



*Breaking  
Silence*

**FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**





## DEAR SCREENING HOST,

Thank you so much for hosting a screening of *Breaking Silence*. By hosting a screening event, you are now a crucial part of the Odyssey Impact's social impact campaign to educate, engage, and uplift the complex and multifaceted ways deaf/hard of hearing and CODAs are uniquely impacted by the criminal legal system to encourage much-needed reforms and change.

We hope that you can use the film to uplift the following goals in support of people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated who are **deaf or hard of hearing**, not considered "**deaf enough**," or **Children of Deaf Adults (CODA)**:

- **Raise awareness** of the need for education and training, which can result in the prevention of incarceration and healing after incarceration;
- **Uplift** preventive measures needed to keep these communities from becoming trapped in the criminal justice system;
- **Address** the unique stigma experienced by these communities;
- **Interrogate** the unequal systems that perpetuate isolation and language deprivation due to a lack of access to effective communication and quality accommodations;
- **Examine** the limitations of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- **Spotlight** the urgent need to create, fund, and support accessible reentry programs, peer-to-peer support programs, and trauma-informed counseling

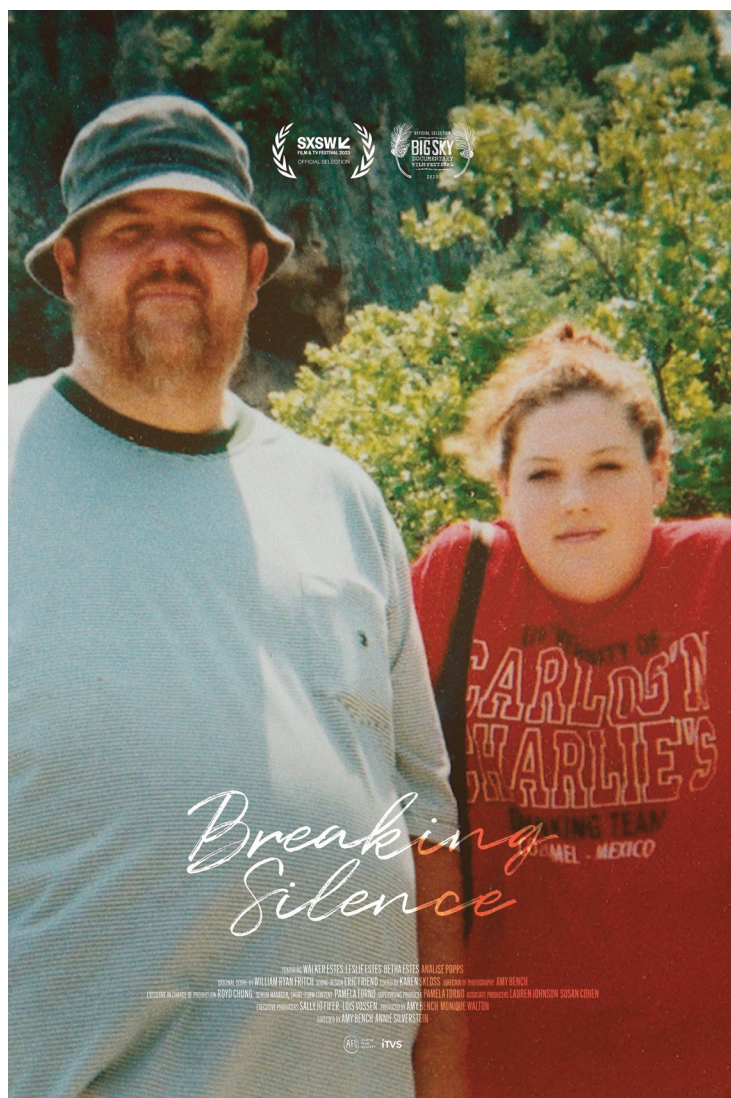
Screening *Breaking Silence* is only the first step. The story within the film is a springboard to more extensive discussions you can have within your family and community.

Thank you for bringing *Breaking Silence* to your community. Now, let's get to work!

Sincerely,

**The Odyssey Impact Team**

# ABOUT THE FILM



## BREAKING SILENCE

*Breaking Silence* is a verité portrait of Walker and Leslie Estes, a deaf father and CODA daughter from Baton Rouge, LA, who work together upon Leslie's release from prison—driven by their shared experiences of incarceration and deafness—to help others in their community affected by the prison system. It is an intimate exploration into parenthood, regret, and, ultimately, healing.

