POV
Community Engagement & Education
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Best Kept Secret
A Film by Samantha Buck

www.pbs.org/pov
The first question I get about Best Kept Secret is usually “What is your personal relationship to autism?” Until making this film, I always thought the answer was “None.” What I learned is that we are all connected to it. Autism is part of who we are as a society. Across the country, young adults who turn 21 are pushed out of the school system. They often end up with nowhere to go; they simply disappear from productive society. This is what educators call “falling off the cliff.”

While I was on the festival circuit with my last feature documentary, 21 Below, I saw many films about young children with autism. These films were moving and important, but they only spoke of a limited population—predominately Caucasians from financially stable families. But what happens to children with autism who grow up in other circumstances?

I began to research public schools in inner-city areas all over the United States, and the best kind of accident of fate brought me to JFK in Newark, N.J. and Janet Mino—a force of nature who changed my life. She has been a constant reminder to have faith, value every member of society and believe in people’s potential.

Best Kept Secret on the surface could seem like a straightforward vérité film, but we tried to accomplish something different—a subtle and layered story that takes on issues of race, class, poverty and disability through a different lens than the one to which many people are accustomed. My intention has always been to make a human, universal story—a character study that would subtly engage viewers and draw them into the lives and continuing sagas of the main protagonists.

Making this film has been inspiring, and at times heartbreaking. The entire crew feels lucky to have been able to spend time with Eric, Quran, Robert, Matthew, Kareem and Rahamid. My hope is that the film allows the audience to get to know them and become personally invested in the futures of Ms. Mino and her class. I want viewers to see past the “autism” label and see these six young men as the interesting, funny, mischievous, hormonal and loving people that they are.

The most difficult part of making the documentary has been watching what has happened to some of our subjects after aging out of the public school system. Already, after just a few months, Robert has been kicked out of his adult daycare program and now lacks any options aside from being neglected at home or institutionalized. This is why it is vital to tell this story. While Best Kept Secret may not help all of our boys, I hope it will pave the road for better options for the young men and women who come after them. I want the same thing for these young people that I want for any young person: a chance at quality of life.

Samantha Buck
Filmmaker, Best Kept Secret
At a public school in Newark, N.J., the staff answers the phone by saying, “You’ve reached John F. Kennedy High School, Newark’s best-kept secret.” JFK provides an exceptional environment for students with special-education needs. In Best Kept Secret (90 min.), Janet Mino, who has taught a class of young men for four years, is on an urgent mission. She races against the clock as graduation approaches for her severely autistic minority students. Once they graduate and leave the security of this nurturing place, their options for living independently will be few. Mino must help them find the means to support themselves before they “age out” of the system.

If it takes a village to raise a child, the film reveals significant cracks in the village’s infrastructure. But in Mino, it also provides inspiration—a model of energy and commitment. As an outreach tool, the film helps communities look at resource allocation decisions, which families and students have access to support (and which don’t) and who is responsible for ensuring the well-being of individuals with autism when immediate families can’t provide for their children’s special needs.
**Best Kept Secret** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to education or special needs children, including *Bye, Neurotypical, No Pity, Refrigerator Mothers* and *Q&A*, a StoryCorps short.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- Mental health organizations, institutions and professionals
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as your local library

**Best Kept Secret** is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- Adult programs
- Aging out
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Economic insecurity
- Education
- Family support systems
- Government aid
- Health
- Mental health
- Newark, N.J.
- Parenting
- Psychology
- Social services
- Social work
- Special education
- Special needs
- Urban/inner city issues

---

**USING THIS GUIDE**

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Best Kept Secret** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach)
The Autism Spectrum

In the film *Best Kept Secret*, Janet Mino teaches a class of six students, five of whom are on the autism spectrum. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), commonly referred to simply as autism, is a neurological and developmental variation that affects learning, communication and social interaction.

