



Presents



**A Feature Documentary**

Directed by **Anna Toomey**

Produced by **David Beal, Sian Edwards-Beal, Chris Farrell and Larry Mullen Jr.**

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

RT: 75 mins. | USA | 2024

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## **LOGLINE**

"Left Behind" tells the powerful story of a group of passionate mothers who unite to create the first public dyslexic school in New York City, the largest school district in the country.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Dyslexia impacts one in five children worldwide, yet while 20% of the population has this learning difference, a staggering 48% of incarcerated individuals are dyslexic. Families without financial means often lack access to essential testing and tailored curricula that their children desperately need. In a city like New York, where 70% of students are Black and Brown, around 200,000 children are left without the support they need to thrive. Kareem Weaver, who heads the Education Committee for the NAACP in Oakland, CA, and a key figure in our film, calls this the defining civil rights issue of our time.

Dyslexia is not a barrier to success; many high-profile dyslexics—including 35% of entrepreneurs, filmmakers, musicians, and actors—prove that. Their unique brain wiring can hinder letter recognition but enhance creativity, risk-taking, and innovative thinking. This film emphasizes the loss of potential brilliance and showcases a group of mothers fighting for equality in our education system. We aim to spark outrage, inspire hope, and ignite a desire for action among viewers.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The idea for "Left Behind" emerged after our son received a dyslexia diagnosis. At just six years old, he entered first grade full of excitement, only to discover that he couldn't grasp letters and struggled to read, unlike his peers. This experience robbed him of his curiosity and confidence, leaving him feeling inadequate and isolated. Our public school failed to recognize his dyslexia and could not provide the necessary support. As parents, we felt stripped of our rights to public education. Conversations across the nation revealed countless parents sharing a similar plight.

As a storyteller and journalist, I felt a profound responsibility to truthfully convey their experiences and highlight the absurdity of a system that fails children with this common learning disability—especially those from low-income families and marginalized communities. This serves as a clear example of educational inequity, which demands our attention.

Discovering the alarming number of dyslexic inmates opened my eyes to a troubling reality. I began to ask how such a trend develops and what factors contribute to this school-to-prison pipeline for dyslexics.

When I met Fatima and her son Aden, I saw a representation of the relentless struggle parents endure when they suspect their child may have a reading disability. The financial burden of diagnosing a child can reach up to \$8,000, and Fatima faced additional bias as a single Black mother. The fear in her eyes when we first met was palpable; she understood all too well the dire consequences of her son's illiteracy and felt genuine anger at being repeatedly dismissed by the school system—a betrayal that could lead to her son's failure.

Mothers have always fought for fair education rights, whether against segregation or for appropriate special education. During my research, I encountered an article detailing five mothers whose children were dyslexic or involved in dyslexia education and wanted to take on an outdated system.

My vision for the film was to capture a documentary-style narrative showcasing these mothers as pioneers of change, which is why I chose to follow the Literacy Academy

Collective on their mission to open a public school. I aimed to represent disruptors—the relentless drive, intelligence, and passion of these women struck me instantly. Each approached the issue from diverse backgrounds and skill sets, from teachers to political activists to clinical psychologists. I realized their journey would be challenging, but these mothers were unwavering in their fight, and I wanted to honor that resilience in this film. Although I was uncertain about the outcome of their efforts, I knew their journey was worthy of documentation.

A significant challenge I faced was conveying the unique emotional struggles that children with dyslexia encounter without exposing their most vulnerable moments on camera. Watching my own son navigate these challenges highlighted the immense toll dyslexia can take on a child's self-esteem. It felt unjust to present those experiences so overtly on screen. Many of the children in the film experience anxiety and frustration due to their reading difficulties. Therefore, I made a conscious decision to highlight their voices and employed animation to illustrate some of their tougher moments. It is only at the film's conclusion, after Lucas finds joy and self-acceptance at a new school, that he confidently reads aloud on camera and shares his feelings.

This film aspires to portray these mothers as champions rather than victims, embodying the struggle of both advocates for the school and their children's futures. A common tactic used by schools is to deflect responsibility onto parents, suggesting they have not engaged in reading with their child or implying that the child is simply not trying hard enough.

