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Studios Get More Real Casting Disabled Actors

ENTERTAINMENT: Rise in streamed content plays part in increased opportunities.

By [Diane Haithman](#)

Friday, June 9, 2017



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In Spotlight: John Paizis opposite a client at Performing Arts Studio West, an Inglewood organization that trains disabled actors and helps them find roles. Photo by [Ringo Chiu](#).

Michael Patrick King turned to an Inglewood company for help needed to cast actors with Down syndrome for his new Amazon.com pilot.

The co-creator and executive producer of CBS' "Two Broke Girls" and writer-producer of HBO's "Sex and the City" features seven actors with Down syndrome in his latest show, "Love You More."

Two of those actors, John Tucker and Luke Zimmerman, studied at Performing Arts Studio West in Inglewood, where the company has offered training and professional representation for performers with developmental disabilities for 19 years.

Performing Arts Studio West received slightly more than \$1 million in state support last year for its training program. The organization also represents its clients as a manager and often has a representative on set during production, said founder and President John Paizis. It collects a 15% management fee.

Tucker and Zimmerman received \$15,000 a week for their work on the “Love You More” pilot, the highest salaries thus far received by the studio’s clients. The company made \$6,700 in fees last year.

King said the motivation for casting actors with Down syndrome had nothing to do with money, but rather a commitment to realistic casting. He and others involved in hiring actors with disabilities said demand for such actors is increasing, fueling businesses that provide the training required to meet Hollywood’s standards.

King attributed the heightened demand to an increasingly competitive TV landscape. Producers have been challenged to explore new worlds as streaming platforms such as Amazon and Hulu of Santa Monica try to offer content outside the mainstream.

“Something that hasn’t yet been seen is the best business model at this point in television,” he said. “There is so much television that people are looking at an entirely new range of characters, something that’s completely nowhere else.”

King added that “Love You More” is part of an observable wave of growing acceptance of actors with disabilities on TV. The pilot was produced by his Burbank-based MPK Productions Inc. in association with Warner Bros. Television.

ABC’s “Speechless,” a comedy about an eccentric family, features a teenager with cerebral palsy, portrayed by Micah Fowler, who has the condition in real life.

The series ranked No. 6 of 40 network sitcoms last year, according to Nielsen ratings. That amounted to about 7.2 million viewers an episode, good enough for the network to renew the show for a second season in May.

King said that actors with Down syndrome did not cause any additional production costs. Producers had to adjust to a bit more spontaneity and improvisational work than usual, but those generally don’t cause delays.



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