Autism can be found across all racial, ethnic and social groups and is associated with a wide range of behaviors and characteristics that may include intense focus on a specific subject; unconventional means of learning and problem-solving; a strong need for routine and consistency; repetitive movement or self-stimulation, such as rocking or humming; difficulty with social interpretation and expression; and an under- or over-sensitivity to sensory experiences like sound, light and touch.

Each individual on the autism spectrum is different, with a unique set of characteristics and behaviors that may change depending on stress or anxiety levels and sensory stimulation. Individuals on the far end of the autism spectrum may be non-verbal, harm themselves or depend heavily on support from family and professionals, while other adults with autism may live and work independently. The exact cause of autism is unknown, though genetics and environmental conditions are thought to be possible factors.

Prior to May 2013, diagnosticians separated the varying degrees of autism spectrum disorder into subsets that included autism disorder, Asperger’s syndrome, pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified, Rett syndrome and childhood disintegrative disorder. Since these subsets were differentiated solely by behaviors, they were often difficult to determine. In an effort to provide more clarity and diagnostic precision, the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (the manual published by the American Psychiatric Association and used as the standard for classifying mental disorders), released in May 2013, eliminated these subsets and instead breaks down positions on the autism spectrum by levels (for example, autism spectrum disorder, level 1, level 2 or level 3).

As of March 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that one in 50 children are identified with autism spectrum disorder, compared to about 1 in 155 in 2002 and 1 in 88 in 2012. However, this rapid increase may be more attributable to greater awareness and more frequent diagnosis than to an actual increase in the incidence rate.

Diagnosing autism accurately is not easy and, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, there are more than 600 different symptom combinations that meet the minimum criteria for diagnosing autism disorder—just one of the formerly used subsets of autism spectrum disorder.

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ASOD) and the Autism Diagnostic Interview, Revised (ADI-R) are the standard assessment tools used for diagnosis, but many other screening tests exist. Administering assessments that are accurate and comprehensive is a difficult task, as traits associated with autism exist on a continuum and may be observed among those not clinically diagnosed with a related disorder.

Sources:

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. 
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/

PBS. “History of Autism Blame.”
http://www.pbs.org/ pov/refrigeratormothers/fridge.php

PBS. “Refrigerator Mothers. What Is Autism?”
http://www.pbs.org/ pov/refrigeratormothers/about_whatisautism.php

PBS. “This Emotional Life. What Is Autism?”
http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/autism/what-autism

http://abcnews.go.com/Health/coldandFluNews/story?id=6089162&page=1#.ubl0cuf2b56

Science Daily. “In Autism, Age at Diagnosis Depends On Specific Symptoms.”

**Newark and John F. Kennedy School**

John F. Kennedy School, featured in *Best Kept Secret*, is located in Newark, New Jersey, a city with a population of 277,727, more than 25 percent of whom live below the poverty line. The state of New Jersey has one of the highest rates of autism in the nation.

John F. Kennedy School is a middle-secondary special education school that serves students throughout the district of Newark from 10 to 21 years of age. The school has two separate programs for students based on their diagnoses: Autistic and Multiple Disabilities with Moderate Cognitive Involvement.

Janet Mino, the teacher featured in *Best Kept Secret*, is part of the school’s transition team, which, in cooperation with students and parents, assesses the needs and skill-development required for students as they transition from school to work and independent living. The team includes two transition teachers, four job coaches, a guidance counselor, a school social worker and a Child Study Team case manager. Transition teams are required by the federal government to prepare students who are receiving special education for life after graduation.

**Sources:**


Newark Public Schools. “John F. Kennedy School.”
http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/JFK

United States Census Bureau. “State and County Quick Facts: Newark, New Jersey.”
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/34/3451000.html

**“Falling Off the Cliff”**

Special education programs in the United States became mandatory in 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed by Congress to ensure equal rights and access for disabled students in the public education system. Additional rights and protections were later added and the EHA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA entitles every special needs student to free public education, appropriate to his or her needs, and sends federal funding to states and local school systems to support special education services.