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***Anna Toomey, 2024***

## FILM TEAMS BIOS

### **Anna Toomey – Director**

Anna Toomey is an independent filmmaker who started her career as an Emmy Award-winning producer for ABC News, Good Morning America, ABC News long-form unit, and Peter Jennings Reporting. She worked on projects including The Gun Fight, an inside look at the NRA, The Century, Beatles Anthology, and the six-part series In the Jury Room. Anna developed and directed her first feature-length independent documentary, Left Behind, after her son was diagnosed with dyslexia. She discovered the inadequate resources for millions of children across the country. She owns her own production company, Sandy Dog Productions, where she works on independent film projects.

### **David Beal – Producer**

Co-Founder, CEO of Green Hummingbird Entertainment. David is a film, television and music producer who co-founded Green Hummingbird in 2014 to develop and produce thought-provoking storytelling. Prior, David served as the President of National Geographic Entertainment, and the President of Palm Pictures. David is a producer on all of Green Hummingbirds' television and film projects including Ordinary Angels (Hilary Swank/Alan Ritchson), Submergence (James McAvoy/ Alicia Vikander), All Nighter (J.K. Simmons/ Emile Hirsch), and award-winning feature documentaries such as HERE. IS. BETTER. exploring therapies for PTSD and Kenny Scharf: When Worlds Collide. As a music producer he produced movie themes such as the Grammy-nominated theme from Mission Impossible, Smoke Signals, and Mortal Kombat. He also performed with artists such as Joe Cocker, Steven Van Zandt, Julian Lennon, Madonna, and Peter Gabriel. Additionally, David has teamed up with artist Gregory Colbert (Ashes and Snow) on his soon to be announced upcoming exhibitions.

### **Sian Edwards-Beal – Producer**

Edwards-Beal is an Emmy award winning producer who has created television and film projects for networks including HBO, the BBC, National Geographic, Channel 4, A&E and Food Network. Sian began her career directing theatre in London, England then moved to NYC where she was awarded the Arthur Krim Award for producing at Columbia University Film School and worked on the Woody Alan film Celebrity. She co-founded Teale-Edwards Productions where she oversaw U.S. production on a wide range of programming for international companies including the BBC's investigative documentary series Panorama, So Graham Norton, 2000 Today, Absolutely Fabulous in

NY, and Channel 4's Da Ali G Show. She went on to create and produce a variety of programming including Ovation's: Anatomy of a Closet and In Search of Food, Cooking Channel's: Eden Eats, Log on & Eat, and Simply Laura, and Food Network's: Good Deal, along with six seasons of Everyday Italian with Giada de Laurentiis garnering Emmy wins for Outstanding Lifestyle Series, Outstanding Directing for a Lifestyle series and Outstanding Lifestyle host. Sian also served as Executive Producer on HBO's Hacking Democracy, which was nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Journalism and as Co-Director and Co-Producer on the National Geographic documentary, The Dalai Lama: Peace and Prosperity, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Sian is currently Co-CEO at Green Hummingbird Entertainment recently producing the multi award-winning feature documentary HERE. IS. BETTER.

### **Chris Farrell – Producer**

Chris Farrell is a Partner in Velvet Strand, the production company he co-founded with Larry Mullen Jr. Farrell most recently produced the feature documentary Jimmy Carter Rock & Roll President. Earlier in his career he was part of the team that produced independent films "Getting Off" and "Spin the Bottle," which led to Gill Holland and Kevin Chinoy launching their production company cineBLAST! Chris subsequently partnered with Chinoy to start Planet Impact, the non-profit incubator. Planet Impact in turn launched "The 24-Hour Plays on Broadway." The 24-Hour Plays ran for 15 years with 25 events in New York, Los Angeles and London, raising \$10 million to support innovation in education. Farrell is involved with a number of charities and previously served on the Board of Directors of the Surfrider Foundation and the Joyful Heart Foundation. Farrell is a well-known corporate advisor having advised large corporations in the retail, consumer and media sectors on international strategy for over 30 years.

### **Larry Mullen Jr. – Producer**

Larry Mullen Jr. is the drummer and founding member of U2. He has recorded 15 studio albums and received 22 Grammy Awards and has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and awarded the Kennedy Centre Honors. Mullen has worked on numerous side projects during his career. In 1990, he produced and arranged the Ireland national football team's song "Put 'Em Under Pressure" for the 1990 FIFA World Cup. In 1996, he also produced and arranged a dance re-recording of the "Theme from Mission: Impossible". He has also collaborated with musicians including Robbie Robertson Emmylou Harris and others. Mullen has produced and acted in

films, most notably in *Man on the Train* (2011) and *A Thousand Times Good Night* (2013).

