



Notes from Interviews Conducted with Staff of Hine Fellowship Placement Sites

We recently interviewed staff, including the directors, of the two placement sites in Boston, MA where our two domestic Hine fellows worked from September 2007 through June 2008. Specifically, we asked staff about the impact (tangible and intangible) of having a Hine Documentary Fellow on staff for ten months, as well as asked whether we could improve the program in any way. Following are notes about fellow Libby Conn's work with Project Hope and Hine Fellow Annie Dlugokecki's work with Julie's Family Learning Center. Both organizations aim to help women and children, some who are homeless, permanently move up and out of poverty.

Project Hope

Sister Margaret Leonard, Founder and Director, Project Hope

Initially when we moved on applying to host a Hine fellow, we were at a period of serious change, where we were identifying our core customer and core geographic area, our mission, which is to partner with families so that they can move up and out of poverty, and then the whole impact measurement process. Do we deliver what we say we're going to deliver?

Although we do education and childcare and shelters and policy change, we really felt our core competency was "transformation," having a relationship with women in such a way that they change. They change themselves and their families. They transform their understanding of their world and began to see themselves as agents of social change, in their kids' schools and in their neighborhoods, and in their larger community.

So when Libby came here, we asked her to document this transformation process. She jumped into it in spite of its vagueness. She did that in a number of ways. She came to meetings and retreats. She began to try to figure out what this meant on an individual level. She did two really good videos for us that really started to document this and then she did all these podcasts.

Our expectation was that she would help us document transformation and she did that. When I look at the end products -- the video pieces and the audio podcasts--we are now much clearer about outcomes for data tracking. On the personal level, everybody just loved her. She worked really hard. She was a delight. She was so willing to do anything.

I also found her process really fascinating. When she did the podcasts she really helped the women articulate and find their voice and learn and then tell their own stories. I came to see that documentary work could be part of an ongoing growth development program with these women.

In one of her videos, she told the story of a woman who had gotten engaged and was able to move into permanent housing and get a job. Suddenly, she earned more money so her housing and health and childcare subsidies went away and she found herself in a situation where she could have moved back into homelessness. Libby did this short video that was so good at revealing and examining this issue. We at PH have been engaged at a local and state level, of

bridging the gap. This phenomenon that Libby captured is an experience that women all over the country are having. Next week there are congressional hearings about this issue and a lot of our scholars are going to Washington to meet with Congress.

I use Libby's video in a variety of ways. I show it in retreats and help the women we work with look at what's happening in the own lives and women's lives across the country and help identify ways we can affect policy change.

I'm in touch with a lot of the women who worked with Libby. They were thrilled to have their story told. What is common among the women I work with is, once they get the support they need, they want to give back. One woman Libby worked with... she was homeless for years and lived on the streets, and now she's graduating and getting her degree. I was with her at a three-day retreat recently and told her how moved I was by her podcast and you should have seen her. Doing this podcast with Libby meant so much to her.

You probably hear how documentary can impact lives and policy all the time, but I have to say, I didn't fully understand it until we had Libby. I don't have any improvements to the fellowship to recommend. The podcasts and videos are on our website and people really listen to them. Other people working with homelessness use them. They're great. Libby was great.

Robyn Eastwood, Development Associate, Project Hope

Libby was absolutely amazing the entire year. It was much more than I ever expected. She went out of her way to get connected with our clients. That's a big deal at PH. She really focused on building trust, so that the women would feel comfortable talking with her.

Initially, she intended to work in video, but when you're working with people who are sensitive about their identity being exposed--because these are women who are moving out of shelters or domestic abuse and other vulnerable situations—then the type of medium you use becomes an issue. In general, we'll have clients, especially when they're just coming into PH who do not want their photos taken, until they trust us.

When she decided on doing podcasts, Libby made sure that the individuals were ready and able to do these. For a couple of people, they just weren't ready and she respected that. Whereas if you hire someone to come in and take photos, they just take the photos. They don't ask whether people mind having their photos taken. Of course, because Libby was that way, people were also comfortable with her taking some of our photos.

The main reason I was involved with Libby is that I do the website for PH. When Libby was deciding on the best way to get her work out to the public, naturally it was the web.

Libby has created seven podcasts. I believe she has nine altogether. Every time she uploads one, I send out a notice to a large listserv of donors, press, etc. We've had a huge response to her podcasts. It's been a great way for us to talk to potential donors who don't know what we do.

I think the biggest thing for me was that I was new to the website. Libby helped a lot with that. She brought our website up to an entirely different level. She created videos for it, took pictures for it and created the SoundProof: Stories of Transformation podcast series. Now we are looking for other communication opportunities on the site. We are very proud of it now. We advertise our website site much more and use it in a much more sophisticated way than most other non-profits.

When I think back to our communication materials before Libby came on, most of the stories were told from the staff perspective. We had one brochure that had client stories. She helped us start using our clients' voices more to tell the stories. It's totally different.

One person featured in a podcast is the current director of our shelter and I wasn't sure how she would feel about putting her own story out on the web. I got to watch this woman as she listened to Libby's piece for the first time. She smiled and was really moved by it. I think for her -- the fact that she and other women at PH had gone through some really traumatic things and are so much the stronger and better for it-- hearing their voices, when they are at a stage when they can look at and reflect on their story--this is really powerful. But none of that would have been captured if Libby hadn't made them feel comfortable and she did it in such a way that they were proud and excited by sharing these stories.

I wish she were here longer. I know she struggled with finding the best women to work with and getting appointments with them and realizing, wow, this one's not going to work, but this one might... These things take time. If we could have taken Libby on fulltime, we would have. She was amazing.