The federal government now requires every U.S. state to provide special education through 18 years of age, though most states extend this requirement to include students up to age 21. At 22, students age out of the public school system and the “entitlement laws” that provide services such as education, transportation, subsidized housing and vocational and life skills training cease to apply, leaving family, friends and teachers responsible for seeking out support programs. Parents and teachers refer to this as “falling off the cliff,” because of the scarcity of continuing adult education programs and accommodations.

To prepare students and families for this life change, the federal law requires schools to begin the process of developing a transition plan for an individual with autism when that person reaches age 16, though the Organization for Autism Research recommends that planning for the transition begin at least as early as 14. Transition planning includes assessing, developing and documenting the skills, goals and challenges for each individual as he or she transitions out of the school system. Upon graduation, individuals with autism are assigned caseworkers from the state. Every state also has a department of vocational rehabilitation that is associated with a nationwide federal program designed to help individuals with disabilities find employment.
According to the Disability Network, experts estimate that at least 90 percent of adults with autism end up living with their parents or in institutions after they finish school. A 2012 study from *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, found that within the first six years of graduation, about one third of young adults with autism had continued on to college, and about half held paying jobs. Six percent of adults with autism work full-time, and those who come from low-income backgrounds and/or have severe disabilities face a much higher risk of not continuing education or finding employment after high school.

In 2012, the annual public and private cost of autism reached $126 billion, more than triple what it was in 2006, and a majority of those costs were in education and adult care. Studies show that individuals with autism who do not receive continued assistance into adulthood are much more likely to regress in their social and verbal skills, while early intervention can lower lifetime costs of care for an individual with autism by nearly two thirds.

According to the organization Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism (AFAA), public and private costs of autism will continue to rise rapidly if support systems for adults with autism are not made more accessible and comprehensive.

**Sources:**


Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism. “Overview.”

http://www.afaa-us.org/site/c.lliYlkNZJuE/b.5O63941/k.E26E/Overview.htm

Autism Society. “Individualized Education Plan (IEP).”


Education Week. “Special Education.”

http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/special-education/


http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/10/1028/2250/


http://www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/index.asp#Transition

PBS Need to Know. “A Generation with Autism, Graduating into the Unknown.”

http://video.pbs.org/video/2073284516


http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/05/09/peds.2011-2864.abstract


Services and Programs for Adults with Autism

In the 1980s and 1990s, the number of children diagnosed with autism increased rapidly, and approximately half a million of those children are expected to reach adulthood over the next decade. This drastic growth, in conjunction with nationwide budget cuts, means that the need for support programs far exceeds available resources. Support services for adults with autism vary by state and may include health and rehabilitation services, residential programs, employment training, day programs, recreational activities and home care.

The majority of long-term government services fall under the following programs: Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and Medicare. However, to qualify for these programs, most adults must be able to prove that their condition is such that they are unable to work, and the payments are often not enough to cover day programs, job coaches or other support programs that could otherwise help prepare individuals for employment and/or independence. In New Jersey, for example, state funds provide an average of $22,000 per high school graduate, but residential and support programs can cost anywhere between $35,000 and $90,000 per year. Eligibility for services varies from state to state, and families/individuals must reapply and go to the end of the waiting list if they cross state lines. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and IDEA are put in place to ensure equal access to support programs, but cannot guarantee that individuals will be provided with adequate services. Adults can qualify for Medicaid community waivers, which provide additional services designed to keep them out of institutions and in the community, but these waivers can have a waitlist of more than 8,000 names, and some individuals face a wait time as long as 10 years.

While those with significant intellectual disabilities often have a strong chance of receiving state and federal support and individuals with high functioning autism are more likely to live independently and continue on to college and careers, those who fall in the middle of the autism spectrum may face additional challenges. They may have difficulty continuing on to postsecondary education or obtaining jobs without support (such as that provided by job coaches), but also have a harder time proving that their needs are great enough to qualify for major supportive care.

Many families and caregivers must work full-time in order to afford services, but finding transportation and programs with work-friendly hours can be challenging. According to the AFAA, transportation is a significant limiting factor for individuals with autism working toward employment and integration into the community, and one of the greatest financial burdens for families after housing. Additionally, many day programs operate from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., a timeframe that is unlikely to coordinate with the schedules of working parents.

