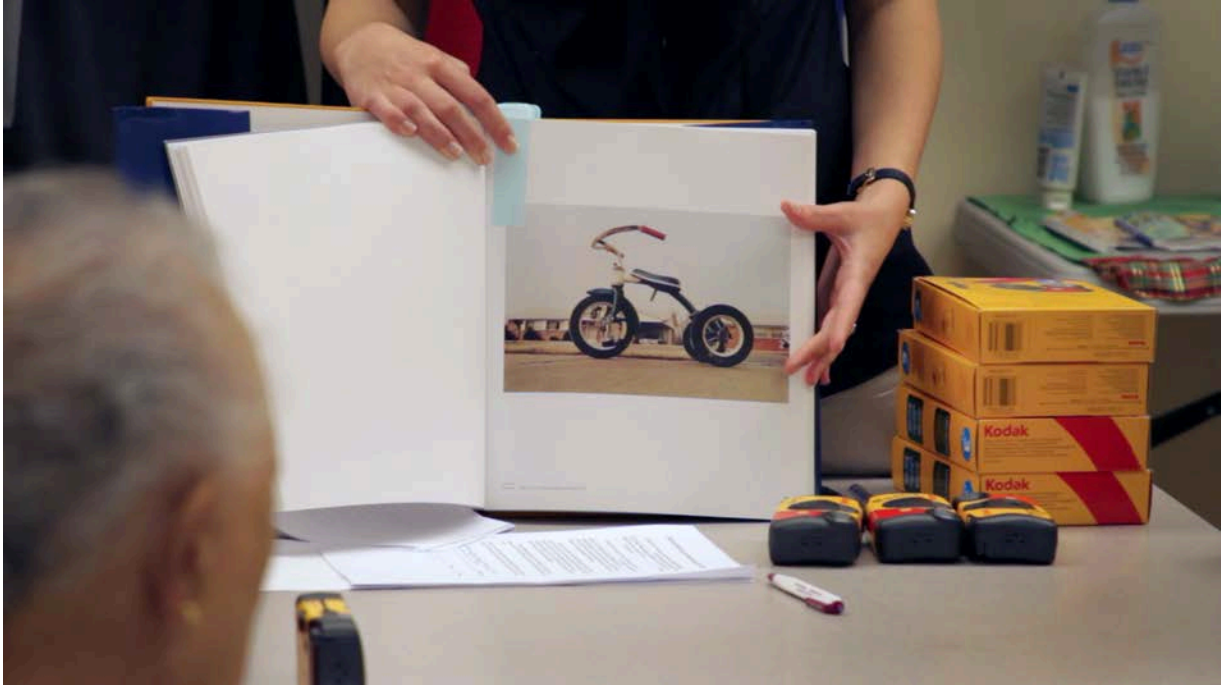


Changing the Visual Narrative



MEDIA KIT

2025

Contact:
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914-413-5378

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A New Public Housing Narrative: *Project Lives*

For a generation, the national and local media's myopic focus on crime and disrepair undermined city and state support of the beleaguered communities inhabiting the NYC housing projects. But in 2010, things began to change.

Over the next three years, hundreds of residents enrolled in a college-level course in the art of visual storytelling, took up disposable Kodak cameras, and set about creating a new visual narrative by documenting their lives photographically.

Result: The most revealing imagery, as seen in gallery exhibits and a globally acclaimed, award-winning book (powerHouse, 2015), created a new public narrative—one that helped return the city and state to the funding table.

In a measure of the effort's continuing impact, the photography is included in a gallery exhibit about NYC public housing in 2025.



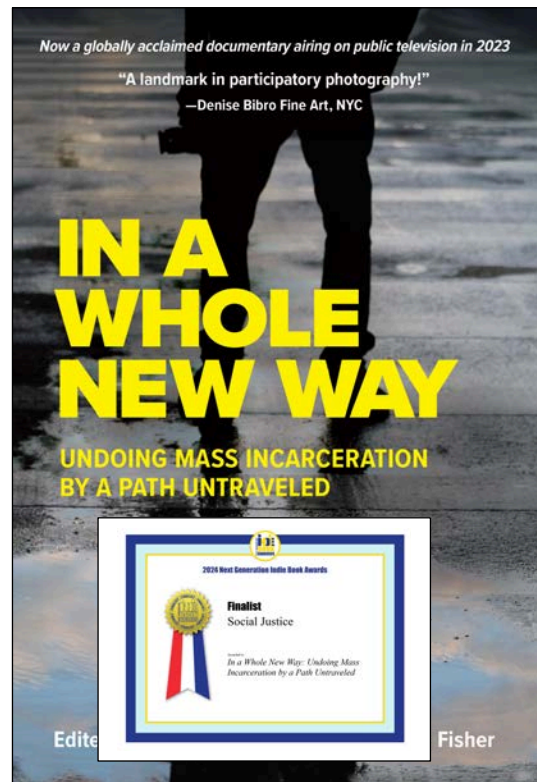
A New Criminal Justice Narrative: *In a Whole New Way*