### **Juju Chang - Executive Producer**

Chang is a multiple Emmy Award-winning co-anchor of ABC News' "Nightline." She also reports regularly for "Good Morning America" and "20/20." Chang's decades of reporting converged in two hour-long prime time specials in 2021. She co-anchored an ABC News Live special "Stop The Hate: The Rise In Violence Against Asian Americans." And after the mass shooting at three Asian-themed spas, Chang co-anchored and reported from the scene for an "ABC News 20/20" breaking news special "Murder In Atlanta", which won a Front Page award in 2022. Her long-form storytelling includes a critical examination of the controversial "Remain in Mexico" immigration policy, told through the eyes of one pregnant woman and her family among the 60,000 asylum seekers camped for months along the Rio Grande. Chang's award-winning report "Trans and Targeted" on violence against transgender women of color across the country caps a series of her stories on LGBTQ+ issues. Chang won a GLAAD award for her story about Matthew Shepard's murder and the legacy his parents built in his honor. Chang has profiled newsmakers like Joe Biden and Oprah Winfrey as well as high-profile celebrities. A former news anchor for "Good Morning America," Chang joined ABC News just after college as an entry-level desk assistant in 1987 and rose to become a producer for "World News Tonight." After reporting for KGO-TV in San Francisco and the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne in Washington, she co-anchored the overnight show "World News Now." Chang's work has been recognized with numerous awards, including multiple Emmys, Gracies, a DuPont, a Murrow and Peabody Awards.

### **Zofia Moreno & Jean Reno Executive Producers**

Zofia Moreno is a producer and philanthropist whose work includes sitting on the board of The Paris Brain Institute of America and being a member of The Columbia Thyroid, Parathyroid, and Adrenal Center Task Force. After finding out that their youngest son has dyslexia, Moreno became an active supporter of The Windward School. Zofia was the face of Ralph Lauren for many years prior to acting in a number of films including the *Pink Panther 2*. She is co-CEO of D'Artagnan's "Jean Reno Olive Oil" brand.

Jean Reno is an international film and television actor who has appeared in numerous films including: *The Da Vinci Code*, *Mission Impossible*, *Ronin*, *Les Visiteurs*, *Wasabi*, *The Big Blue*, *Hector and the Search for Happiness*, *Godzilla*, *La Femme Nikita*, and *Leon: The Professional*. He has been nominated or has received multiple awards

throughout his career including the European Film Academy Achievement in the of World Cinema, The César for Best Supporting Actor for The Big Blue, Best Actor for The professional and les Visiteurs. He has also received multiple French civilian honors including Chevalier de l'ordre national du Mérite, Chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres and Commandeur dans l'ordre de la Legion d'Honneur, the highest French order of merit. His philanthropic activities include The Paris Brain Institute of America (PBIA), Global Gift and The Windward School.

### **About Abramorama**

Abramorama is a leading innovator in worldwide event cinema, theatrical distribution, marketing and rights management for nonfiction, narrative and music films. For more than 20 years Abramorama has provided strategic services to Intellectual Property owners including filmmakers, networks, record labels, platforms and artists including The Beatles, Dolly Parton, Led Zeppelin, Metallica, Pearl Jam, Neil Young, Melanie Martinez, Laurie Anderson, Jimi Hendrix, Green Day, National Geographic, AARP, Apple, Amazon, HBO, Hulu, Universal Music Group, Atlantic Records, Warner Music Group, and Sony, among others. Abramorama is expert at maximizing reach, engagement and Impact ROI for films created for target audiences. Abramorama creates a unique distribution and audience development plan for each title, engaging a global network of cinemas, digital media outlets, and marketing partners. For more information, visit [abramorama.com](http://abramorama.com).