For public and private programs, financial constraints, capacity limitations and low staff numbers present major obstacles to meeting demand. Since autism has a wide range of characteristics and each individual has a unique set of needs and abilities, care and support services often need to be individualized to be effective. For example, higher functioning adults with autism like Erik, featured in Best Kept Secret, may still need job coaches throughout their employment, but often the staff or funding needed to provide this support is lacking.

Some parents, family members and teachers, discouraged by the lack of available and comprehensive support programs, start their own programs or pool their resources to create family coalitions, though this method is expensive. Such coalitions may take years to develop, especially when participating parents are working full- or even part-time.

Since the filming of Best Kept Secret, Janet Mino has applied for a grant to open the Valentine Center, a center for young adults with autism that would provide transportation, therapy and activities during hours compatible with the schedules of working parents.

In July 2013, New Jersey senator Robert Menendez announced the AGE-IN Act, legislation to address the needs of young adults with autism who are “aging out” of public education and other support services. The new legislation would fund research into options for improving transition programs, including continued education, housing, healthcare, transportation and community integration.

Sources:

Autism Speaks. “Adults with Autism: What Services and Programs are Available at Twenty-Two?” http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/community-connections/adults-autism-what-services-and-programs-are-available-twenty-


PBS Need to Know. “A Generation with Autism, Graduating into the Unknown.” http://video.pbs.org/video/2073284516


**Autism Myths and Misconceptions**

- **The appearance of autism is relatively new.**
  Autism was first described by scientist Leo Kranner in 1943, but the earliest description of a child now known to have had autism was written in 1799.

- **Autism is caused by poor parenting or “refrigerator mothers.”**
  In the 1950s, there was an assumption that autism was caused by emotionally distant or cold parents. Though the exact cause of autism has not been determined, it is now firmly established that autism has nothing to do with parenting.

- **Autism is caused by vaccines.**
  There is no evidence that childhood vaccination causes autism. A 1998 study linking autism with vaccines has since been retracted.

- **Individuals with autism are violent.**
  Though there have been recent news stories relating autism to violence, violent acts from individuals with autism usually arise from sensory overload or emotional distress, and it is unusual for individuals with autism to act violently out of malice or pose any danger to society.

- **Individuals with autism are unable or unwilling to form meaningful social relationships.**
  Though many individuals with autism have difficulty with social interaction, they can have close social relationships, fall in love and have children.

- **Therapies and programs for individuals with autism work across the board.**
  There is a wide range of symptoms and behaviors associated with autism, as well as opinions on when treatment is required. Since each individual is different, treatments and therapies that may be beneficial and effective for one person may not be for another.

- **All individuals with autism have savant abilities.**
  While there is a higher prevalence of savant abilities among those with autism, only about 10 percent of individuals with autism exhibit savant abilities. Some have what are called “splitter skills,” meaning skills in one or two areas that are above their overall performance abilities.
• **All individuals with autism have mental disabilities.**
  Individuals on the autism spectrum are unique, with a wide range of intellectual abilities that easily can be under- or over-estimated. Tests designed to include language and interpersonal analyses may misrepresent the intelligence of people with autism, who struggle with social skills, and individuals with autism may also have difficulty with tasks considered simple, but quickly master complex tasks and concepts. Individuals on the autism spectrum have also earned college and graduate degrees and work in a variety of professions. Conversely, it may be assumed that an individual with autism has a higher level of understanding than he or she does, based on behavior, language skills or high level of ability in a specific area.

• **People with autism are cold and lack empathetic feelings.**
  Individuals with autism feel as much, if not more, empathy than others, but they may express it in ways that are harder to recognize.

• **People who are not diagnosed with autism will never exhibit characteristics similar to the characteristics of those who have been diagnosed.**
  Characteristics associated with autism exist on a continuum that includes those considered “normal” and can be exhibited to a lesser degree by those not diagnosed with autism.