A generation-long treatment of probation by the media as a slap on the wrist, if not a joke—kicked off, ironically enough, just as the practice turned punitive in response to the 1972-92 crime wave—had undermined efforts by individuals in the city and across the nation to return to a lawful life.

This portrayal also discouraged jurisdictions from walking the sanction back to its original rehabilitative purpose—and so helped feed mass incarceration.

During 2018-2021, in an effort partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, hundreds of New Yorkers on probation along with their neighbors enrolled in a college-level course in the art of visual storytelling, took up high-end digital cameras or their own smartphones, and set about creating a new visual narrative by documenting their lives photographically. Meanwhile, NYC paid participants stipends in the interest of job readiness—which, along with paid photo shoots and photograph sales, charted a path out of justice involvement going forward.

Result: The most revealing imagery, as viewed in gallery exhibits and both a globally acclaimed film and a widely praised companion book (Prospecta Press, 2023), created a new public narrative—one that has stimulated reform of this dominant criminal justice intervention across the US. Even Britain has taken notice.



A New Climate Change Narrative: *Picturing My Climate Future*

Young people have been marginalized in the national conversation about climate change. Yet they have the most skin in the game—even as they did not create the problem in the first place.

During 2023, a quartet of students attending Cape Elizabeth High School in Maine underwent a brief orientation in the art of visual storytelling, took up their smartphones, and set about creating a new visual narrative by documenting their concerns photographically.

The result: The photos were exhibited at the local public library, with the show held over from one month to three in connection with the town's effort to develop a Climate Action Plan. A virtual meeting held by the library brought together students and townspeople to discuss the project in detail. The stage was set for a wider program during the 2024-25 school year.

In 2024, the project won funding from the prestigious Zain Jaffer Foundation while a partnership was formed with Everyday Climate Champions, both Bay Area organizations. The teaser for the upcoming film was itself named Best Short Documentary by the Florence Film Awards in August 2024 and the Paris Film Awards in January 2025. By January 2025, another partnership was in the works with the Chicago organization It's Our Future. Meanwhile, students at South Portland High School and Deering High School in Portland in Maine may join Cape Elizabeth High School in participating in 2025, along with the Boys and Girls Club of Shinnecock Nation in New York.



A promotional poster for an event. The background is a scenic view of a coastal town with a house and a body of water. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box. At the top, it says 'MY CLIMATE FUTURE: A CONVERSATION' in blue. Below that, the date and time are listed: 'Thursday, December 28, 6:30 - 8:00 pm via Zoom'. A paragraph of text describes the exhibit and the event's purpose. Below the text is a list of four bullet points detailing the event's agenda. At the bottom left is the Thomas Memorial Library logo, and at the bottom right is a QR code with the text 'Please register on the library's website' and 'Scan me!'.

Programming Photos



Public Housing



Criminal Justice



Climate Change

The Nonprofit Behind the Programming

Seeing for Ourselves was founded in 2010 by George Carrano, a retired executive of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority. He had stumbled upon an exhibit of participatory photography in the basement of a London church eight years earlier and found himself entranced. After staging an exhibition of such photography in New York City in 2004, he was encouraged by the world-famous war photographer Philip Jones Griffiths to launch a nonprofit dedicated to participatory photography. George took on Chelsea Davis as an instructor and Jonathan Fisher as a storyteller. In 2015, Holly Gordon signed on as the master printer.

Chelsea left in 2021 for a more permanent career path. George departed due to ill health in 2023. A year later, Nuzat Choudhury volunteered to handle social media. And so there are three of us now.

The nonprofit's first initiative served residents of the New York City housing projects during 2010-2013. The effort catapulted Seeing for Ourselves to the front ranks of participatory photography practitioners worldwide.