Trish Hembrough, Director of Educational Services, Adult Learner Program, Project Hope
Libby was so fabulous. We had such a great experience. As an organization, it was really helpful for her to capture what it looks like for women to go through transformation. It's such a hard thing to capture.

She created seven podcasts with women who came through Project Hope's programs. She also did a video for our leadership retreat, which was really great. She did another video for our career explorer retreat and then another one of volunteers who worked at Project Hope during its Extreme Make-over. The Career Explorer program now uses her video in its orientation. It's so well-done, they'll use that for years. And she took lots of pictures, too.

Libby was so open and made herself available to the whole organization and was able to get involved in all the programs and really captured who we are as an organization. We've been trying to integrate our programs more so and the work that Libby did has really helped facilitate that process.

In the beginning, she came to the classes and introduced herself and why she was here. She did the same thing over at the shelter. The women were very comfortable with her. She was always there. She would go to events and celebrations just to get to know the women and develop the relationships.

The seven podcasts are on our website. I've used one of them in the classes in the adult learner program as a writing prompt, to give these women ideas on how they can share their story. One Family Scholars, another Boston agency serving these women, uses the podcasts, and so does a policy consortium in Boston.

In terms of the quality of her documentary work, it goes back to the relationships she built. They knew that Libby was here long-term. She wasn't just here for a one-shot deal. The women we serve, it's hard for them to really trust. It takes a long time. Libby made it easy, because of who she was. The relationship that she was able to develop led to the high quality of material she was able to get.

The women who worked with Libby, they're going to carry that positive experience forward with them. They're going to have some pride instead of shame about their story.

Libby's main struggle was connecting with these women outside of Project Hope to record their stories. Sometimes they didn't show and didn't have a phone to call her. I don't know that we could have avoided this. It's just the nature of working with this population.

She certainly taught me and Robyn a lot, about podcasts and video and the web. The women she worked with, none of them had experience with her technology.

We miss her terribly. One of the things I loved was that she just became a part of us so easily. That's really key... that the fellow feels and becomes part of our community. You can hear that spirit of belonging in her audio pieces.

Julie's Family Learning Center

Bob Monahan, Director, Julie's Family Learning Center

I'm trying to find the right superlatives. Hosting a Hine fellow was very, very beneficial to Julie's. Annie not only created these wonderful pieces, she also left behind certain skill sets. She also helped us organize a simple thing like our pictures. We had hundreds and hundreds, but every time we did a newsletter, it felt like we were starting from scratch. Annie set up a system for tagging, organizing and searching for photos.

Sure, the end products Annie created were so powerful, but the whole process was equally so. Annie is a force. She just has a personality and spirit about her. The moms spent time with her and trusted her. Before she came, not one of those moms had a family portrait in her house. She came in and gave them the power to decide where the portrait should be taken and who should be in it. She interviewed them and captured their stories. They then wrote these words on their portraits. This combination was so powerful. All the women received portraits for their homes. We used the portraits for a final exhibition that we invited our donors to. Many attended. We announced it in the paper, on flyers and on listservs. We're going to have those portraits up at our upcoming annual fundraiser.

As part of our fundraising dinner last year, by coincidence, we were given 10 citywide advertising pods by "Walls USA." Annie did a beautiful portrait of a mother and child from Julie's and then made it into a poster for those pods. They were in very public spots; for example, at the entrance to Boston City Hall and the Boston Public Library. We would go to city events and meetings and everyone suddenly became aware of us. People who didn't normally come suddenly started coming to our programs. We had a new legitimacy. It linked folks to our new website. We got so many comments. Some folks came to our annual dinner because they saw that poster.

Annie also did the video at our annual fundraising dinner. We got feedback from staff and moms and donors about her video. Specifically, they said the moms were much more comfortable and candid and it seemed more natural. Folks noticed that. The staff who are doing it this year learned how to replicate this for this year's, including how to approach the project, what techniques and tools to use, and how to edit it.

As far as how she gained access to our mothers, Sisters Jean and Louise introduced Annie. Annie started immediately giving weekly workshops to the moms and helped in the childcare center. These approaches helped her gain the mothers' trust pretty quickly.

Our experience was extremely positive. I don't know that I would change anything. One big strength is that CDS and the donor allowed the fellow the time and space to find and evolve the best, most touching projects.

Ann Doria, Director of Education, Annie's mentor

Annie produced many useful things for Julie's, just by force of her character.

What was less tangible were the relationships she built with the women and children before producing anything. She spent a lot of time and a lot of quality time listening to the women and making them feel safe and respected and important. She went on trips and ate lunches and spent time with their kids. Having been at this for 20 years, I know it is rare to meet someone so young who can build that level of trust.

She really influenced most of our communication materials, like our video. We've been doing this video for seven years. In the past I had always set up the equipment in a room and would ask the women questions and then edit myself out. It was stilted. Annie came up with this idea of using "photobooth" (an application on the Mac). Women could sit in a room by themselves and see themselves on the screen and just talk. The women said some amazing things that we never got when I was in the room. We used a lot of first takes. She pioneered how we could do that. That's one legacy.

She also helped us see the value of the women telling the story rather than the staff telling it. That video was so well-received. It will guide us.

I think it was the length of time that Annie spent here that allowed her project to be so successful. You really have to build a relationship to get to know the story. I think she needed every minute here. Even the women now are still asking about her.

As far as things to think about for future placements, it might be good for Duke to help orient future fellows to Boston and the winter and transportation before they arrive, but I really can't think of anything else. I've seen a lot of volunteers and she just exceeded everyone's wildest expectations.