**Sources:**

Explore more myths about autism at www.pbs.org/pov/bestkeptsecret
Did You Know?

• The first person ever diagnosed with autism was Donald Gray Triplett of Forest, Mississippi in 1943.

• For reasons that are still unknown, boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with autism.
  However, girls are often diagnosed later than boys and sometimes camouflage identifying behaviors or express
  them more subtly. For this reason, psychologist and author Tony Attwood estimates that the ratio is closer to one
  girl for every two boys.
  204355432)

• When someone with Asperger’s looks at another person’s face, he or she engages a part of the brain that is
  usually used when looking at objects.

• Temple Grandin is a world-renowned scientist who was born with autism. Though she didn’t speak until she was 4
  years old, she is now famous for her work in both autism advocacy and animal welfare. She is also known for her
  invention of the “squeeze machine,” which exerts a kind of deep touch pressure that has a significant calming
  effect on animals and humans.
  (Grandin, Temple. “Calming Effects of Deep Touch Pressure in Patients with Autistic Disorder, College Students and Animals.” Journal of Child

• Some individuals on the far end of the autism spectrum also suffer from physical conditions, such as seizures,
  sleep dysfunction and chronic gastrointestinal problems. In turn, these may manifest behaviorally. Self-destructive
  behaviors like head-banging or biting oneself may stem from an inability to localize or communicate physical pain
  or emotional distress.
  jun11/autism101.html)

• In February 2013, Senator Tom Harkin called for a 25 percent increase in the disability workforce, bringing it to six
  million by 2015.
  calls-25-growth-us-disability-workforce)

• There is a significant earnings gap between workers with disabilities and those without, with disabled workers
  earning about 75 percent of what workers without disabilities earn.
  (United States Census Bureau. “Workers with a Disability Less Likely to Be Employed, More Likely to Hold Jobs with Lower Earnings, Census

• According to reports from state vocational rehabilitation agencies, for every $1 spent by federal and state
  governments in providing vocational rehabilitation services, $5 to $10 come back in taxes paid by clients once
  they are employed.
**Selected People Featured in Best Kept Secret**

**The Students**

**Erik** is Janet Mino’s highest-functioning student, the class cut-up who is smart, talkative and good at following directions. He is happy and loves his “two moms”: a biological mother who is too ill to care for him and a dedicated and loving foster mother. Erik seems the most ready to graduate. In fact, he has a dream—to work at Burger King.

**Quran** is a quiet soul who works well, is able to read, successfully controls his social behavior and has strong support from two parents. Mino has high hopes for Quran but finds herself at odds with Quran’s father, who fears the teacher’s emphasis on education comes at the expense of acquiring basic life skills.

**Robert** is the biggest mystery and source of heartbreak in the class. A troubled boy who cannot express his pain, he is given to erratic behavior. Robert’s father home-schooled him until he passed away four years ago, and Robert is now cared for by his aunt, a recovering drug addict. His chaotic home life often keeps him away from school and he begins to regress. Robert may be an unfortunate example of Mino’s contention “Skip a day . . . and you have to start all over.”

**Rahamid** has Down’s syndrome, not autism, but came to Ms. Mino’s class as a last resort. A young man with a violent streak, he has been kicked out of every other classroom in the school. With Ms. Mino’s help, he has become much more functional, but is hindered daily by a crippling fear of plants. He was placed in the care of his grandmother due to his mother’s drug addiction.
Selected People Featured in *Best Kept Secret*

**The Adults**

- **Janet Mino** - John F. Kennedy School special education teacher
- **Cynthia Pullen Thompson** - Social worker
- **Bradley and Doris Key** - Quran’s parents
- **Alyce and Maurice Barnhardt** - Erik’s foster parents
- **Bessie Taylor** - Erik’s mother
- **Linda Coleman** - Robert’s aunt
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Advocacy

The school faculty and staff, as well as the families featured in the film, see the boys as individuals with clear personalities who bring joy and frustration to others. How would you describe these young men and the contributions they make to their school, families and communities?

