. In 2007 he co-directed *Bending Space: Georges Rousse and the Durham Project* which screened at fifteen US and International film festivals and aired on PBS in North and South Carolina. He received a Triangle Access Award in 2009 from the Alliance of Disability Advocates for his efforts to promote inclusion and disability rights through his film *A New Kind of Listening*. Since 2001, Kenny has worked as a media arts educator with Creative Arts in the Public and Private Schools (CAPS) of the Durham Arts Council and has offered workshops at alternative schools and juvenile justice programs. He received his M.A. in Anthropology from Duke University in 1985 and taught middle-school Social Studies at Carolina Friends School between 1986–1996. Kenny has lived in Durham, NC since 1983 where he has worked, played and raised three children with his wife Marybeth.

**Polly Medicott** (Co-Producer) received her M. Ed. From West Georgia College and is a teacher, member of the Community Inclusive Theater Group, and Chris' mother. A passionate advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, she has served on the boards of the NC Assistive Technology Project, NC TASH, and First in Families of NC. Polly supports the right of non-speaking people to communicate, and the use of facilitated communication (FC) to allow their authentic self-expression. *A New Kind of Listening* is Polly's first film project. She lived in Durham, NC for twenty years and moved to the Asheville, NC area in 2009.

**Richard Reho** (Theatrical Director) formed the Community Inclusive Theatre Group in 2005, and directed the group in the creation and performance of "The Song That Greens the Earth." As part of his role as Director, Richard facilitated the building of relationships within the group, and its development over time into a true community. In the 1990's Richard lived in New Hampshire and helped lead a local grassroots movement for self-determination for people with disabilities. In partnership with people with disabilities and the community at large, he co-authored and directed several inclusive performances, with co-creative elements, including *Vincent*, a musical drama based on the life of Vincent Van Gogh, and *Tandy's Bishop*, a play based on the writings of Eve Hanf-Enos, a young woman with autism. Richard has worked with the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Governor's Advocacy Council For Persons With Disabilities, and for over 25 years has been a staunch advocate for self-determination, inclusion, and full civil rights for people with disabilities.

**Chris Mueller-Medicott** struggled all his life to be recognized as an intelligent human being who had important contributions to make. At age 20 he joined the Community Inclusive Theater Group, and became a catalyst for self-reflection and artistic expression for the whole cast. His insights, humor, and love for others created a strong presence which contributed to the community-building process and was instrumental in the creation of the performance piece. Ultimately, Chris was seen by Richard Reho and the others as the co-director of the theater project. At age 21, Chris died suddenly just a few months after performing *The Song That Greens the Earth* in November 2005.

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## Screenings

### **Cucalorus Film Festival**

Wilmington, NC, November 13, 2010

### **5<sup>th</sup> International Disability Film Festival, "Breaking Down Barriers"**

Sochi and Moscow, Russian Federation, 2010

### **NC TASH Conference**

Raleigh, NC, November 4, 2010

### **Turning Point Theater**

Peterborough, NH, October 4, 2010

### **Community, Arts and Development Forum**

UNC-Asheville, NC, September 29, 2010

### **Alternate Roots**

Arden, NC, August 12, 2010

### **Arts and Disability Community Forum**

Raleigh, NC, August 8, 2010

### **Limelight Film Showcase – Illuminating Disability in Film**

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada May 2010

### **Jubilee! Community Church**

Asheville, North Carolina, March 2010

### **Sustainable Cinema Series**

Pittsboro, North Carolina, February 2010

### **Picture This...International Film Festival**

Calgary, Alberta, Canada February 2010

### **Ashland University**

Ashland, Ohio, November 2009

### **The Internatioal Short Film Festival, "The Way We Live"**

Munich, Germany, November 2009

### **Community Screening**

Durham, North Carolina, October 2009

# The Herald-Sun

Durham, North Carolina

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2009

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSING YOURSELF

### Documentary spotlights inclusive theater group

By Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan

DURHAM -- Being able to express yourself isn't as easy for some as it is for others. Chris Mueller-Medlicott couldn't speak, but that didn't mean he didn't understand. Cerebral palsy prevented him from using his physical voice, but his message still resonated through different means.

Mueller-Medlicott is the focus of a new documentary from Durham filmmaker Kenny Dalsheimer. He began filming "A New Kind of Listening" to focus on an inclusive theater group in Durham that used the arts to facilitate the expression of self by people of all abilities. Mueller-Medlicott of Durham, who was part of the theater group, died suddenly of pneumonia during the filming, in the spring of 2006. After several months on hold, Dalsheimer returned to the film with a renewed focus, encouraged by Mueller-Medlicott's mother, Polly Medlicott, who became co-director.

Now Medlicott will take "A New Kind of Listening" on the road to share her son's message, and the film's message, with audiences everywhere. She wants to dispel the notion that someone who cannot communicate verbally doesn't comprehend what's going on.

Dalsheimer hopes the film will present a message of inclusion and foster dialogue about "being truly inclusive, being human, being able to communicate in other ways," he said. The film progresses at a slow pace, he said, because that models what communities need to do -- move at the pace of others.

"The power of film is that it can draw people into a world they're not familiar with. It's just getting them to have a different way of thinking about people when they pass them on the street or at a party," Dalsheimer said. He is founder of The Groove Productions, housed in the Bull City Arts Collaborative downtown.

