



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

## Face Equality International Launches Global Campaign #WeWillNotHide to Promote Face Equality Week, May 15-19, 2023

### *Global Nonprofit Works to Create Awareness About the Stigma People with Facial Differences Encounter in Their Lives*

#### *FEI Releases Report Calling on the Entertainment Industry to Step Up*

Today, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023, Face Equality International (FEI) today announced the details of their fifth annual **International Face Equality Week** with the theme **#WeWillNotHide**.

The global awareness campaign, takes place from May 15-19, 2023. FEI, the organization which works to protect the human rights of people with disfigurements is an [Alliance of 36 worldwide non-profits](#) that campaign to promote face equality, seeking to put an end to discrimination against people with facial or bodily visible differences.

"Together, we can create a world where anyone with a facial difference is free to be unapologetically themselves. In order to celebrate what makes us 'different,' first we must recognize that it is society that must change, not us," said Phyllida Swift, CEO of Face Equality International. It is the limiting perceptions placed on faces and bodies that do not conform to the 'norm' that we must change."

The **'We Will Not Hide'** campaign aims to bring the face equality community together to promote:

- Visibility of visible difference on the big screen. Not simply as villains or vulnerable people.
- Visibility of the community on social media, where right now people are being censored or abused because there is not yet a safe space for the community to be seen, and to be free to express their truest selves.
- Visibility of real stories about disfigurement. Where we see the whole person, not just one-dimensional, purely medical or sensationalised stories.



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

“There are definitely still days where walking out of my front door without hair on feels like climbing a mountain. It feels huge... I know those days when I feel scared to, are the days I need to show up for myself the most and be the role model that I didn't have when I was losing my hair at 13.” Said Laura Mathias, Activist and FEI film contributor.

[Disfigurement is a globally neglected human rights issue](#), with equality laws in the UK, USA and Europe failing to protect this community from discrimination on several counts [as revealed in this pioneering research by global law firm Reed Smith LLP](#). The face equality campaign, demonstrates a world where the facial difference community is valued equally in society and can live free from stigma. [‘Ugly Laws’ which existed until 1974](#) in Chicago existed across the UK and USA to prevent people deemed as ‘unsightly’ from being seen in public due to disfigurement or disability have long been eradicated, but the disfigurement community are still being inhibited from being seen in public through systemic discrimination by:

- Social media companies censoring the disfigurement community as [revealed in this feature by Refinery29](#) and preventing them from expressing themselves online. [FEI fed into a United Nations Thematic Report for the Human Rights Council on this issue.](#)
- Hollywood and the entertainment industry failing to hire or represent the real lives of people with disfigurements. [FEI put together a Position Paper on representation of disfigurement in the Arts.](#)

It is this systematic erasure that leads members of the facial difference community to internalise the idea that they should be hidden, and forces individuals to use hiding as a coping mechanism for the hostility they experience in society. 49% of people with a visible difference reported that they have to contend with hostile behaviours, like [stares](#) and bullying in the UK. [\(Changing Faces, UK Savanta 2023\)](#)

“When my son was born with facial paralysis, due to Moebius syndrome, I quickly realised people made assumptions based on the way people looked when they have facial difference. It was for this reason I set up Same but Different, an organisation dedicated to using the arts for positive social change. We were delighted to partner with Face Equality International in creating the creative elements for this campaign.”  
Ceridwen Hughes, CEO Same but Different, the makers of the Campaign Film.



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

Facial difference is a term used to describe a facially-diverse or non-normative appearance of the neck and above. Visible difference indicates face and body. These terms are used to describe conditions or marks that an individual is born with, as well as changes of facial appearance that are acquired either permanently or temporarily. Face Equality is a social justice movement devoted to ensuring the facial difference or FD community can live freely, without indignity or discrimination.

Over 100 million people worldwide have a mark, scar, or condition that affects their facial appearance, yet throughout history, equality laws have failed to protect this community from harm. The legacy of systemic oppression remains today, where people with facial differences (FD) are forcibly hidden from sight around the world, and also through the absence of representation of FD on our screens and the censorship of the community on social media. "We need to smash the misconceptions about facial/visible difference and build solidarity for the face equality movement. It's time for the world to listen, to see us, to no longer hide us from sight," added Swift.

### **Campaign Details**

To support the campaign, Face Equality International is calling on people to use the hashtag #WeWillNotHide and share stories, photos, or videos to help raise awareness and promote face equality. International Face Equality Week will involve global awareness campaigns and activities both online and offline.

The campaign is devoted to bringing solidarity to the cause, bringing vital understanding and education around life with a facial difference in today's global society, and amplifying the diverse voices of the facial difference community. For more information, [visit this page](#). FEI is calling upon the entertainment industry with an [Open Letter and Position Paper](#), with five calls to action which include, speaking up about harmful stereotypes, recognising bias, including diverse professionals in the entire creative process, casting real people with visible differences rather than prosthetics, and removing barriers to employment and opportunity.

### **About Face Equality International**

*Face Equality International was created by Dr James Partridge OBE, founder of Changing Faces UK, with the support of nine founding members. The alliance was launched in November 2018 and now has over thirty members world-wide. Our vision is for the global facial difference community to live freely, without indignity or discrimination. In order to achieve our vision, our mission is to position face equality*



FACE EQUALITY  
INTERNATIONAL

*as a social justice movement. Most member NGOs are condition-specific (i.e. for people with clefts, burns, craniofacial conditions, psoriasis and other conditions) and their members have very different medical and surgical needs and treatments. But their members also face very similar psychological, cultural and social barriers to living fulfilling lives. FEI embraces and creates space for facial differences of any kind, be they acquired, from birth, or temporary.*

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**For information about interviews with our CEO or advocates, please contact:**

#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

Media enquiries should be sent to [info@faceequalityinternational.org](mailto:info@faceequalityinternational.org) or +44 (0) 7841 908852.

A full list of contributing Members of Face Equality International is [here](#)

Case studies and interviews with contributors to the film/campaign are available upon request.