

# The importance of being... an extra!

**Joanna Jones has left her job on *Hollyoaks* to set up her own television casting agency**

MANY of us dream about a job in television and 26-year-old Joanna Jones knows just how lucky she is, writes Catherine Lawler.

At just 16, she left school and went to work in the casting department for Mersey TV (now known as Lime pictures) and stayed there for 10 years.

However, ready for a new challenge, Joanna left just a few weeks ago to set up her own business – a casting agency for films and television.

"When I was giving in my notice, I said to my boss that I could quite easily stay another 10 years – it's a great job and I've been really happy," said Joanna, who has spent a lot of her time working on the set of Channel Four soap *Hollyoaks*.

"I worked my way up from the very bottom of the ladder, but I'm now ready for something completely new. With all of my experience, I now feel it's the right time to branch out and I have the confidence to set up on my own, using my contacts to my advantage."

Joanna, who lives in Birkenhead with her partner Ingo and their two-year-old daughter Amelie, is no stranger to challenges – she recently did a skydive in Shropshire to raise money for cystic fibrosis, the country's most common life-threatening inherited disease. She is now busy building up her database of 'extras' or, as they are

known in the industry, 'supporting artists' for her company Bananafish Management.

"I first saw the name Bananafish when I went to watch my boyfriend's brother play in a band," said Joanna. "It was weird and a bit quirky and I knew it was going to be a memorable name!"

Extras lend atmosphere and authenticity to crowd scenes, street scenes, restaurant or bar scenes on soaps, dramas or films; indeed any scene that requires bodies other than the main actors. They mainly work in the background, but may occasionally be asked to perform a few words or lines and may be asked to use 'special skills' (horse-riding, driving, sword-fighting etc).

"Anyone can be an extra, as it's generally just people walking in the background of films or soap operas," said Joanna. "So we're looking for people of all ages, shapes and sizes. No experience is necessary, although you must be keen and reliable."

While it is true that some people manage to make a living out of being a supporting artist, the work is unpredictable and certain looks and types of people can be favourable to directors one minute and not the next. Therefore, most people will use extra work to supplement another job – or vice versa for those really committed to working on films and television.

As the film industry moves at a fast pace seven days a week and 24 hours a day, requests for extras are often at the last minute and can involve early mornings, late nights,

weekdays and weekends with long hours being more usual than not.

Sometimes filming is done at night (normally at a better rate of pay). Reliability and a commitment to teamwork are also essential and how you interact with the rest of the cast can have a crucial bearing on the scene the director is trying to create. Also you need to be able to take instructions without making comments or offering your own ideas (as inspired as they might be).

Joanna added: "There's so much going on at the moment. A lot of film and television production companies find it more cost-effective to film up north, so there are more and more things happening locally. And, with the Capital of Culture in Liverpool next year, there are a films scheduled there too."

This is not Joanna's only project – she's also been working a lot with a Wirral theatre group called 'Starlight' and will be starting drama classes for children soon as well.

"There's so much talent around, but many people simply don't know how to get into TV," said Joanna. "Some of them have come from nowhere and now they're household names. Anyone can do it."

Joanna's company also provides celebrities for public appearances, such as store openings and nightclub appearances.

**Anyone interested in becoming an extra can email Joanna at [info@bananafish.co.uk](mailto:info@bananafish.co.uk) or visit the website for more information at [www.bananafish.co.uk](http://www.bananafish.co.uk)**



#### SHOWBIZ:

Left, Joanna is pictured with her good friend, actress Suzanne Collins.

Right, Joanna and *Hollyoaks* actor Stuart Manning

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