Directed by  
**AMY BENCH &  
ANNASOPHIA "ANNIE" SILVERSTEIN**

*Breaking Silence* is a co-production of *Breaking Silence* LLC and **Independent Television Service (ITVS)**, with funding provided by the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)**. Additional funding is provided by the **Austin Film Society**.

# MEET THE FILMMAKERS



## AMY BENCH

(Co-Director, Co-Producer, Cinematographer)

Documentary filmmaker and cinematographer Amy Bench is drawn to the immediacy of film and photography for telling stories of resilience and community. Her work explores immigration/migration narratives, communication access for the Deaf, reproductive justice, and LGBTQ+ rights, and involves both animation and live action as a way to connect emotionally with audiences. Her short film "More Than I Want to Remember" (2022) won an NAACP Image Award, a Social Impact Media (SIMA) Award, and was shortlisted for an Oscar in 2023. "More Than I Want to Remember" won Best Animated Short at the Tribeca Film Festival, Best International

Short Documentary at Hot Docs, and is distributed by MTV Documentary Films on Paramount+. Her most recent short film, "Breaking Silence," (2023) won both the Jury Award and the Audience Award in its category at SXSW. As a cinematographer, Amy collaborates closely with directors, often working in the cinema vérité tradition. She was the cinematographer on the Emmy award-winning short "Trans in America: Texas Strong" (2019) about young trans activist Kai Shappley and her formerly conservative mother, Kimberly. "Texas Strong" grew into the feature "Mama Bears," which will make its broadcast premiere on PBS's "Independent Lens" in June 2023. She is a cinematographer on upcoming features and series from Julie Cohen (RBG, Julia), Kim Snyder (Newtown, Us Kids), Josephine Decker (Shirley), and Louie Psihoyos (The Cove).



## ANNASOPHIA "ANNIE" SILVERSTEIN

(Co-Director, Co-Producer)

Annie Silverstein is an award-winning filmmaker based in Austin. After earning her MFA in Film Production from the University of Texas, Annie's short film, Skunk won the jury award at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival – Cinéfondation. Before attending film school, Annie spent ten years as a youth worker and media educator, collaborating on community film based projects with Native American youth on reservations across Washington State. She co-founded and served as Artistic Director at Longhouse Media, an indigenous film organization based in Seattle.

Annie recently premiered her debut feature, BULL, at the Cannes Film Festival in Un Certain Regard. BULL won the top awards at the Deauville American Film Festival and was nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards, including the Best Male Lead, Best Cinematography, and the 'Someone to Watch' Award. Annie is a Sundance Screenwriting and Directors Lab Fellow.



# ARTISTS/DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

As with many documentaries, at the beginning of this project, we had a different idea about the film we were making than what it became. We wanted to explore the staggering number of mothers incarcerated in Texas, often for drug-related issues, by focusing on one woman's journey of re-entry. We met Leslie 2 weeks after her release in November 2019 through an organization called Truth Be Told. Before we started filming, the pandemic hit and got to know Leslie better through Zoom interviews. It quickly became apparent how integral her deaf father, Walker, was in her life and re-entry. We began to understand that her experience in the prison system sparked Walker's activism on behalf of deaf incarcerated people. Suddenly, it was clear that Leslie's relationship with her dad and Walker's work were important parts of the story.

We had never thought about deaf people in prison before or the lack of access they face. As hearing filmmakers, we educated ourselves and interrogated ourselves daily on accessibility issues and how to approach both the filming and editing process. We were very fortunate to find wonderful consultants like Mei Kennedy, whose deaf father was in federal prison for 7 years, 6 of those without access to a video phone. She and her father's experiences are integral to highlighting the issues discussed in this film and the nuances of filming with deaf prisoners.

We also worked with Lauren Johnson, who was formerly incarcerated and now works for the Texas ACLU on criminal justice reform. Lauren shared a similar history of addiction as Leslie and used her personal experiences to help guide our storytelling. A crucial moment in the process was conducting a work-in-progress screening with an audience of deaf activists, formerly incarcerated mothers, formerly incarcerated deaf people, and filmmakers. This mix of backgrounds gave us insight that deeply informed our edit. Regarding the tone of the piece, the humor, vitality, and resilience came from our protagonists.

