

My Life: Breaking Free

My Life: Breaking Free (CBBC, Salford, United Kingdom) is a 28-minute documentary for 8 to 14-year-olds about children with Down Syndrome. Cameras follow 12-year-olds Ruben, Harley and Nicole over the summer as they face fears, learn to do things themselves, and break free (cf. illustration 1). Ruben narrates the program. He explains the condition known as Down Syndrome (cf. illustration 2). He wants to be a champion swimmer and win medals (cf. illustration 3). Ruben's friend Harley wants to be a surfer (cf. illustration 4) and Nicole wants to date James, a boy she has known all her life and really likes (cf. illustration 5). The three engage in swimming, surfing, and drama performance with other children, most of whom do not have Down Syndrome. At first, some things don't go as well as they hope and they experience a range of emotions: nervousness, frustration, loss of confidence and excitement (cf. illustration 6). Families, coaches and friends meet with the children and provide encouragement (cf. illustration 7). After much rehearsing, Nicole succeeds in delivering her lines on stage in front of the audience in a large theater (cf. illustration 8). Harley wins a trophy in the surfing competition and Ruben makes the Great Britain swim team. The stories of these three children are interwoven skillfully into a portrait of perseverance and courage.

My Life: Breaking Free was a fifth place finalist in the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014 in the 7-11 non-fiction category.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS' OPINION

International experts shared their opinions about *My Life: Breaking Free* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014. Some experts loved the program and others were torn by it. Experts agreed that there are cultural and historical differences in understanding Down Syndrome. An expert from Brazil described how children with the condition were once hidden in Italy and often mistreated in Brazil. He noted several programs about Down Syndrome were made in his country recently. Several experts expressed concern about the adult interviews in the program, because these adult moments felt like they were not children's television. Others mentioned the use of cussing. Some experts thought that it would be technically difficult to work with these children.

"For Cuba it is difficult to tackle this type of topic because people don't have the experience to deal with Down Syndrome people. You need a trained camera man and people who want to be videotaped, to be part of this and exposed to it. For me it is very important that we see them and know that they exist." (female expert, Cuba)

"This is a very important issue." (male expert, Brazil)

"Hardest to stage because you cannot manipulate children with Down Syndrome. I am not very experienced with this, but you see how the children relate. You see them overcoming, whether they have Down Syndrome or not. Children with Down Syndrome experience love. They asked their parents to go dating, so you see it as an ordinary person would" (female expert, Phillipines)



Ill. 1: Life stories of three children are woven together



Ill. 2: Ruben explains how Down Syndrome occurs



Ill. 3: In his bedroom, Ruben discusses his swimming medals

Screenshots from *My Life: Breaking Free* © CBBC



III. 4: Harley participates in a week-long surfing camp



III. 5: Nicole's life-long friend James asks her on a date



III. 6: Harley has setbacks and builds life skills while surfing



III. 7: Ruben expresses his feelings about best friend Hannah



III. 8: Nicole succeeds in delivering her lines in the play

"You felt the emotions of the children were real." (male expert, Mexico)

"The casting...it's not like one Down Syndrome is like the other. Not every kid with Down Syndrome is that easy. (female expert, Germany)

"I'm torn. Parents were in interview situations, but at some point, the mom had a voiceover and I immediately went into an adult mode." (male expert, Denmark)

"Even as an adult I found it touching. It succeeded in reaching a target which can relate to those things. I'm inspired; it inspires the adults." (male expert, Norway)

"We have so little of this programming for children, adults, and educators. This would be tremendous for children without disabilities to understand Down Syndrome." (female expert, United States)

"It felt forced into formats. There were three different stories. I think it should have been three different programs." (female expert, Norway)

"I think we really achieved normalizing the disability....putting them on a platform to be celebrated, included." (female expert, United Kingdom)

Elizabeth Spezia, PhD student, Southern Illinois University, USA

Screenshots from My Life: Breaking Free © CBBC

Target Audience 7.43	Idea 7.78	Script 7.51	Realization 8.02
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2014			