Near the end of the film, when Janet Mino testifies on a panel hosted by Senator Robert Menendez, she emphasizes that she works in the “inner city.” In terms of meeting the needs of the young people that Mino teaches, what is distinctive about living in the inner city? How do race and socioeconomic class shape legislative and community responses?

At the panel, Senator Menendez says, “What I want to see for each child is to fulfill their God-given capability to its maximum potential and . . . with the belief that every child on the autism spectrum has the ability to do so and how do we help you accomplish that.” What is the responsibility of government to help every child reach his or her “maximum potential” regardless of starting abilities? What would you propose to Senator Menendez as a plan of action to help accomplish his goal?

When Mino expresses a desire for placements for her students that will “give them a life” and be as supportive as schools or as caring as her classroom, social worker Cynthia Pullen Thompson says she’s being unrealistic. Thompson says, “You’re treating them as if they’re so different and that’s not right.” Under what circumstances is it appropriate to treat individuals as if they were the same and under what circumstances is it appropriate to make accommodations for their differences?

Thompson says, “One of the biggest problems that we have, for students with autism, is there’s not a whole lot of resources post high school,” especially resources that are not private and expensive. In your view, who should be responsible for providing services for these young men and others like them? How should those services be funded?

Education

What did you learn from the film about effective teaching techniques for children on the far end of the autism spectrum? What did you learn about what works to motivate these students to learn?

What did you notice about the impact of family illness or disruption—and the resulting absences—on the young men? How is this similar to and different from the ways that family problems affect children who do not have autism?

Mino tells an autism awareness panel, “I’m also working with young adults who are aging out and I’ve been looking for two years for different places for my young adults to go to.” In fact, Mino spends a tremendous amount of personal, unpaid time looking for post-graduation alternatives for her students. What is the responsibility of a public school in terms of helping its special needs students after they graduate? What could or should a school do besides relying on the volunteer efforts of dedicated teachers?

Mino says, “If I can teach you how to take care of yourself, how to express yourself, or just get some type of language out of you for you to be able to voice for yourself . . . and these are the things that we really need to work with.” If you were in charge of evaluating Mino and her students, what would you establish as the goal(s) for the young men in Mino’s class? What would they have to accomplish in order to graduate? How do these goals fit into current public school accountability and testing initiatives?

Thompson tells Mino, “There’s nothing we can do beyond what you’ve already done. They may or may not regress, but you have to kind of let it go. You really do!” Do you agree with Thompson that Mino is too invested and needs to find a way to “let go”? What would “letting go” look like?
Discussion Prompts

Mino’s brother-in-law, Tyrone, thinks that finding placements for the boys is “easy to make happen” and that if Mino just “lit a fire” under herself, she’d succeed. What do you think? What obstacles does she face?

What types of assistive or adaptive technologies did you see in the film? How do you think they helped? How else could technologies be used to benefit these young men or others like them?

When Quran’s father shares the results of Quran’s outside psychological evaluation with Mino, the teacher questions the evaluation methods. What are Mino’s objections? Do you think they are valid? Why or why not? What types of diagnostic tools or testing would you trust?

After Graduation

Thompson says, “You know, when you graduate school, you’re no longer a student. They call you a consumer.” Mino adds, “Like a product instead of a person.” There are linguistic alternatives; for example, the Wae Center has “members.” Other agencies have “clients” or “patients.” How do differences in language reflect actual differences in the approaches taken by the agencies that provide services? Which label do you prefer and why?

Of all the classmates, Erik seems to be the most traditionally functional, but even he needs a coach to help him perform his job at Burger King. How do we support people who need intensive services in order to have full lives? If we can’t provide the additional resources they need, what’s the alternative?

The school hosts an informational panel for parents and guardians during which four programs present their services: Pathways to Independence, Wae Center, Division for Vocational Rehabilitation and Birchwood Adult Day Center. What are the strengths and limitations of each program? If these programs were in your community, which do you think you might choose and why? How might you help programs overcome their limitations?

