

Addressing the Needs of Immigrant and Refugee Youth Through Participatory Photography: The AjA Project

www.ajaproject.org

Ashleigh Starke, Program Director

November 30, 2009 12-1pm
315 Behrakis Health Sciences Center



Northeastern University
Institute on Urban Health Research

The AjA Project is a nonprofit organization headquartered in San Diego that empowers and engages recently resettled refugee and immigrant youth through participatory photography-based educational programs. AjA's after-school program, Journey, uses visual storytelling to help youth process their experiences of migration and resettlement, explore cultural identity and become agents of positive social transformation. The program curriculum also includes tools for visual literacy, language acquisition, behavioral health and on-going evaluations.

In 2007, a program evaluation indicated that AjA plays a significant role in alleviating despair, loss, and alienation among refugee and immigrant youth acculturating to life in America. Specifically, the evaluation reported that AjA supports positive youth development in seven areas: social support and belonging, involvement in pro-social activities, structure and safety, building self-efficacy, competence building, character building, and perspective building. Since its founding in 2002, AjA has provided long-term, community-based programming for over 800 refugee and immigrant youth, and has shared their visual narratives with over 750,000 viewers through large-scale public exhibits, including the National Geographic Society's Explorers' Hall (2003), United Nations Headquarter (2004), and the San Diego Museum of Arts (2006).



Photographer: Mesa Country of Origin: Cambodia
Location: San Diego, CA Title: Basketball
"The basket is my goal to go to college and the ball is me. When I go to college I can get a good job, get more money and buy my mom a house. I don't know what kind of job, maybe a policeman."



Photographer: Barwako
Country of Origin: Somalia
Location: San Diego, CA
Title: Red Scarf

I like to walk a lot with my friends and family. The reason I walk a lot is because I want to get exercise.

Ashleigh Starke holds a B.J. in Photojournalism and a M.A. in Intercultural Relations with an emphasis in visual media. Prior to joining The AjA Project, Ashleigh created and implemented participatory photography programs for youth in Boston who have special needs. Ashleigh also curated exhibits showcasing their visual narratives throughout venues in Boston, including the Massachusetts State House and the Harvard School of Public Health. Ashleigh currently serves as Program Director at The AjA Project, where she designs, delivers and evaluates photography-based educational programs for refugee youth living in San Diego. She is also developing interactive cultural competency workshops, based on the youths' visual narratives, to help raise the cultural consciousness of both refugee and non-refugee youth in San Diego high schools.

Ashleigh is a published newspaper photojournalist whose work has included in-depth photo essays chronicling the experience of patients awaiting organ transplants.