There were many reveals for us as filmmakers: Walker's work and issues around accessibility for deaf prisoners, and this film, at its heart, is a father-daughter story. We are parents and deeply connected with Walker and Leslie's beautiful, hard, messy relationship. Walker's love, total commitment to his daughter, and regrets. They have worked to understand each other and get closer because of what they've been through. We found their commitment to deepening their understanding of each other and capacity for forgiveness incredibly moving.

The most fulfilling aspect has been watching the effect participating in the film has had on their relationship. Our "unofficial" premiere was in a high school classroom at Big Sky. The students had many questions for Walker and Leslie. Afterward, Leslie shared that she hadn't known what Walker told the students. Working on the film together has helped heal past traumas, which is incredibly meaningful to us.



## PLANNING YOUR SCREENING

# USING THE FILM AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

- What goals do you have for the outcome of your screening event?
- What support is needed regarding the needs of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated who are deaf or hard of hearing, not considered "deaf enough," or Children of Deaf Adults (CODA)
- Are there other organizations, congregations, and/or community leaders who would benefit from attending this screening and could collaborate on a Call to Action?
- Are there models of action other communities have used that you could adopt in your community?



# STEPS TO HOSTING A SCREENING EVENT

**1 Decide when and how your audience will watch the film. You can give your audience a time frame to watch the film or set a specific time when everyone watches together.**

The film will be delivered as a password-protected Vimeo link a week from your event. If you have any questions, please let us know by sending an email to [screenings@odyssey-impact.org](mailto:screenings@odyssey-impact.org).

**2 If you choose, invite a moderator and/or panelists for a post-screening discussion.**

We always recommend inviting panelists and/or moderators from your community. This will help guide the conversation to something specifically relevant to your community.

**3 Depending upon your audience, create an RSVP system through Eventbrite, or a similar platform, to gather the email addresses of your audience members.**

Send the audience members the link to the pre-screening survey before the event.

**4 Send your audience the link to the film or set a time to watch together, and send invitations to the post-screening discussion.**

Some suggested ideas for post-screening discussion include a panel discussion, community Q&A, or an audience talkback. Suggested virtual platform options include Zoom, Google Hangouts, Facebook Live, Instagram Live, YouTube, Twitch, Webex, or CrowdCast.

**5 Publicize your event by using the promotional materials provided by the impact campaign and encourage your network and/or community to help spread the word by:**

- Promoting the screening on your local Spanish-speaking AM radio station
- Handing out flyers in your neighborhood
- Starting a phone or text chain via What's App
- Asking your clergy or other faith-leader to speak about the event on a Sunday

**6 Remind your audience before the event is over to fill out the post-screening survey via What's App. Take pictures/screenshots of the screening and the post-screening discussion.**

*Please note: If you are concerned about visibility, limit these photos to the back of people's heads, hands, and feet. Be particularly mindful to avoid school logos, license plates, and building or home addresses.*

**7 Engage in a post-screening activity and/or announce your call to action.**

**8 We want to hear about your event!**

Email [screenings@odyssey-impact.org](mailto:screenings@odyssey-impact.org) and let us know how it went! We welcome quotes, testimonials, and photos from your event!



# CONDUCTING PURPOSEFUL CONVERSATIONS



## I. GUIDELINES

The topics you will engage with in this conversation may be emotionally charged for all those involved. Engaging in a courageous conversation can be challenging and uncomfortable for many people. Creating and maintaining a purposefully brave space throughout the conversation allows each person to express themselves while respecting others.

Your job as a facilitator is not to help the group agree but to create and maintain an environment where everyone can participate in a discussion [around this film] in an ethical and honest capacity, even if in disagreement with someone's perspective.

### CREATING GROUP NORMS:

- The creation of conversation norms for the group. We recommend consensus-based decision-making for this process (fist-to-five and asking questions two ways are helpful consensus tools).
- You can start by offering transparency in this process and open with something like:

“ As a group, I'd like us to take some time to establish group norms for this conversation. We want to make space for everyone who wants to share about this topic/film. What are some needs you have that will make you feel brave enough to share your thoughts?”

- Give the group space to reflect and answer intentionally. You can use reframes to ask clarifying questions about anything unclear i.e.