## END CREDITS

**Director:** Anna Toomey

**Produced-By:** David Beal, Sian Edwards-Beal, Chris Farrell, Larry Mullen Jr.

**Producers:** Mari Keiko Gonzalez ACE, Anna Toomey

**Writer:** Karen K. H. Smith

**Executive Producers:** Juju Chang, Lisa Domenico Brooke, Dan Fougere, Stephanie Fougere, Sarah E. Johnson, Ellen Lovejoy, Spencer Myers, Zofia Moreno, Jean Reno

**Director of Photography:** James Fideler

**Editor:** Brittany Kaplan

**Composer:** Olivier Manchon, Clare Manchon

**Animation:** Ikartoons Animation

## CAST

**Cast:** Aden Geidi, Fatima Geidi, Naomi Pena, Lucas Torres- Pena, Jonah Torres- Pena, Johanna Garcia, Ruth Genn, Emily Hellstrom, Jeanine Kiely, Freya Sakamoto, Soleil Azkuy, Zaiden Azkuy, Kareem Weaver, Luciano-Elijah Valencia, Hektad

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCERS

**Co-Producer:** Chelsi Bullard

**Consulting Producer:** Hilderbrand Pelzer III

**Associate Producer:** Erin Richmond

**Associate Producer for Green Hummingbird Entertainment:** Katie Asch

## ADDITIONAL EDITORS

**Additional Editors:** Michael Dowling, AM Peters

#### **ASSISTANT EDITORS**

**Assistant Editor:** Jason Yue

**Additional Assistant Editor:** Kathy Hinh

#### **ADDITIONAL CINEMA PHOTOGRAPHY**

**Additional Cinema Photography:** DJ Carroll, Geideon Fideler, Marcin Kapron, Anna Toomey, Jason Yue

**Aerial Cinema Photography:** Marcin Kapron

#### **SOUND**

**Sound Recordist:** Fred Helm

#### **ADDITIONAL SOUND RECORDISTS**

**Additional Sound Recordist:** Adriano Bravo, Kevin Crawford, Kevin Kniowski, Dylan Lappin, Michael Lawson, Nil Tiberi

#### **PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS**

**Production Assistants:** Geideon Fideler, Oliver Fideler

#### **HAIR & MAKE UP**

**Hair & Make Up:** Maria Charina, Amanda Markoya

#### **ANIMATION**

**Animation:** iKartoons Animation

**Directors:** Edino Israel Ferreyra, Julian Van Bores

**Executive Producers:** Peter Lopez, Jorge Otero

**Production Manager:** German Alonso Rodriguez

**Production Coordinators 2D Animation:** Deivi Alejandra Restrepo

**Production Assistant:** Jonathan Emilio Rodriguez

**Production Administrators:** Daniel Velez Carvajal, David Andres Mesa

**Art Director:** Ulises J. Rios

**Character Rigging:** Angel

**Scenic Design:** Francisco de la Cruz

**Background Layout / Color:** Francisco de la Cruz

**Story Board Illustrators:** Ornella Antista Juan Fernando Valera

**Character Layout:** Steven Cardenas

**Animators:** Diego Alejandra Galindo, Juan David Valencia Castillo, Rafael Luna, Walter Alvarez, Manuela Toro, Llene Moreno, Juan Camilo Berrio, Stiven Pulgarin, Pedro Yañez, Marilyn Castaño

**Composition Assembly:** Andres Cardona

**Editing and Composition:** Mauricio Otero, Camilo Rey, Johan David Hipolito, David Rodriguez,

**Post-Production Director:** Mauricio Otero

**Motion Graphics and VFX:** Camilo Andrés Rey, Johan David Hipolito

**Production Post Production Coordinator:** Erika Peña

## **POST PRODUCTION SERVICES**

**Post Production Services & Sound Facility:** Skyline Finishing

**Colorist:** Will Cox

**Online Editor:** Ben Kiviat

**Re-Recording Mixer:** Mike Frank

**Sound Effects Editor:** Alex Loew

**Dialogue Editor:** Mike Frank

**DI Producer:** Wendi Litteral

**DI Mangers:** Ben Kiviat & Kevin Allen Caby

**Deliverables Technician:** Daniel Padberg Bartoo

**DI Technical Supervisor:** Sandy Patch

**DI Executive Producers:** Will Cox & Jessica Hinds

**Director of Engineering:** Craig Penner

## **POST PRODUCTIONS**

**After Effects:** Hovig Soghomonian

**Post Production Supervisor Sandy Dog Productions:** Carolyn Herrera Lopez

**Additional Sound Design:** Fred Helm

## **INSURANCE**

**Production Insurance provided by:** Front Row Insurance

## **ARCHIVAL**

**Archival Footage courtesy of:** Getty Images, Pond 5, NBC News, Comedy Central  
The Daily Show, ABC News, WABC, Fox 5 News, CBS News, The Young Turks, NY1

### **ORIGINAL SONGS**

“One of Us”

