

Student-produced documentaries give a voice to small nonprofits in the community

As part of their final project, ASU film students create professional-level documentaries for Arizona nonprofits

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Kim Thomas spent 32 years behind bars for an action that only took 37 seconds of her life. And now those 37 seconds have defined who she is — and what she can and cannot do.

Her story is one of a series told by Arizona State University students highlighting nonprofits in the community.

“I will never for the rest of my life be able to vote, hold office or serve on a jury,” Thomas said in a documentary about the Arouet Foundation, a nonprofit that empowers women and families impacted by the justice system. “I’ve lost those rights forever.”

The film went on to highlight how she’s now making a difference working for the foundation, helping women who leave the justice system without money, job prospects or direction. The organization helps participants prepare for social reentry, gain meaningful employment and build a solid foundation for their lives. This year they served 400 women.

The documentaries were produced as part of a final project assignment for the course Documentary for Social Impact. A screening took place on Friday, May 1, at ASU’s [Media and Immersive eXperience \(MIX\) Center](#) — a world-class facility for film, media arts, design and emerging technology programs.

Through heartrending stories of love, transformed lives, hope and generosity, the films are meant to raise awareness of the work being done by small nonprofits, highlight the value of volunteering

and inspire the audience in the process.

They also provide a professional-level product to help the organizations secure the much-needed financial support necessary to continue their work.

“My hope is that people will no longer be able to say, 'I didn't know you existed,'" Thomas said.

“This is a wonderful day to celebrate the phenomenal accomplishments of our students and for telling these stories in such a compassionate and lovely manner,” said [Nita Blum-Reddick](#), a clinical assistant professor in [The Sidney Poitier New American Film School](#).

The course is a collaboration between ASU and Northern Arizona University, co-taught by Kurt Lancaster, a professor of creative media and film at NAU.

“We decided that we'd work with nonprofits — for those who need help,” Lancaster said. “I really wanted students to do something that was real world, that would have an impact on a community that needs their help. The students need to connect with real people and solve real problems. And that's what these films are about.”

In addition to the Arouet Foundation, the students created documentaries for:

[2gether We Live](#), which provides positive life experiences for people with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities

[I Rise Foundation](#), which provides at-risk youth with affordable after-school programs in STEM, athletics and the arts

[House of Refuge](#), a transitional housing service for families experiencing homelessness

[Friendly House](#), which aims to empower Arizona communities through education and human services

[Sojourner Center](#), which provides shelter and support services to adults and children affected by violence

[7th Street Food Pantry and Outreach](#), which helps individuals and families who are struggling with hunger

[Heidi's Village](#), an animal rescue organization and clinic

[Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center](#), a rescue and rehabilitation center for native Arizona mammals

Shining a spotlight on underserved communities

The 7th Street Pantry and Outreach documentary spotlights volunteers handing food to needy families as they drive up in their cars.

The pantry serves low-income individuals, families, seniors and homeless veterans by providing essential food assistance, including take-home food boxes and free meals. It is run entirely by volunteers.

“The students gave the pantry a beautiful voice that it didn't have,” said Ginger McLamb, co-founder of the pantry.

“It’s funny — you can work an eight, nine, 10-hour day, go home and feel tired,” said Bill Morgan, a volunteer for the pantry. “Then you come to the pantry, work that same kind of day, and you’re exhausted, but in a different way. Your feet might be sore, your back a little stiff from moving things around, but you feel revived. You feel refreshed. When you serve someone, it’s like you refill your gas tank from loving other people unconditionally.”

Timothy Bolen, founder and executive director of 2gether We Live, said, “To be recognized on this type of platform and to be able to use this video as we move forward to send our message of love, equality and inclusion is priceless.”

“I am so honored to be able to work with these very, very talented young men,” said Jacqueline Cruz, chief development officer at House of Refuge, after its documentary was shown. “You guys did a phenomenal job of capturing what we do. We would not be able to do what we do without wonderful support from the community. And this video definitely is going to help showcase that, and we’re really, really grateful to have it.”

Student takeaways

The students in the class not only learned the technical process of documentary filmmaking — mastering production, directing, sound and other skills — but also gained firsthand experience working with community organizations.

And beyond that, they learned compassion.

“Homelessness is not this kind of looming, invisible threat that you can't do anything about,” said Anthony Camaccho, a student and director who worked on the video for House of Refuge. “Everybody can do something, even if it's small. ... A lot of small things all together amount to a lot.”

TJ Bohling said it meant a lot for him to work on a project that can make a difference in the lives of others.

“This class has been a great opportunity to do that,” said Bohling, who helped create the documentary for Heidi’s Village. “It’s been amazing to see all of you (fellow students) come here with your own projects, to see all of the volunteers and all of the organizations. It’s just great knowing that people in Arizona do care, and they care a lot.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU film students interview House of Refuge CEO Kayla Kolar for a documentary about the Arizona nonprofit. Courtesy photo

Text image(s)



ASU film students work on a documentary about the nonprofit Heidi's Village, an animal rescue organization and clinic. Courtesy photo



Timothy Bolen, founder and executive director of 2gether We Live, is interviewed by ASU film students for a documentary about the nonprofit. Courtesy photo