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Final Report

A Lewis Hine Documentary Fellow Partnering with College Bound Dorchester

Growing up, I was incredibly fortunate to have parents who made traveling around the world a priority in our lives; twice a year the whole family would venture somewhere new. It began slowly, to communities that seemed more like our own, but gradually we pushed our comfort zones. When I was 11, I went on my first trip to southern Africa. By the time I graduated high school, I had explored large areas in South East Asia, India, southern Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Oceania. If I learned nothing else from these experiences, I learned the value of engaging with people. People are our greatest wealth of information. Learning one person's personal history can provide a whole new understanding about our own, and hearing many peoples' accounts certainly paints the picture of a collective story. It is this understanding that gives documentary work its value. And, it was with this knowledge of the power that people can harness through their engagement with each other that I began my year as a Lewis Hine Documentary Fellow.

In September 2010, I began my work as a Hine Fellow in partnership with College Bound Dorchester (CBD). I chose CBD because they had such diversity in their programming and the people they serve. CBD, which has been part of the community since 1965, was originally a collective of settlement houses providing aid in the form of education, housing, health, and wide variety of social services. Feeling the need to be more targeted in their approach to uplift Dorchester, one of the most underserved areas of Boston, CBD consolidated all its efforts into education. Now, the organization's mission is to get people of all ages back on track towards higher education at whatever stage they fell off. My favorite fact about the organization is that their youngest student is two months old and their oldest student is over 70. Each age group requires a unique type of engagement and method of instruction, and each program is designed to reflect that, engaging students both academically and socially and emotionally.

Determining my project

My first priority when entering such a large organization was to get acquainted with its people and its programs. After speaking with Sherrie, the Development Associate and my main contact at CBD, I learned that they needed a new collection of photographs for their promotional materials and press releases. I rotated between programs and classes, sitting quietly on the side to observe, speaking to the students and instructors, learning the histories of the different buildings within the community, and amassing photographs. My first project, a photographic archive of all programming, helped me form relationships within the CBD community and begin to reflect on potential projects of interest.

For the first few months, I struggled to choose a project idea. I wanted to celebrate the strength and perseverance I saw and admired so much, but I wasn't sure how. One of my first ideas was to profile several instructors. I started teaching a photography course to middle school students in one of the after school programs and

video course to students in the Alternative Middle School (AMS). AMS is a full-time middle school program for 12-16 year olds who are court mandated to participate and who all have histories of violence and learning problems.

I developed a strong relationship with several of the AMS students. They trusted me and were interested in some of the topics reviewed in my class. I introduced the idea of youth produced videos by showing One Minute Juniors, one-minute films created by youth all over the world. The films talked about poverty, violence, sexual abuse, and gender issues and the students were all too willing to share their opinions and talk about the content in terms of their own lives. When we began talking about interviewing techniques, I had students question each other. The class had already decided they wanted to create a film about how they each came to CBD. When it was Emily's turn to be interviewed, she told the story of when her brother was stabbed on the street, how she thought he almost died in her arms, and how she was so angry afterwards that she wanted to kill the girl who stabbed him. The other students were so captivated by her story and when I spoke to Emily after class, she expressed how glad she was that her fellow students knew her story.

Each of these students wanted to express their personal histories. I would have loved to collaborate with them on a project reflecting the struggles of their community and highlighting the hard work they demonstrate to take advantage of a second chance. Unfortunately, it didn't seem possible. The students in my class never had consistent attendance and, although they wanted to tell their stories, they did not want to put in the work to do so. After an enormous amount of reflection and many meetings with their instructors, I determined that the AMS students needed their normal instructor more than they needed my class or my pressure to keep them involved. I had to rethink what I wanted to convey about the College Bound Community. While I was working through several ideas, the production of the Annual Report began and CBD needed my help. Together with the development team, we chose a documentary theme for the report: a day in the life of CBD's students. I worked with students in each program to photograph them and learn about their day. Sherrie wrote the content for the report and I provided all the photographs. Additionally, I created a complementary video diving deeper into the lives of two students. The videos combined voiceovers of students and their instructors with classroom photographs to tell their story. Trung Huynh, a 70-year-old Vietnamese man in the Adult Education program and Andre Smith, a 15-year-old student in the middle school, were the subjects of the accompanying video. Both spoke briefly about their personal stories and about their experiences at CBD. Their instructors also participated by providing descriptions of both the program and Trung and Andre, respectively. A newsletter was emailed to all CBD supporters with the report and a link to the video, which is now displayed on the website.