Based on the efficacy of this first initiative, NYC asked the nonprofit to then serve its residents currently on probation, which became another huge success.

In 2023, Seeing for Ourselves launched its third initiative, aiming to amplify the views of youth confronting a future of climate change.



*Acting Executive Director
Jonathan Fisher*



*Social Media Volunteer
Nuzat Choudhury*



*Master Printer
Holly Gordon*



Founder George Carrano



Former Photography Instructor Chelsea Davis

Gallery Exhibits



Project Lives Exhibit at Patchogue Arts Gallery, May 30, 2015



In a Whole New Way Exhibit at Hunter East Harlem Gallery, March 8, 2019



My Climate Future Exhibit at Thomas Memorial Library, November 30, 2023

The Changed Media Narratives

The New York Times

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2015

Sunday Metro

They the Camera

Photographs from 'Project Lives'

By ALAN FEUER

The first picture Zoya Mourning took was of her dining room table at the Bailey Houses in the Bronx. She snapped it with an orange-and-red disposable camera she had received through Developing Lives, a participatory photographic project run in consultation with the New York City Housing Authority. She liked the way the chandelier was reflected in the serving bowl. She was 10.

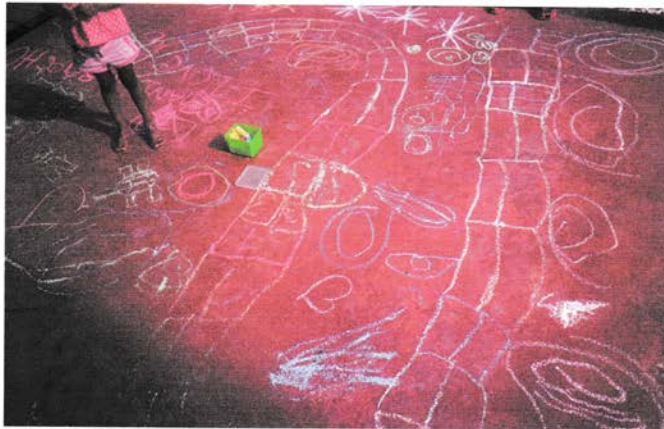
Zoya (pronounced sub-NAJ-uh) is now 13, and some of the images she has captured over the years have been included in a new book, "Project Lives," a collection of photos taken at home by dozens of public housing residents. Most New Yorkers know what public housing looks like from the outside, but this brazenly simple compilation takes us into the interiors of the buildings and thus into residents' startlingly ordinary lives.

Developing Lives began in 2010 when George Carano, a former Metropolitan Transportation Authority official, found himself working at a bus depot across the street from the Manhattanville Houses in Harlem. The contrast between what he experienced of the projects on his daily walk to work and the way they are portrayed in tabloids and Hollywood films inspired him to get started. Offering residents a 12-week photo-taking seminar, Developing Lives was extended into 13 housing projects in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, including the Bailey Houses, where Zoya learned of it at the local community center.

"Before I started taking pictures, I never really saw the meaning of things," she said the other day. "But now I do. I see the past meaning and the present meaning. I can really feel it."

ONLINE THROUGH THEIR EYES

For more photographs taken by young residents of New York City Housing Authority projects, visit nytimes.com/metroprojectlives.



A new book, "Project Lives," collects photos taken at home by dozens of New York City public housing residents, including, clockwise from above: Shariq Baschur, Linda Krwin, Margaret Wells, Aiyah Colon, and Jared Wellington.



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Public Housing

Crime



What if the probation office was a place of joy instead of fear? New York City shows how.

"We're trying to dispel some of the historical trauma that has been in place between probation, law enforcement, and the community," one probation official said.



Andre Whitehead, shown here near the South Bronx NeON, took advantage of photography classes offered at the probation office and discovered a new career path.
JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer



by Samantha Melamed
Updated Jan 10, 2020

ADVERTISEMENT



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- 7. TRENDY CLOTHES FOR OLDER WOMEN >
- 8. WOMEN LOOKING FOR MEN >



Criminal Justice



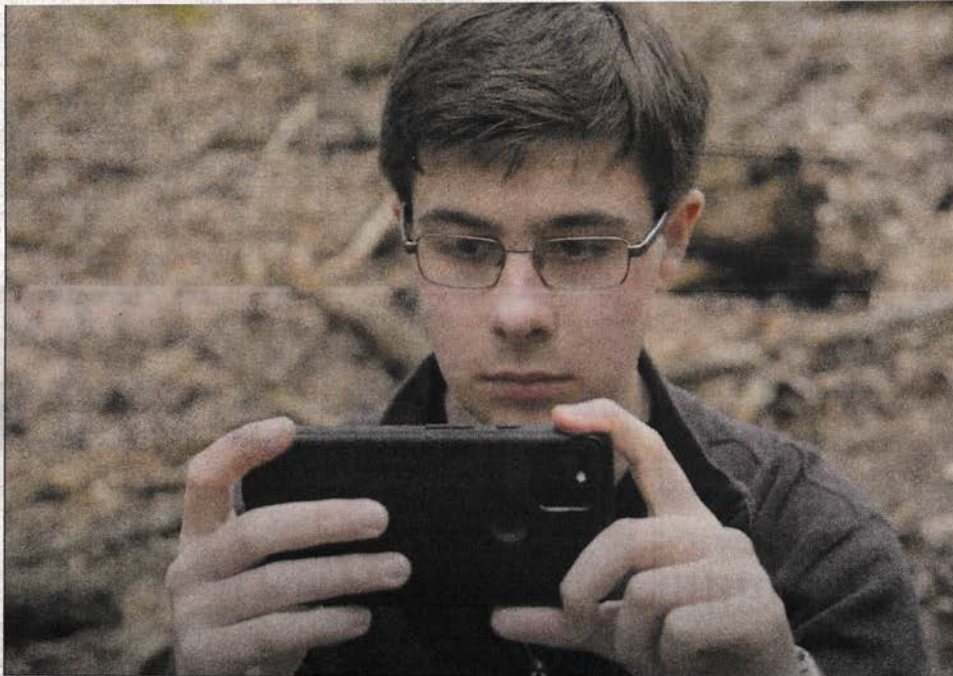
David Geary, founder of Portland's first craft brewery, dies at 78 / B1

\$3.00
Friday,
July 28, 2023

Portland Press Herald

WEATHER:
Lots of sun,
high humidity
High near 88
Details, B6

pressherald.com



CONTRIBUTED / JONATHAN FISHER

Cape Elizabeth High School student Trevor Oakley snaps a picture of a vernal pool for a photography and documentary project on climate change.

Climate change as seen through youth lenses

By Drew Johnson

A Cape Elizabeth documentarian is giving local high schoolers the opportunity to amplify their voices on climate change through photography.

Jonathan Fisher is leading a student photography project, "My Climate Future," at Cape Elizabeth High School, and he will write and direct a documentary based on the project.

In New York City, Fisher and fellow filmmaker George Carrano produced "Project Lives" in 2015 and most recently "In A Whole New Way," featuring photography from public housing residents and people on probation, respectively. The goal was to elevate



CONTRIBUTED / PHOTO BY TREVOR OAKLEY

One of Trevor Oakley's photos for the project is of a vernal pool close to his home in Cape Elizabeth.

Youth lenses, Page 8



ELECTION Local council, school board seats up for grabs this fall

By Drew Johnson

South Portland District 4 City Councilor Linda Cohen is stepping down a year before her term ends because she is moving out of the district, according to the City Clerk's Office.

Cohen's council seat and three others will be on the ballot this fall, along with positions on the South Portland Board of Education.

Cape Elizabeth and Scarborough also will elect council and school board members this fall.

Nomination papers for all candidates will be available next week for the Nov. 7 election.

South Portland

In addition to the one-year remainder of Cohen's term, the City Council District 1 seat now held by Jocelyn Leighton, District 2 seat now held by Mayor Katherine Lewis and District 5 seat now Deqa Dhalac will be on the ballot. Those seats carry three-year terms.

The school board has three available seats, two at-large, three-year seats held by Claire Holman and Jennifer Ryan, and a one-year District 3 seat, currently held by Rosemarie De Angelis.

Nomination papers, available Monday, July 31, at the City Clerk's Office, must returned by 4:30 p.m. Sept. 8.

For more information, go to southportland.org or call 767-3201.

Book Reviews

“Wonderful!”

—*NY1-TV*

“Remarkable!”

—*Annabelle (Switzerland)*

“Stunning!”

CUNY-TV

“Stunning photographs....A fascinating book!”

—*National Public Radio*

“Beautiful.”

—*BuzzFeed*

“An incredibly moving book.”

—*Refinery29*

“Most New Yorkers know what public housing looks like from the outside, but a bracingly compilation of pictures takes you into the interiors of the buildings and thus into the residents’ startlingly ordinary lives.”