“ What I hear you saying is \_\_\_\_\_, correct?”

- Below are some norms to consider offering to the group if no one explicitly raises them:



# CO-BRANDED GUIDELINES

## IN PERSON/GENERAL

- We ask that you show up in whatever way feels right for you.
- We invite you to be vulnerable with people you have met, and we hope you will share bravely in this space. It might look mostly like listening. We trust you to make that decision.
- If things come up for you unexpectedly, please prioritize taking care of yourselves in those moments. However, you need (you can exit the space, you can take an aside, you can close your eyes, you can take some deep breaths, etc.).
- Go slow and play with silence. We encourage you to lean into slowing down, asking the group to pause and ask clarifying questions. We should take the time to engage with these ideas and each other.
- If the sharing is personal, please respect everyone and their privacy within this group. Take the lessons you learn with you but leave the details of people's stories – *what's shared here stays here, and what's learned here leaves here*.
- During these sessions, be intentional with your language, avoid generalizations, and consider the impact it may have on people with different identities. Words are compelling.
- Unpack the perspective, not the person. When someone says something we disagree with, we can hear each other better if we focus on why we disagree with the idea or statement rather than whether the person who raised it is good or bad.
- Make Space, Take Space: Be aware of the space you take up. This conversation is meant to be collaborative and inclusive. If you notice that you are talking and taking up a lot of space in the discussion, consider making space for others by holding the silence and listening. If you notice that you are not talking, remember that we have this brave space together and encourage you to be courageous.
- We actively want to hear what you have to say! Privilege inevitably informs our relationships to conversation and space. If you find many places and spaces in the world where your voice is prioritized and valued, please actively focus on listening more than you speak.
- Owning intentions and impacts. We encourage you to acknowledge and discuss the intentions and the consequences when this conversation emotionally affects participants in the space.
- "One mic" - One person speaks at a time.

## ONLINE (SPECIFICALLY)

- We ask that you show up in whatever way feels right for you. Feel free to turn off your mic or camera anytime during the session. You can also use the chat box as much as you want; it's a great way to engage with the material and the group.
- Hide Self View! Looking at your face on Zoom for extended periods can be weird and exhausting, and none of us signed up for that kind of self-scrutiny, so feel free to click the "hide self-view" button so that the group can see you and you can see the group, but you don't have to see yourself.

## CO-BRANDED GUIDELINES

- If things come up for you unexpectedly, please prioritize taking care of yourselves in those moments. However, you need (offer: you can privately chat with me, take a break, and head back to the main session).
- Make content accessible for folks with different abilities (utilize closed captioning, chat, allow for video only, allow for audio only, etc.)

**AFTER GOING THROUGH THIS FRAMING**, ask participants the following questions:

- How do these norms sound to everyone?
- Is anyone uncomfortable with any of these norms?
- Does anyone have any other norms to add?

## II. THREE RULES OF RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

Your conversations may directly or indirectly address religion, the religious beliefs of community members, or targeted religious identities. Consider including these guidelines or keeping these tools in mind as issues arise. These rules are also helpful for thinking through intergroup dialogues, regardless of whether religious identity is the most salient difference between these groups.

At a press conference in 1985, Dr. Krister Stendahl, a Bishop of Stockholm, responded to vocal opposition to building a temple there by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He laid down three rules, which have been used across the globe to guide dialogues involving religion and topics that address faith.

- 1 When trying to understand another religion or community, you should ask the adherents of that religion or ideology (and not its enemies).
  - Note: *No one can speak for an entire faith tradition, community, or demographic (i.e., refugees, immigrants, etc.). It is important for each person to speak from their perspective about the practices or beliefs of their tradition or community.*
- 2 Don't compare your best to their worst.
- 3 Leave room for "holy envy."
  - By this, Stendahl meant that you should be willing to recognize elements in the other religious tradition or faith (or non-religious group) that you admire and wish could, somehow wish could, be reflected in your religious tradition, faith, or community. This also applies to groups not defined by their faith outside your identity (e.g., country of origin, socio-economic status, immigration status, political affiliation, etc.)



### III. ANTICIPATE ISSUES TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOUR CONVERSATION

Discussions may be difficult for some participants to host or participate in for several reasons. We'd like to offer strategies to help manage and maintain a brave space throughout this courageous conversation.

