



Different is the New Normal **Powerful Documentary About** **Chicago Teen Takes Aim at the Stigma of** **Tourette's Syndrome – November 6 on WTTW**

*Moving and Intimate Portrait –
Featuring James Durbin of American Idol, Who Inspired the Film Title –
Captures the Courage and Triumph of High School Senior Ariel Small*

CHICAGO, IL – October 27, 2011 – *You cannot control the tests of life, but how you confront those challenges defines who you really are....* Ariel Small was born in suburban Chicago, the middle child in a close-knit family of five boys. When he was 6, Ariel's parents became concerned when they noticed he was exhibiting odd facial movements that he couldn't seem to control. Ariel was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome, a neurobiological disorder affecting an estimated 200,000 people in the U.S. alone. ***Different is the New Normal, premiering in the Midwest on WTTW, Sunday, November 6, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. and on PBS nationally in May 2012,*** closely follows Ariel's incredibly moving journey to overcome obstacles and bust the misconceptions surrounding Tourette's. Along the way, a meeting with James Durbin, whose own embattled path led him from brutally bullied student living with Tourette's to nationally-celebrated American Idol Finalist, helps reinforce Ariel's own belief that anything is possible.

One of the disabling aspects of Tourette's is the tics that disrupt daily function, but Ariel found that another was the constant need to prove that his symptoms were real – and that he wasn't faking them just to be disruptive. ***Different is the New Normal*** introduces viewers to an amazing 17-year-old who refuses to be defined by a disorder and instead chooses to validate, advocate and educate.

The film is a presentation of Creative News Group in association with WNET New York Public Media, the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21, New York's public television stations and operator of NJTV.

"I have made it my mission to educate the world about Tourette's Syndrome and pave a path for all of the kids who struggle with Tourette's on a daily basis," said Ariel Small. "My hope is that ***Different is the New Normal*** will change the way people think and feel about those they perceive as different and encourage them to look past those differences and see how alike we really are."

"***Different Is the New Normal*** captures the pain and frustration many parents and their children experience," said Neal Shapiro, WNET's President and CEO. "Ariel's inspirational story provides an uplifting perspective to this often misunderstood disorder, and will inspire everyone who watches this film to think about people as individuals, not as labels."

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Produced, directed and written by Emmy Award-winning NBC News veteran John Block and directed and edited by Chicago native Matt Wechsler, who also is the film's cinematographer, ***Different is the New Normal*** is an acutely personal and ultimately uplifting first-hand account of Tourette's through the eyes of Ariel Small. According to the Tourette Syndrome Association (TSA), the only national non-profit membership organization in this field, Tourette's is a neurobiological disorder characterized by involuntary and repetitive physical and vocal tics.

At first, the Smalls shared the common preconceived notions of Tourette's stereotypical symptoms such as compulsive outbursts of obscenities, but that behavior actually belongs to a rare form that affects only a small percentage of patients and Ariel exhibits none of these traits. With his permission, Robin Small turned the camera on Ariel to let viewers in on their family's emotional journey to surmount the challenges of living with the disorder and break through the stigma and shame associated with Tourette's.

"WTTW is honored to be the first station in the Midwest to air this important film, which puts a human face on a condition about which there are many misconceptions," said Dan Schmidt, President and CEO of WTTW. "It is especially significant given that the Smalls are from the Chicago area, and we feel the telling of their story aligns with WTTW's mission to educate and enlighten our audiences."

"We hope that this documentary changes people's perceptions of Tourette's Syndrome and will inspire children who are struggling with it," said Robin Small, Ariel's mother. "It is extremely important to separate the person from the disorder. We are all different and it is these differences that make us unique. Understanding and empathy are qualities of a successful perspective that will help individuals succeed in life."

To help safeguard other children from the hardships he has faced since he was young, Ariel's laudable mission is to speak out in order to demystify Tourette's. As an Illinois Youth Ambassador for the TSA, he was invited to address members of Congress and their aides about Tourette's at a special luncheon. In addition he has developed a presentation designed to increase awareness about Tourette's Syndrome and visits Chicago-area middle schools with his important message of acceptance. The all-conference captain of his Varsity football team, Ariel has achieved high honors each semester of his high school career and also finds the time to mentor local youngsters with Tourette's Syndrome.

Different is the New Normal is a presentation of Hourglass Films and a production of Small Boys Productions and Creative News Group in association with WNET New York Public Media. For nearly 50 years, WNET has been producing and broadcasting national and local documentaries and other programs for the New York community and beyond. Major support for the documentary is provided by David and Robin Small. Executive Producer is Robin Small. Producer, Director and Writer is John Block. Director, Editor and Cinematographer is Matt Wechsler. Composer is David Varga. Narrator is Edie Magnus. For WNET's Creative News Group, Executive Producer is Mary Lockhart. Executives-in-Charge are Stephen Segaller and Neal Shapiro.

To learn more about ***Different is the New Normal*** and Ariel Small, please visit www.DifferentistheNewNormal.com and www.ArielSmall.com.

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About the Filmmakers

John Block is an Emmy Award-winning television and documentary producer/writer who, for more than a quarter century, worked for NBC News. He left NBC to pursue making documentary films. He is a former Guggenheim Fellowship recipient. *Different is the New Normal* is his first film for WNET.

Matt Wechsler is an award-winning director, cinematographer and editor who founded Hourglass Films in 2009. His passion for film began at an early age; completing his first documentary at age 17 and his first narrative film two years later. Matt currently focuses on commercial, documentary and narrative productions.

About WNET

WNET is America's flagship public media outlet, bringing quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. The parent company of public television stations [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of NJTV, WNET produces such acclaimed PBS series as [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Nature](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#), [Tavis Smiley](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Noah Comprehend](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [SundayArts](#), [Reel 13](#), *NJ Today* and the new online newsmagazine [MetroFocus](#).

About WTTW

For more than 55 years, audiences have turned to WTTW for distinctive programming that informs, inspires, educates, and entertains. WTTW reaches 1.5 million weekly households over a four-state area, making it the most-watched public television affiliate in America. Recognized for its award-winning local and national productions, WTTW is committed to presenting the very best in cultural, nature, science, public affairs, and children's programming across its four distinct television channels: WTTW11, WTTW Prime, its Spanish-language channel WTTW V-me, and WTTW Create, its "how-to" channel. For more information, please visit www.wttw.com.

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