

Soap and glory

Sam, Hilly, Lewis, Lucy and Megan are the stars of an online docu-soap 



Docu-soap *The Specials*, which launched in September and broadcasts weekly shows online, follows five young people with a learning disability who have been friends since childhood. They now share a house in Brighton, and the series aims to give an accurate insight into what it's like being a young person with a learning disability.

The show is the brainchild of TV producer and director Katy Lock. Originally commissioned by a major broadcaster to make a pilot show, Katy continued to fund the series after the broadcaster backed out. She feels the show is capable of bringing an understanding of learning disability to a wider audience: "I've loved working on this project as the housemates were a dream to film – they were so open and were always up to something. I think people will find this series hugely entertaining, and see that programmes about people with a learning disability can have mainstream appeal."

Carol and Daffyd Williams, parents of Hilly, set up the house so that their daughter and other people with a learning disability could choose their own housemates. "A lot of documentaries about people with a learning disability tend to be quite negative," said Daffyd. "The series will show that it is possible for people with a learning disability to live with their friends, have a job and be part of their community."

Each episode of *The Specials* is around ten minutes long and is narrated by a different housemate each week – with the effect that the viewer sees the world through the young people's eyes. The website will also include forums and a blog from the housemates. "We want people to watch the series and think it's brilliant and funny," says Sam, the self-confessed ladies man of the house. "I think it's much better than *Big Brother*."

 To view *The Specials* go to www.the-specials.com

Arts in brief

Unexploded Stories, a new collection of dance pieces performed by the Anjali Youth Dance Company, will be showcased on Thursday 24 Sept at The Theatre, Chipping Norton. Every member of the company has a learning disability. **Call 01295 251909 or email info@anjali.co.uk**

Unlimited, a project that highlights the talents of deaf and disabled artists, has received £1.5 million of funding from the National Lottery. The grant was given as part of a £15.6 million grant to help fund projects for the Cultural Olympiad, which will celebrate arts and culture inspired by the Olympics. Organisers describe Unlimited as "the biggest UK-wide celebration of disability culture ever seen". **Go to www.london2012.com**

In August, members of the Side by Side theatre company took their play *Tempest in a Tea-Cup* to the Edinburgh Festival. The production uses mime, dance and dialogue to tell the story, and the actors and dancers in the company, which is based in Stourbridge and is affiliated to Mencap, all have a learning disability. **Call Side by Side on 07929 352 239 or email susan.sidebyside@btinternet.com**