

## **Carolina Gutiérrez: Acting is about authenticity**

*Carolina, an actress diagnosed with Down syndrome, thinks authenticity is the best way to connect with her audience*



By the time the makeup artist finished her final touches, Carolina was angry and disappointed. Her eyes were covered with a dark olive eyeshadow, and her lips seemed too red. She thought she looked like a clown.

“I don’t like it,” she said with a serious tone in her voice. “You need to take this off before I go on stage.”

At the stage, everyone was ready to start shooting the next scene of the film. Everyone, but her. When the assistant director came looking for her, Carolina was removing her last eyelash extension. “She wouldn’t leave the dressing room unless we promised to fix her face and make her look more like herself,” said Laura Pérez, director of “Palos Verdes,” a movie where Carolina played the role of a high school student.

Carolina has always had an outspoken opinion about what makes a good actress. Even though some people think acting is the art of putting on a mask, she thinks that portraying a character is a matter of authenticity. “I love acting. But I do not like costumes. I am better when I can just be me,” she said during an interview with Noticias Caracol, Colombia’s national newscast.

Becoming an actress has always been Carolina's dream. As a teenager, she enrolled in a theater arts program offered by the Artes Guerrero academy in Bogotá. Her mother, Natalia Palacios, knew that finding an acting job for her daughter was going to be difficult in a country where only 19 percent of the people with some type of disability have a job.

Carolina's mother heard about Best Buddies Colombia from a close friend. "He said that this organization had an employment program for people with developmental disabilities," Ms. Palacios explained. "We applied for an acting job through the Best Buddies website. Two weeks later, we got a call from Maritza Hernández, the placement coordinator, who said she had found the perfect job for Carolina. She was very excited when I told her the news," she continued.

The Best Buddies Jobs program is one of the many programs offered by the organization. The program matches qualified individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) with companies seeking enthusiastic and dedicated employees. "Our program empowers people with IDD by helping them form meaningful relationships and develop professional competencies. We want them to live independently and feel valued by the society," said Alejandra Arenas, the executive director of Best Buddies Colombia.

Carolina is one of the 617 people with IDD who are currently enrolled in the Best Buddies Jobs program. She worked as an extra in the Colombian series "La Niña" and is now part of the Palos Verdes movie cast.

"Carolina is one of the most candid and honest members of our team," said Ms. Pérez, the film's director. "She is not afraid to say she doesn't like something when she sees it. But that is also why her acting skills are so remarkable. She is very authentic, even when she is playing a role."

For more information about Best Buddies Colombia contact Manuela Maldonado at

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