Mino and the school attempt to give students some job training (e.g., by arranging for them to clean a local church). As you look around your own community, what jobs could be made available to schools and programs serving students like the ones in the film? What could you do to help facilitate the connection?

Mino bemoans the practices of certain programs that simply have people doing repetitive piece work and don’t really “give them a life.” Thompson counters, “The place that you work is not necessarily going to provide that for you . . . As much as we like it to be nice and sweet and fluffy, that’s not real life for anybody.” In “real life,” do employers owe workers interesting work? In what ways, if any, does the fact that an employee has autism change the responsibilities of an employer or employers?

Family

Quran’s father, Bradley Key, says, “First of all, I had to accept that Quran didn’t have a problem. I had the problem . . . Because, see, I want him to be a different person than he is.” How do you think his shift in perception changed his relationship with his son?

Quran’s parents discuss their hopes for their son. If you were in a position to offer guidance to this family, what would you say to them about Quran’s prospects? How would you help them balance hope and realism?

Thompson says that finding great placements for the boys to ensure that they continue receiving the stimulation and support they need to progress “is a family and an individual’s responsibility.” What happens to a system that is set up to put the onus of care on families when family circumstances (e.g., illness) make it impossible for families to care for special needs children, especially when those in need of supervision are adults?

Mino disapproves when her students’ families choose other activities over school. Social worker Thompson suggests that Mino is looking at things from a teacher’s perspective rather than a parent’s perspective. In your view, how do those perspectives differ? Given that both Mino and the families want the best for the young men in the film, what accounts for the differences in priorities?

Mino regrets that, for a variety of reasons, parents are often looking for a babysitter rather than “looking for quality” when seeking out programs for their children. How would Mino define “quality”? What factors would prevent parents from choosing quality placements?

Additional media literacy questions are available at: www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
Taking Action

- Find out how your school district defines “special needs,” who qualifies for services under that definition and what services are provided. Talk with families of students who qualify to determine which current services are working well and where there is room for improvement. Begin a dialogue with all the stakeholders to establish an action plan for how to make needed improvements.

- Join with a local or national autism advocacy group to support families of children with autism so they can get the services they need. Also consider brainstorming with stakeholders in various ways (e.g., providing transportation to and from places like the Wae Center) to provide support.

- As part of anti-bullying efforts in your school, arrange for a “teach-in” about autism. Help students and faculty understand variations along the spectrum and provide all children with opportunities to “hang out” with kids who have autism. Invite special education teachers and/or siblings of kids with autism to model how to be friends with a child who has autism.

- Participate in or help organize observances of World Autism Awareness Day (April 2), National Autism Awareness Month (April) or Autism Pride Week (June 16-22).
Autism

AUTISM NETWORK INTERNATIONAL
www.autreat.com/
This advocacy network of people with autism runs an annual national gathering. Many of the resources on the group’s website are dated, but the collection of perspectives on the definition of autism and history of self-advocacy is valuable.

AUTISM NOW
http://autismnow.org/
This website serves as a clearinghouse for information and resources related to living with autism spectrum disorder, and includes sections on employment, education, family life and community, as well as a searchable collection of relevant articles.

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK
www.autisticadvocacy.org
The website for this organization (mentioned in the film) run by and for people with autism offers a range of resources, including networking opportunities, policy briefs and a variety of projects that give voice to members.

AUTISM SOCIETY
www.autism-society.org/
This grassroots organization provides support, advocacy and research for people living with autism. The site’s rich resources include clinical information, statistics and research reports, strategies for living with autism and family stories.

AUTISM SPEAKS
www.autismspeaks.org
This advocacy organization supports research about all aspects of autism, including educational practices, as well as suggesting advocacy strategies and ways to support families of children with autism. The website includes links to social networking opportunities for people raising or helping children with autism.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS AND STROKE
This division of the federal government’s National Institutes of Health provides basic information about autism—what it is, what research is underway and where to find support. The website includes an extensive set of links to organizations that focus on autism. It also includes information in Spanish, as well as English.
Wrong Planet is an online community and discussion forum for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other neurological differences, as well as for their friends and family members and professionals in the field.

