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December 3, 2012

Developing Lives Photography Program: Eastman Kodak Company Donates Single-Use Cameras to New York Housing Authority



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Developing Lives is a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) photography program. Eastman Kodak Company donated over 300 single-use cameras to the Developing Lives Photography Program. The program provides residents living in New York public housing with Kodak single-use cameras, which are used in educational-training workshops. The participants create a visual and oral history of daily life that, without being heavyhanded, effectively counters many popular misconceptions about life in public housing. NYCHA residents are most often on the other side of the camera lens; Developing Lives turns that paradigm on its head.



The project was piloted at the Manhattanville Houses in Harlem in the fall of 2010, with some 20 participants equally divided between seniors and children. The project has been expanded to include a total of fifteen developments in three boroughs with close to two hundred participants. Just this fall, the Developing Lives program added a lecture-style class setting for seniors, in addition to the classes held in a small classroom environment. The lecture classes are similar in nature to a college-level photography class and offered for free to any resident living in public housing. Currently, classes have included about 10 participants per session from 5 developments; the lecture series includes 25-50 participants and is advertised to all seniors across all NYCHA developments.



Each Developing Lives session includes weekly one-hour classes that run for a twelve-week period. Each week instructors demonstrate a new photography technique (light, shadow, camera language, etc.) and introduce a well-known photographer whose work exemplifies that technical style. The Kodak single-use cameras are distributed at the start of every class and returned the following week. The film is then processed and photographs reviewed and returned. Participants are asked to bear in mind the new photography technique when documenting their lives throughout the week.

In addition to teaching technical skills, Developing Lives also helps participants become documentary photographers. The classes discuss the art of storytelling through a photograph. All photographs are paired with handwritten captions from the photographer.

The photographs are displayed on our Studio NYCHA website, which was launched shortly after the Developing Lives program piloted in 2010 (www.StudioNYCHA.org/DevelopingLives).

The New York Daily News ran a full-page [article](#) about Developing Lives in March 2011, at the end of the pilot program. The piece demonstrates that the truer aspects and creative richness of daily life in public housing can garner the attention of the broader public, in stark contrast to typical negative coverage. Through participatory photography, Developing Lives gives residents control over their own narrative. As one senior participant who never used a camera before put it, "Holding up the photographs of my neighbors and neighborhood was like holding up a mirror to myself and allowing me to see things I never noticed before."

In addition to Kodak, which donated over 300 cameras, Developing Lives' other private sector partners include Dell Computers, one of America's most admired American corporations, who provided laptop computers at no cost; Seeing for Ourselves, a not-for-profit grassroots photography organization that helped initiate the Developing Lives program and conceive [StudioNYCHA.org](http://www.StudioNYCHA.org); and Duggal Visual Solutions, a premier American imaging studio (with a client-list that includes MoMA, The Whitney, and The Smithsonian, along with many Fortune 500 corporations), which provided all lab work at cost.

Meet our team:



Project Creator, George Carrano organized and curated "50 Years on the Frontlines," a retrospective of the works of top war photojournalist Philip Jones Griffiths that The New York Times called "One of the great tragic portraits of their time, and required viewing in ours." And in a participatory photography exhibit curated by George, "Unbroken: Photography Subjects Speak Out", photographers from around the world provided a visual journey of their daily lives —"poignant," The New York Times termed.



City-Wide Project Director, Chelsea Davis was born and raised in New York City. Chelsea previously established two programs in participatory photography. In 2004 she created an art class for autistic children at the Association for MetroArea Autistic Children in New York, and the success of that program motivated her to set up a similar class in 2007 in the pediatric oncology ward of St. Louis Children's Hospital. She believes in the communicative power of art and hopes to share this with the participants of Developing Lives.

Lily Randall has ably assisted the Developing Lives program since the summer of 2012.

A special thanks to the Kodak team for helping make the Developing Lives program possible.

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Posted By: Diane C.

Date: 12/4/2012 9:25 AM

Comment: A wonderful program with dedicated instructors! Who knows how many future professional photographers may be on their way thanks to these classes?

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