To view the Annual report and the accompanying short video, please visit <http://www.fdnh.org/annualreport>.

The Sacrifices They Make

Through the Annual Report process, I realized that my original idea of profiling instructors was much stronger than I originally understood it to be. Most of the instructors at College Bound were teaching students with whom they shared a similar

history. Many of the instructors could speak to College Bound's place in the community having both participated in and observed the neighborhood over many years. The instructors that I chose to profile exhibited a deep-seated understanding and respect for the students coupled with a drive to devote their lives to the cause. These instructors go above and beyond the call of duty daily to make a powerful impact on the lives of their students. Profiling these few individuals would give a glimpse into the lives of the students and the organization as well as a unique portrayal of the Dorchester community. Thus began production of *The Sacrifices They Make*.

My last four months I worked closely with Susan, Leslie, Ismail, and Mila. I spent weeks in their classrooms, photographing their interactions with their students and recording their lessons. I interviewed each other them about their stories, their beliefs, and their motivations.

Susan, the Director of Early Education and Out of School Time, has been with CBD for 25 years and has lived in Dorchester all her life. She never went to school and now works tirelessly to ensure that her students are on the right track from the very beginning. Leslie, the Co-Director of Adolescent Education, is so passionate about working with teenagers that a few years ago she bought a large house and invited those in need to live with her. She runs an informal rehabilitation center by providing a nurturing environment with strict rules to be a support and driving force for change in the lives of her self-determined family. Ismail, the Lead Instructor for the College Prep program, wreaked havoc in the very neighborhood where he teaches. After a brutal stabbing that nearly left him paralyzed, Ismail was determined to change his life around, which he managed to do through his devotion to Islam, and now works to inspire his students in the same way. In the fall of 2010, I nominated Ismail for the Boston Neighborhood Fellows grant through The Philanthropic Initiative. He was thrilled to be awarded the grant, which he is using to help finish his degree in Education. Finally, Mila, ESOL instructor and Academic Advisor in the Adult Education program, is originally from Cape Verde. As an immigrant living primarily surrounded by other Cape Verdeans, Mila is personally exposed to many of the complexities and disenfranchisement that her students face daily. Her students find Mila relatable and therefore comforting as they navigate a new world in Boston.

By the end of June, I created a website that housed all four profiles, an artist statement, and some information about the Hine Fellowship. Around the time that I completed the website, I visited Durham to work closely with Alex Harris and Elena Rue while I printed close to 60 of my photographs. I was scheduled to have an exhibition of the videos at a neighborhood café in Dorchester, Dot-2-Dot. The exhibition was for the CBD community to see the work and celebrate the instructors together. I chose 12 photographs to print on 13x19 paper for the exhibit, which would remain in the café for the month. After the exhibit, these 12 prints accompanied by the remaining 45 prints, on 11x14 paper, would be used to decorate College Bound's four buildings. Most of the spaces had very little color and we hoped the photographs would bring vibrancy to the buildings and even more pride to the community coming through CBD's doors every day.

The exhibit took place on July 6th and was the perfect farewell to an amazing year. Many of the people that I had seen and worked with throughout the year came to see my projects. They all admired the photographs and teased each other about their newfound celebrity status. I stood before everyone to thank the community and the

individuals for graciously welcoming me into their lives and sharing their stories with me. After each profile was showed, I called the subject to stand with me and presented them with a framed 13x19 print: my favorite photograph of them interacting with the students. One-by-one, Susan, Leslie, Ismail, and finally, Mila, came to collect their gift, speak about the experience, and thank me for representing them well.

I left my 10 months with College Bound Dorchester knowing that I had created unique and meaningful relationships. Susan, Leslie, Ismail, and Mila felt pride in their work and I was able to leave with the sensation that I had celebrated them. I too am proud of the work that I was able to accomplish with CBD.

To view the profiles and read more about *The Sacrifices They Make*, please visit <http://thesacrificestheydo.wordpress.com/>.