- Managing the range of emotions that might arise during your courageous conversations.
  - Reference the previously established Group Norms as needed and, if necessary, acknowledge when people aren't respecting those norms (For example, *"I just wanted to notice that we have a couple of people speaking over each other, how would we feel about returning to our 'One Mic' norm we discussed earlier?"*)
  - Periodically, check in about learning goals for the conversation. Ask everyone to offer ideas and suggestions for achieving those goals/purposes.
  - Give space to emotions as needed. Heavy topics will bring up feelings, and if we ignore them entirely, they will often still come out later and require even more space after having done damage. Some small ways to offer space for emotions include:
    - Asking questions to the person sharing, like, *"Why do you think this is coming up for you now?"*
      - Asking the group questions, such as, *"What did it feel like to hear that?"* or *"Do other people feel this way?"*
      - Making space for people to exit the group as needed.
      - Holding silence after heavy shares and acknowledging/appreciating vulnerable shares (a *"thank you for your share"* will suffice).
      - Reflecting the feeling(s), you heard (i.e., *"It sounds like that was scary..."*)
- Make a plan, hold it loosely, and follow the group.
  - Planning is vital to feeling prepared when facilitating. Having a plan can help us think through timing, framing, and goals before we start the conversation. We recommend you keep in mind three things:
    - Keep it simple
    - Follow the group
    - Make space
  - Allow the group agency over the conversation as often as possible, especially regarding learning goals and objectives.
- Difficult dynamics.
  - It is vital to hold a purposeful space so there is room for everyone participating to share. If you notice the group is not following the agreed-upon norms, here are some ways to detect this dynamic aloud:
    - Ask the group members how they would like to handle the situation.

## CO-BRANDED GUIDELINES

- Offer options that include the behavior that was disruptive (i.e., if there is a lot of side chatter, maybe offer some time for smaller group or pair-shares)
  - Notice to participants, *We established some group norms at the beginning of this conversation. Does it feel like we are still following those norms? Would we like to revisit or reconsider those norms?*
  - When someone has an emotionally charged share, reflect their comments or ideas to the group, check for accuracy with the original speaker, and ask the group what that share brings to mind for them.
  - Respectfully try to intentionally balance the voices in conversation, making more space for those less dominant. For example, *I'm wondering if we could hear from some people who haven't shared yet. Do any of you have questions or thoughts?*
  - If someone says something problematic, you can ask the group *What it felt like to hear that?* A likely participant will likely name the harm to address it.
- 
- Responding to complex, complicated questions.
    - These conversations likely involve people discussing stereotypes, misconceptions, and interpretations about the event/film. Fact sheets can provide helpful, vetted information that will provide data for responses. Additional strategies include:
      - Pose the question to the group. As a facilitator, you do not need to be, nor should you be, the arbitrator of knowledge. Allow the group and the individual asking the question to answer it themselves.
      - If you'd like to respond, you can speak from personal experience. For example, *I believe* \_\_\_\_.

## IV. PRAYER/ INVOCATION ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONS OR OTHER IDENTITY-BASED GROUPS

There are several ways for people to share their religious traditions or culture to set the environment for the conversation. Consider:

- Opening the conversation with a land acknowledgment.
- Allowing volunteers to share words of greeting from civilization, their house of worship, or belief system.
- Asking people to take a moment of silence together as a group.



### V. DEBRIEF THE CONVERSATION

After courageous and difficult conversations, it is essential to reflect on the intention and impacts of the event. Debriefs allow participants to synthesize learnings, offer feedback, and continue processing reflections from the space.

Some questions to consider including in your debrief evaluations might be:

#### 1 Logistics and Accessibility

- Location
- Date
- Format
- Language
- Support
- Accessibility issues that arise

#### 2 Resources referenced

- Fact sheets or questions used

#### 3 Participant experience

- What one takeaway is participants leaving the conversation with?
- What is something participants want to know more about or wish more space had been given to in this conversation?
- Did participants share how this conversation has affected their thinking about or engaging with this topic?
- Do participants plan to take any actions as a result of this event?
- Were there any difficult moments?
- What moments felt essential and/or meaningful in this discussion?



# THANK YOU

Thank you for screening the film and participating in the impact campaign!

*Breaking  
Silence*

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

[odyssey-impact.org](http://odyssey-impact.org)



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