—*The New York Times*

“[The] program started by George Carrano, Chelsea Davis and Jonathan Fisher gave photography training and equipment to NYCHA residents and encouraged them to take photos of their homes—their families and neighbors, their decorations and furnishings, and the social events at the core of the community....Whether or not NYCHA can make a comeback will have a crucial bearing on what the future of America’s safety net looks like.”

—*Politico*

“A startlingly simple and optimistic portrait of family, friends, and neighbors. Photos show a couple cooking dinner, a beloved cat, a first date, the junk that’s accumulated in an apartment over years. There’s nothing really specific about the projects in Project Lives. It’s just life.”

—*New York Magazine*

“A change in perceptions is needed to enable those residing in the projects to reclaim pride and to motivate the involvement of policy makers. And ‘Project Lives’ can be considered the first contribution.”

—*Vogue Italy*

“By presenting this look at life in the projects, people in New York and beyond will see why they are worth funding and call for action.”

—*Slate Magazine*

“See NYC public housing life as residents turn cameras on themselves....Unique.”

—*am New York*

Project Lives

"As I observed almost four years ago about *Project Lives*—the book of photographic self-portrayals by New York public housing residents, with imagery intertwining revelatory text—it is always inspiring to see the scorned and disenfranchised take control of their lives.

"Now comes the book and documentary about cameras turned over to the city's probationers, the latest effort by the non-profit Seeing for Ourselves. Once again, we recognize how connected we all remain. Once again, the photographs open our eyes and warm our hearts. Once again, our concerns for social justice broaden and deepen."

—Noam Chomsky

"A wonderful contribution to our field. *In a Whole New Way* contains so much – it's an engaging history of community corrections and a glimpse of how probation is practiced in New York City. It's a series of memorable and moving vignettes about people whose lives have been touched by crime and the justice system. But what will stick with me is the pictures. Throughout the book, we see the faces of those who are participating in this unique and special program. They are smiling and engaged, clearly relishing the opportunity to see and be seen as so much more than the criminal convictions that brought them to probation in the first place. The light in their eyes – their positivity and evident optimism about their futures – is an overwhelming argument for the importance of meaningful second chances as a core component of our justice system."

—Megan Quattlebaum, Director, The Council of State Governments Justice Center

"Institutional reforms often start from the outside and work inward, which is one reason why so many overpromise and underdeliver. *In a Whole New Way* shows us what it could look like when reform begins with the perspective of those on the inside of a system—in this case, individuals on probation in New York City. Using participatory photography as a means of visual storytelling, the participants in this transformative project narrate their view of the world through the lens of a camera. In so doing, they remind us that it's often not people who need changing but the systems that envelope their lives and so frequently constrain their futures."

—Steve Woolworth, President, International Community Justice Association

"Sometimes solutions are in front of us, but we do not see and do not ask. Turning New Yorkers on probation into photographers documenting their own stories has led to an amazing cultural change. *Seeing for Ourselves* documents it beautifully in their film and book *In a Whole New Way*."

—Linda Connelly, President/CEO, Successful Reentry

"Some books are here and then are gone. This one will still be around two hundred years from now."

—*In Conversation with Frank Schaeffer* podcast

"I'm a huge fan of your work!"

—Montel Williams

"A fascinating collection of photographs and personal testimonies that offer groundbreaking insight into both the probation system and the people immersed in it."

—*The Reporters Inc*

"Otherness in criminal justice has to be addressed—and photography is a great way to get at that. *In a Whole New Way* leverages the visual arts to break down barriers and truly utilize the power of perspective-taking."

—Joe Arvidson

The Criminologist

In a Whole New Way

Industry Exhibition



Robert Longino, Resident Photographer



Art Yeh, Resident Photographer



Essany Gray, Resident Photographer



David Rodriguez, Resident Photographer My cousins in the projects. There are three parks near my building.



Richard Mills, Resident Photographer Remember when the ball field was a court house? Now paved, kids love to play basketball.



David Belfrage, Resident Photographer We team around this spontaneous block kicking together as brothers. Yet we are cousins.

REDESIGN FOR COMMUNITY

Many NYCHA residents still gather and play outdoors, and their families benefit from shade and lower temperatures, but the superblocks are not as well utilized as they were decades ago. This decline in activity undermines the tower-in-the-park concept that devoted so much valuable urban land to open space.