Adults with Autism

**ADULT AUTISM AND EMPLOYMENT: A GUIDE FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS**
http://www.dps.missouri.edu/Autism.html

This guide from the University of Missouri is designed for vocational rehabilitation professionals and includes extensive information and helpful practices and tips on adult autism and employment. The landing page also offers an Employment Fact Sheet, webcasts, and other resources.

**ADVANCING FUTURES FOR ADULTS WITH AUTISM (AFAA): RESOURCES**
http://www.afaa-us.org/site/c.IIIYikNZJuE/b.5076217/k.EE66/Resources.htm

Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism is a consortium of organizations committed to supporting individuals with autism and their family members. The AFAA website offers extensive resources, including links to key organizations across the nation for adults with autism.

**AGING WITH AUTISM**
http://www.agingwithautism.org/

Aging with Autism recognizes that the experiences and needs of individuals with autism will change throughout their lives, especially as they transition to adulthood. The organization supports research and advocacy efforts that contribute to enriching the lives of adults with autism, and offers reports, guidebooks and other resources.

Autism After 16 seeks to support families and their teens with autism and/or learning disabilities as they reach the transitional age of young adulthood. Their website provides information on a breadth of topics such as: employment, housing, finances, health, community support groups and the arts.

**AUTISM SPEAKS: TRANSITION TOOL KIT**
http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/transition-tool-kit

Autism Speaks provides a free tool kit to assist families of individuals with autism on their journey from adolescence to adulthood. The tool kit provides resources and materials (from housing to health to legal matters) to help family members of young adults with autism make a successful transition.

**DANIEL JORDAN FIDDLE FOUNDATION: SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERISM TRAINING MANUAL**

The Supported Employment and Supported Volunteerism Training manual assists employers who have newly hired employees or volunteers with autism by sharing insight on the characteristics of autism, and practical strategies that will enrich workplace experience and promote positive interactions with new employees or volunteers.

**ORGANIZATION FOR AUTISM RESEARCH: A GUIDE FOR TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD (ENGLISH AND SPANISH)**
http://www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/index.asp#Transition

Organization for Autism Research offers a guide book for families, educators and friends of individuals with autism as they transition to adulthood. The guide book provides information on employment, postsecondary education and life skills to support those developing a plan.
Teaching/Education

**EDUCATE AUTISM**
www.educateautism.com/
This site, created by U.K. educators, provides free materials for teachers (so they don’t have to “reinvent the wheel!”) and an excellent set of links to articles describing various research-based teaching methods.

**NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION:**
AUTISM RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS
http://www.nea.org/home/15151.htm
National Education Association provides an archive for educators who have students with autism in their classrooms. To enhance the classroom experience for both teachers and students, the website offers links to material on autism, effective teaching methods and strategies.

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:**
SPECIAL EDUCATION
www.nj.gov/education/specialed/
The special education website for the state of New Jersey—home to the school featured in *Best Kept Secret*—includes statistics, mandates, available programs and services and related resources.

**TEACCH AUTISM PROGRAM**
www.teach.com
This program bases its approach on working with the strengths and needs of individuals with autism.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: A GUIDE TO THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM**
http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/
Developed by the U.S Department of Education, this guide provides a comprehensive overview of the Individualized Education Program.
HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order Best Kept Secret for home or educational use, go to http://bestkeptsecretfilm.com/the-film

Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 26th season on PBS in 2013, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today’s most pressing social issues. Visit www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

POV’s award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV’s Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 600 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

POV has the honor of receiving a 2013 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the desJardins/Blachman Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV’s Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Special support provided by The Fledgling Fund and the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage for the latest news from POV Community Engagement & Education.

Front cover: Ms. Mino looks on as Quran prepares to get his diploma.
Photo courtesy of Nara Garber

The See it On PBS logo is a trademark of the Public Broadcasting Service and is used with permission. All rights reserved.