Richard Reho started the inclusive theater group, now called Turning Point Theater, in 2004. The dozen people involved have become a tight knit group of friends. A new project is in the works, a musical drama about the life of Vincent van Gogh. Reho said he is always looking for new people who bring different gifts and experiences into the project. He casts a wide, inclusive net, he said, to people of all abilities and backgrounds.

Reho worked on inclusive performance projects in New Hampshire before moving to Durham. He wants to use theater to help people find their voices. The play featured in "A New Kind of Listening" began rehearsals in December 2004 and Dalsheimer began filming the next month, following the group through its November 2005 performance in Raleigh. He edited the footage to tell Mueller-Medlicott's story, also adding home video footage from Medlicott.

Mueller-Medlicott first tried voice-assisted typing in 1999, but it wasn't until the theater project that he found his voice. It sometimes took hours to type a few sentences, as his muscle control was compromised. But when Dalsheimer came to visit and talked to Mueller-Medlicott about the production, he was determined to type out "Theater lets miscued years die" within a few minutes.

Before the theater group, Medlicott said her son didn't know people -- beyond family -- who were interested in what he was saying.

"Assumptions people make about people who are not speaking is that they're not in there," she said. "That is not so." Medlicott doesn't use the word "nonverbal" because, she said, that makes it appear there is no comprehension. "We make a lot of assumptions about persons with disabilities," she said. Medlicott thinks that the media contributes to it by using words that play people with disabilities as pitiful victims.

Reho said his theater productions don't create roles for people, but rather provides them means for moving toward deeper expression of themselves, of one's authentic self in relationship with others. He said he hopes the film will lead to workshops about building community and fostering inclusive co-creativity. Reho said he had envisioned co-directing with Mueller-Medlicott before his death. The group had been rehearsing the performance, called "The Song That Greens the Earth," for a conference in Greensboro when Mueller-Medlicott fell ill suddenly and died less than two days later at age 21.

Medlicott's son was her life before his death, and he still is, though her mission has changed. She wants to use her and her son's experiences to teach others. She sold her home in Durham and moved to the Weaverville area in western North Carolina near her parents in preparation of taking "A New Kind of Listening" on the road.

"I'd like to be able to talk to other parents, especially of children with disabilities and tell them -- don't make the same assumptions like I did. Don't just assume your child isn't able to be engaged in life. There's some way for them to communicate," she said. For years, Medlicott was focused on whether her son would be able to walk, not realizing that being able to express himself was more important.



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## Speechless, Not Mindless

By Jason Sanford

When **Chris Mueller-Medlicott** joined a unique Durham theater group in 2005, it sparked a major breakthrough.

**Richard Reho**, director of the Community Inclusive Theater Project, invited the young man with cerebral palsy to take part in a production. The experience brought Mueller-Medlicott new friends and a new voice, in the form of an assisted-typing method that helped him communicate.

"In the context of the theater group, he just blossomed, and he found a way to communicate," says his mother, **Polly Medlicott**. Her son wound up becoming co-director of the project. "It was just an amazing experience for him in what turned out to be the last year of his life."

Mueller-Medlicott died of pneumonia in 2006; he was 21. The loss devastated his mother, who'd devoted her life to him. Now, however, the Barnardsville resident has a new mission: She's taking a documentary about her son on the road, aiming to dispel assumptions about people with disabilities — and perhaps inspire other inclusive-theater projects.

*A New Kind of Listening* by Durham filmmaker **Kenny Dalsheimer** focuses on both Mueller-Medlicott's story and the theater project, which is based on the idea that the arts can help all people express themselves.

"We want to use the film to inform, inspire and encourage inclusive community arts to happen," says Medlicott, a co-producer. "Without any money or any particular set of resources, we created these amazing relationships. Disabled and nondisabled people found a way to be creative as a community and find their voices and express themselves," she notes. "This is the sort of thing that could happen anywhere."

Citing the movie's tag line, "Speechless does not equal mindless," Medicott says she wants to emphasize that just because someone can't communicate easily doesn't mean they don't understand what's happening around them. "In the disability world, you need to presume competence. You assume that they are in there and that they understand a lot more than you think."

*A New Kind of Listening* will be shown Sunday, March 7, at the Jubilee! Community in downtown Asheville. And the next day, the church will host a workshop titled "Connecting Authentically to People Who Live With Disability." Medicott says it will offer people a chance to explore feelings of fear, "or whatever else it is that keeps them from connecting with people of disabilities."

Medicott says she's excited about telling her son's story and seeing new arts projects spring up. Already, "Something interesting is happening" in Asheville after she helped bring together people from local churches as well as theater and advocacy groups. And by the time of the screening, says Medicott, "Hopefully we'll announce the next steps for the Asheville Inclusive Theater Project," which could include a series of improvisational activities.

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**PHOTOS** (High resolution photos available upon request)



Richard Reho and Chris Mueller-Medlicott rehearse a movement piece.



Chris Mueller-Medlicott and his mom, Polly Medicott, at theater group rehearsal.

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Chris Mueller-Medicott and theater group director Richard Reho perform in "The Song that Greens the Earth".



Polly Medicott and teardrop camper on grassroots tour.

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Kenny Dalsheimer, director and co-producer



Polly Medicott, co-producer

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