

Victoria Fleischer
Lewis Hine Fellow 2010-2011

Progress Report (December – February)

My enthusiasm for people is certainly what pulls me towards documentary work. It's the individuals behind an issue that give energy, heart, and a story to any cause.

Ismail is currently the lead instructor for the College Prep program at College Bound Dorchester. He teaches 16-24 year olds who, for a variety of reasons, have not graduated from high school and are trying to pass their GED with the goal of attending a 2 year or 4 year post-secondary institution. At 43, Ismail is still able to relate to his students. Like most of the men and women that he instructs, Ismail has lived a challenging life. He was engaged in a lot of the violence and drugs in the same neighborhood in which he now teaches. But after surviving a brutal stabbing, Ismail changed his life. Instead of adding to the negative behavior of the Bowdon-Geneva area, he has made it his mission to right some of his wrongs and in so doing, redeem himself for his past mistakes. He now dedicates his life to teaching academic and life skills to individuals on a life path similar to the one he has chosen to leave. Sacrificing time and money, Ismail has taken it upon himself to make as much of a difference as he can, to re-engage students and instill in them the value of education and drive for a better future.

Ismail is only one example of an instructor working at College Bound Dorchester. Such a large organization, serving such a wide spectrum of students and needs, has an instructor base that reflects its diversity. Mary grew up in Dorchester, mere blocks away from College Bound's Ruth Darling Child Care Center, where she has worked for almost 30 years. Mila was born in Cape Verde and now works tirelessly with immigrants from throughout Africa and the Caribbean who are eagerly learning English to increase their options and better their quality of life. Each program seems to have an instructor with a story that echoes that of the students they are serving. This fact may explain the teachers' motivations and sacrifices, and shows the heart behind the work that College Bound tries to accomplish. The organization would be nothing without the dedication and passion of the instructors whose sacrifices too often go unnoticed or under appreciated.

My goal as A Hine Fellow is to tell the stories of a select group of instructors at College Bound Dorchester. Through photographs and a narration by the individual teachers, I hope to show why they do what they do and why they are well suited to work with the specific population and issue to which they dedicate their lives. I will profile five individuals to mirror the five programs with which College Bound works and display them on a website to help celebrate the people that give the organization life.

In addition to my main project, I have been working with the Development Team to execute the Annual Report. The original idea of profiling one student who would help interpret all of College Bound's programming turned into smaller profiles of several students, one for each program. On top of the print version of the report, for which I took pictures of the individuals, I am creating two one-two minute audio-visual profiles to be placed on the web. These profiles will give more of a personal context to report.

The two courses that I was teaching have both ended. The students in the photography class have finished with a collection of digital photographs spanning a variety of themes that they can enjoy as well as a few printed photographs of self-portraits currently hanging on the wall in their classroom at College Bound Dorchester. The video course morphed into mentoring sessions as it became clear that the majority of students were less interested in creating a finished video project than they were just discussing their lives and personal stories. I am no longer teaching them, but I am now accompanying their weekly Monday mentoring sessions and I will be paired with two girls in the Alternative Middle School program to function as their individual mentor and confidant.

A final very exciting note: In November, I secretly nominated Ismail for The Philanthropic Initiative's Boston Neighborhood Fellows program. In late February, I found out that he had been awarded the fellowship. He was chosen to receive \$30,000 over three years to be used for whatever he chooses. He was totally surprised and thrilled by the award. He plans to use the money to pay for his education, to help finish his Bachelor's Degree and hopefully a Master's Degree in education. I am very excited for him.