Performed by Larry Mullen Jr. & David Baron, featuring vocals by Donna Lewis

Written by Larry Mullen Jr. & David Baron

“Between the Lines”

Performed by Larry Mullen Jr. & GAYLE

Written by Larry Mullen Jr., GAYLE, Reed Berin & David Baron

### **LEGAL COUNSEL**

**Legal Council:** Javier Feito, Esq., Leslie José, Esq., SMGQ Law

**Clearance Council:** Donaldson Callif Perez, Dale Nelson, Kelly M. Johnson

### **ACCOUNTANT**

**Accountant:** Zackin Zimyeski Sullivan, CPA LLC

### **PUBLICITY**

**Poster:** Ikaroons Animation

**Publicist:** Rebecca Shapiro, Shore Fire Media

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

**Special Thanks:** Chris Toomey, Elizabeth & Charlie Toomey, Fiona Farrell, Rory & Vera Farrell, Olivia, Lily & Jackson Beal, Wellesley Wild, Anne & Shep Wild, Maria Cuomo Cole, Erica Hill, Kristie Simon

### **THANKS-1**

**Very Special Thanks:** Literacy Academy Collective

### **THANKS-2**

Child Mind Institute, Decoding Dyslexia, Dyslexia Advocacy Action Group, Dyslexia Alliance for Black Children, Eye to Eye, International Dyslexia Association, Promise Project, The Stephen Gaynor School, Tremaine Foundation, Reading League, understood.org, The Winward School, The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity

### **THANKS-3**

Chris & Melissa Avery, Blake Baucom, Colleen Baucom, Carolyn Beyrich, Mario Bilotta, Catherine Rush & Adrian Blue, Julie Bohan, Bret & Courtney Bowerman, Julie Bridgham, Dami & John Burckin, Paul & Michele Cashman, Indra & Christina Chandra, Liz Maccie & Stephen Chbosky, Kevin Chinoy, Leslie Cohen, Bill & Lisa Collins, Chuck & Ana Collins, Susan Courtney, Peter & Carrie Crow, Michael & Nina Daum, Andres & Kyle deLasa, Deena Demasi, Tom Demry, Bernarnd & Vivian DeRaad, Sumayyah Din, Kara DioGuardi, Walter & Sarah Donovan, Charlie Doolittle, Jed & Carolyn Dorfman, Ilia Edwards, Carlos & Amra Garcia-Tunon, Lucy Godman, Danielle Goldsmith, Kelly Harold, Stacy & Vaughn Harvey, Jackie Hassell, Debra Hellinger, Amanda & Kayvan Heravi, John & Courtney Hewson, Deborah Hodge, John Hoffman, Bridget Johns, Scott & Patricia Jones, Danny Kahn, Michael Katz, Kennedy Children's Center, Jack Knowles, Sharon Larpenito, Emma Lefever, Peter Lopez, Susan MacLaury, Topher Margolin, Mary McDowell School, Rev. Lisa Mason, Erin Matthews, Finn McDonald, Jon & Kate McDonald, Ashley & Joel McNeill, Debbie Meyer, Lisa Brien & Peter Mundheim, Greg Myers, Mary Olson-Menzel, Bridget & Vincent Palmieri, Ryan Palmieri, Melissa Pianko, Gillian & Darin Prozes, Nathan & Lauren Radcliffe, Joanna Hagan Rego, Jon Reiss, Brooke Molinaroli & Nick Robinson, Shawn Robinson, Louis Rodriguez, Ollie Rodriguez, Rafael Rodriguez, Vincent Rubino, Jay Russell, Kristina Russo, Joe Saparone, Anthony Scaramucci, Tom & Louisa Schneider, Aaron & Emmy Schwimmer, Jennifer Scruby, Kim Sears, Sally Shaywitz, Zachary Sigel, Kristie & Aaron Simon, Andrew & Kerry Sneyd, Michele Sotto, Clay & Tom Tarcia, Bernadette Toomey, Martha Rogers & Dan Toomey, Brian Hartman & Jenny Toomey, Peter Treadway, Anjelina Vazquez, Victoria Vazquez, Clare & Jay Walker, Nancy Han & Scott Wapner, Paula Weinstein, Mary Wharton, Mark Wike, Alan Wilkis, Jaime Williamson, Jeff & Laxmi Wordham, Gillian Pinchin, & Bernard Yancovich, Erica Hill & David Yount

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