Rising crime, air conditioning, electronic entertainment, and the declining conditions at many NYCHA playgrounds have diminished well-being. Landscape maintenance has taken a back seat because billions in urgent building repairs are required to maintain apartment habitability.

These photographs, selected from among those taken by NYCHA residents as part of *Project Lives* between 2010 and 2013, capture the complex experience. Children may still find brightness and joy in a fountain or ballcourt, but NYCHA landscapes deliver less beauty, warmth, and security to residents and the community than initially hoped.

Over the past two decades, NYCHA leaders and designers have worked with residents, community activists, and elected officials to reimagine and enhance open space. Today, the emphasis is on resident engagement, the arts, resiliency, and programming for renewed outdoor activity. With sufficient funding, NYCHA open spaces can again become community assets.

Exhibition Curators:
Prof. Matthias Altwickler, AIA LEED AP, NYIT and
Prof. Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Ph.D., Hunter College

Team:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Axel Linnell, Studio A-14 Thomas Wu, Studio B Tony Koffman, PA&A, WWT Nadia Bryson & Steven Day, NYIT Erwin Pagan and the NYIT Faculty John Papan, Hunter College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michelle Brady, NYCHA Alex Zakhari, NYIT Ann-Cathie Lammiman, East River, Center for Justice Innovation Mark Roman, Lisa Pridemore, MDC Jonathan Rosen, Project Lives John Yeh, FXCollaborative Douglas DeCuir, Sandra Chugh-Lerner, Stephen Pinsky, LaGuardia and Hesperia Institutes Barbara Brannaman, Emily L. Rubin, Andy Wang, NYCHA Sarah Sklaroff, First Faculty
--	--

Funded by:

- NYU School of Architecture & Design
- Hunter College, Department of Urban Policy and Planning
- Public Housing Community Fund
- LaGuardia and Wagner Institutes
- FXCollaborative

“Living in the Shade: NYCHA Open Space Past, Present, and Future”

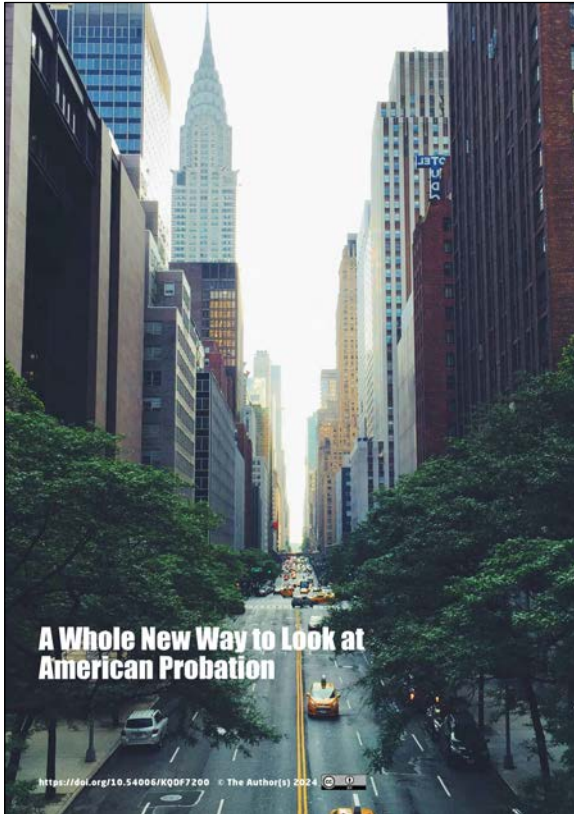
FXCollaborative Gallery

Brooklyn, NY

January 2025

Project Lives

Industry Coverage



Probation Quarterly

Journal of Britain's Probation Institute

December 2024

LOOKING AT PROBATION IN A WHOLE NEW WAY

by Jonathon Fisher

"Taping dog's mouth shut gets him probation in Topeka"
(The Associated Press, 2020)

"East Boston woman on community supervision makes off with her probation officer's wallet"
(WISN, 2016)

"Cold-cocking chiropractor earns Florida man probation"
(Cooper, 2015)

While the above news headlines have been somewhat disguised, the imagery that accompanied the original stories can easily be imagined. We have, after all, become accustomed to the photos of scowling Americans clad in orange jumpsuits illustrating stories about probation. It would also be no great stretch to consider that such imagery may kneecap one's attempt to return to a law-abiding life. And it can follow one around online forever (Lageson, 2016). Whoever has said there's no such thing as bad publicity may not have been on probation at the time.

