

Former Big Picture Learning student Molly O'Sullivan features in The Assembly Season 2

Premieres on ABC TV Sunday 21st September 7:30 pm and on ABC iview

<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/assembly>



https://youtu.be/OBJ_OfVrnPI?si=hdXWG2KeoD2JhZII

If you have been watching the ABC lately, you may have noticed a promo for an upcoming show featuring a smiling young woman with brown curls, glitter on her cheeks, and a bright dinosaur shirt. That's **Molly O'Sullivan, a 2023 Big Picture graduate from Tomaree High School**, dinosaur enthusiast and passionate advocate for better representation of autistic people onscreen.

Currently in her second year of a Media and Communications degree at the University of Newcastle, Molly was in a hotel room in Sydney, doomscrolling Facebook on her phone when she noticed an ad for a very interesting opportunity: to take part in a new season of the program *The Assembly*, designed to give autistic young people with an interest in media the chance to learn more about the craft of journalism, interview Australian celebrities, showcase their talent and bring new perspectives to the chat-show format on Australian TV.

Molly wasted no time in filming her video application then and there in the hotel room. As a Big Picture student who had done an analysis about the representation of autistic people onscreen for her Senior Project, coupled with her passion for filmmaking, she felt like a perfect candidate for the show. And, as it turns out, several videos and Zoom meetings later, she was indeed selected by the production team!

As Molly recalls, “When I got the call to say ‘You’re in’, I was so excited but also super nervous. This would be my first paid job ever, and I was going all the way to Sydney to work with people I didn’t know and testing the limits of what I think I can do. But I figured that if it means one more autistic person feels more ‘seen’, then it will have been worth it.”

But first, Molly received a journalism foundations course developed and delivered by Macquarie University, supported by Aspect Australia (Australia’s largest service provider for people on the autism spectrum) and Bus Stop Films (Australia’s leading inclusive filmmaking organisation), coupled with tours and workshops at the ABC studios in Sydney and mentoring from renowned journalist Leigh Sales.

According to Molly, the highlights of the experience were becoming confident with public speaking, talking to celebrities, working in a supportive workspace where she felt able to articulate her needs, and perhaps most importantly, getting to meet and make friends with “so many cool, quirky, autistic people”.

“No-one judged me for anything, or looked twice at anything I did. I recognised aspects of ‘me’ in the other people, and for the first time in my life was able to easily make friends, and feel comfortable in their presence.”

You might expect that so many budding journalists together on a production could become competitive, but according to Molly it was the opposite experience.

“We were all there for a reason: to make autism representation better. We were not trying to compete with each other because we knew that as a group we make a bigger impact.”

Growing up in a rural community, Molly had found it difficult to connect with other young people, and was often singled out for being different. However when she joined her high school’s **Big Picture Academy in Year 9**, she felt a lot less pressure to fit in and more able to work at her own pace and depth on topics that she chose.

“In Big Picture I had a lot of opportunities to use my interests for good, it was a chance to do what I loved and be good at it.”

Molly was able to pursue her passion for film while at school, and to explore the craft with a filmmaking mentor Dr Stuart McBratney from the University of Newcastle. Upon graduating from school with her International Big Picture Learning Credential, Molly was accepted into a media degree at the same university.

Meanwhile back on the set for The Assembly, Molly researched and designed questions for high-profile interviewees such as the actor Richard Roxburgh, and former Australian Cricket Captain Steve Waugh. Richard Roxburgh was amused to be asked by Molly how it felt to have won the best male fake accent for his role as Dracula in Van Helsing in 2004 (“I never read my reviews, fortunately!”) while the notoriously superstitious Steve Waugh’s eyes lit up when Molly asked him about his lucky red hanky that he always carried in his pocket on the cricket pitch.

She was disappointed, however, that she did not get to interview her favourite incarnation of Dr Who played by David Tennant on the UK version of The Assembly.

“I love that version of the Doctor... he is definitely neurodivergent in there somewhere, it's not made obvious but we have many of the same traits.”

When asked if she felt that the inclusion of autistic people and characters in the media had improved at all in recent years, Molly said that it is getting better, but we are just not there yet.

“Shows like The Assembly are showing that it's possible for people like us to be in a workplace and deserve to be there. I made such great contacts and networks in my time on the show. While my passion is drama and filmmaking, I am also very open now to journalism.”

Tune in from Sunday 21st September at 7:30 pm on ABC TV for the six part series (or catch it on iview) , and be amazed at the original insights and unfiltered voices of journalists like Molly as they bring new perspectives to their interviews with well-known Australians.

Links to:

The Assembly 2 trailer:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBJ_OfVrnPI

Welcome to Mollywood (BPLA video story)

<https://www.bigpicture.org.au/file/welcome-mollywood>