The media scorn of probation as a sanction, along with its mockery of those serving a term, is exactly what certain New Yorkers on probation and their neighbors have been trying to undo since January 2018. It was then that a novel "participatory photography" program was brought to the city's probation agency by a nonprofit organization, Seeing for Ourselves.

Seeing for Ourselves equips and trains marginalized individuals to take control of their own public narrative by documenting their lives photographically. It delivers a 12-week college-level program in the art of visual storytelling. The nonprofit then promotes the new imagery in gallery exhibits, publications, film, and social media. Shifting the discourse about people on probation, and probation itself, can have lasting impact on the nearly 3.1 million Americans sentenced to a term of probation in 2022—more than those in jail or prison or out on parole combined (Carrano & Fisher, 2023). This article documents how the program and the practice of participatory photography is helping to change the public image of probation.

PROBATION AND THE MEDIA

It seems no accident that the "second chance" known as probation was begun in 1841 by Boston bootmaker John Augustus (New York City Department of Probation [NYCDOP], n.d.) here in America, the country that itself was a second chance for so many. The practice entails supervision in the community, generally as an alternative to incarceration. For a century after its institutionalization in the Bay State in 1878, the practice was portrayed by the media as a legitimate criminal justice sanction (Carrano & Fisher, 2023). However, the 1972 to 1992 crime wave (Lancaster, 2017) led the media to begin characterizing probation as a slap on the wrist, if not a joke (Carrano & Fisher, 2023)—an ironic development, as in another apparent reaction to the crime wave this originally rehabilitative practice now turned punitive.

After the shift toward increasingly punitive policies took hold, untold numbers of Americans wound up pinballing between probation and prison, continually tripped up by arduous stipulations or mandatory conditions of probation (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2019). Over the ensuing decades, many jurisdictions began to walk back the harsh transformation of probation, and New York City led the way. Its many innovations have turned it into an industry leader and helped make it one of the safest large cities in the country (Carrano & Fisher, 2023; Gordon, 2024). Yet beyond the news headlines, probation remains largely unknown to the public.

Both the NYCDOP (Barmudez, 2015) and Seeing for Ourselves (Carrano & Fisher, 2023) believe that the

AMERICAN PROBATION AND PAROLE ASSOCIATION 17

Perspectives

Journal of the American Probation and Parole Association

January 2025

In a Whole New Way

Film Reviews

“Despite the undeniably important reality behind the action taken by the subjects of this documentary, *In a Whole New Way* feels uplifting and hopeful for a better future. Eloquently narrated and thoughtfully put together, this documentary proves people can affect change. That if communities come together we make the world a better place.”

—Infinity Film Festival (London)

“The 24-member Jury committee reviewed almost 600 submissions for our 60-hour festival program. They found your film to be extremely pertinent and well suited for this year’s festival theme, MOVING FORWARD, and we feel strongly that the audience will be captivated by your work.”

—United Nations Association Film Festival (San Francisco)

“Your Documentary ‘*In a Whole New Way*’ is remarkably well done with one of the most necessary and vital issues dealt with. Your film deserves credit for script, directing and overall filming. I trust your documentary is appreciated profoundly by everyone. Keep up the good work and looking forward to see more of your films.”

—International Moving Film Festival (Khuzestan, Iran)

“Moving, important, inspirational and eye-opening, you won’t want to miss the exclusive screening of this short film about one of the most pressing issues of our time.”

—Thomas Memorial Library (Cape Elizabeth, Maine)

“A beautiful project!”

—Vegas Movie Awards

“A pioneering approach to criminal justice reform.”

—*Palo Alto Weekly*

“A film about the camera's power and the injustice of the American justice system. Brilliantly shot and with great force, the filmmaker makes us aware of one of the biggest problems facing American society today.”

—Magma Film Awards

Links

[Seeing for Ourselves website](#)

[Project Lives website](#)

[In a Whole New Way website](#)

[Picturing My Climate Future website](#)

[In a Whole New Way film trailer \(0:52\)](#)

[In a Whole New Way film \(31:06\)](#)

[Can People on Probation Change the Practice Along with Their Own Lives? \(01:19\)](#)

[My Climate Future teaser \(04:15\)](#)

[Looking at American Probation In a Whole New Way](#)

[Looking at Probation in a Whole New Way](#)