



Chicago Youth
Community
Film Festival
a reel look at their neighborhoods

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PRESS RELEASE

FILMMAKERS KICKSTART YOUTH CAMPAIGNS ON VIOLENCE, FOOD JUSTICE & HUMAN TRAFFICKING
America's New Superheroes: Teens Release New Era of Action Films At Youth Film Festival,
"A Reel Look At Their Neighborhoods"

CHICAGO - From human trafficking of minors, widespread youth violence, to food justice as students fight for the right to a free school lunch program – former Chicago high school dropouts are tackling hard-hitting issues to change lives in their schools and neighborhoods. At the **6th Annual Chicago Youth Community Film Festival, "Reel Look,"** awards presentation and film screening today at the Claudia Cassidy Theatre at the Chicago Cultural Center, 11 winning short films put a new twist on the action film genre; redefining action as activism, and taking the pressing-issues of their streets, to the streets.

"Our goal with the *Film Festival, "Reel Look,"* is to prepare at-risk and underserved teens for the 21st Century workforce and increase the likelihood that they stay in school and graduate by incorporating learning into an educational program motivated by students' self interest in the film medium," said **Jack Wuest, executive director of the Alternative Schools Network.** "This year's *Film Festival* entrants have embraced the opportunity and taken the film program to the next level, not only developing their communication and leadership skills to share their voice through cutting-edge film production techniques, but also using their films as a platform for action to bring about *real* change."

More than 420 youth from 11 Chicago alternative high schools submitted 21 film entries to this year's *Film Festival.* Films were developed in classes taught by Chicago **Community TV Network** instructors and sponsored by the **Alternative Schools Network.** The *Film Festival* is presented in conjunction with the **Chicago Film Office,** acknowledging these teenage filmmakers as the upcoming talent joining Chicago's vibrant film community.

A panel of judges comprised of filmmakers, critics, writers, media professionals and educators, selected the winning films based on film technique criteria but also evaluated the significance of each film. This year's judges included: **Nelson Carvajal, Filmmaker, Content Creator, Writer, IndieWIRE & Fandor's Keyframe;** **Dr. Susan Doll, Professor of Film & Art History/Ringling College of Art & Design, Official Blogger for Turner Classic Movies;** **Dr. Vinni Hall, Board Secretary, Illinois State Board of Education;** **Jeff Harder, Filmmaker, Associate Professor of Communications at Loyola University of Chicago;** **Phillip Koch, Screenwriter, Director, Producer, Film Police!;** **John Petrakis, Film Critic for Christian Century, Adjunct Professor at School of The Art Institute of Chicago & Lecturer at University of Chicago;** **Zak Piper, Independent Producer, Sound Recordist, Director, Kartemquin Films;** and **Ines Sommer, Filmmaker & Executive Director, Percolator Films.**

"For this generation of youth, film is the communications medium of choice and by tapping into this high area of interest, we've been able to engage a range of teens, many of whom have been disconnected and face extraordinary obstacles in their everyday lives," said **Dr. Denise Zaccardi, executive director of Community TV Network (CTVN),** a national leader on engaging youth for more than 38 years. "Working directly with these youth on the production of their films, the *Film Festival* has encouraged these teens to feel empowered by teaching them skills to communicate and contribute to social justice conversations and by connecting them with other communities who share similar concerns so that they can experience the power of a collective voice."

TEEN ACTION HEROES EMBARK ON NEW MISSIONS

Giving Hollywood's best action films a run for the money, winners of the *"Reel Look" Film Festival* have used their films to organize contemporary, teen superheroes around urgent issues and launch social activism campaigns.

"What Is Freedom?" – Social Action To End Human Trafficking

Created by **Prologue Early College High School** Film Crew, with video instructor, Vedran Residbegovic, this film educates youth, advocates and officials on the rise of modern-day slavery targeting youth and the need to put an end to human trafficking. The film won the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives' National Video Challenge, which brought the

student filmmakers to Washington, D.C. for the 150th Anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and while there, students testified to the Department of Justice, Department of Education, and the FBI to request human trafficking education be a part of national curriculum. To date, the work of these filmmakers has supported the following actions:

- **Launch of a curriculum pilot program in a New York City public school.**
- **Scheduling of a training and certification program for teachers and administrators in New York City in partnership with AMBER Alert, NYPD, NY State Administration of Child Service and Safe Horizon.**
- **Support from Chicago Public Schools, the Mayor's Office and the Sheriff's Office, with fundraising beginning to support the curriculum addition.**
- **Interest from Dallas and the state of New Jersey in bringing programs to their students.**

“Lunch Pitch” – Creating Access To Free Student Lunch

The **Winnie Mandela Intergenerational High School** Film Crew, with video instructor, Christopher Rose, used their film to demonstrate the need for a school lunch program to feed hungry, low-income youth; many of whom may have no other source of regular nourishment. Students formed the Winnie Mandela Food Justice Project, created a plan and budget for bringing lunches and snacks into their school, and initiated actions including:

- **Obtaining an initial social justice grant from Presbytery of Chicago and enlisting CTVN's support in working to get additional grants to fund their program.**
- **Reaching out to the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration for consulting on program actions.**
- **Testifying at a Chicago Public School Board Hearing on the need for increased funding for their school.**
- **Currently working to gather speakers to facilitate a Food Justice Promotional Congregation.**

“Turn One Into None” – Taking Action To Stop Violence

As youth violence has increased exponentially in Chicago, the filmmakers from the **Academy of Scholastic Achievement (ASA)**, with video instructor, Philister Sidigu, dramatized the devastating impact of gun violence, and the enormous impact on just one class, in one Chicago school. While the film serves as a public service announcement, students at the Academy of Scholastic Achievement, along with students of other Alternative Schools Network schools, are calling on each other, as well as neighbors and advocacy organizations to take action including:

- **Working with advocacy and violence prevention organizations like CeaseFire Chicago.**
- **Encouraging the development of after-school opportunities to curtail gang involvement.**
- **Asking people to become mentors, check on neighbors and help those in need every day.**
- **Engaging youth to help, rather than shrug responsibility, and “stop the hating” that leads to violence.**

“As the *Chicago Youth Community Film Festival* has gained broader attention nationally for its youth-produced films, this year's entries demonstrate how youth have evolved their role to capitalize on this communication platform and ensure their voice turns to action,” said **Zaccardi**. “Students are seeing the impact of sharing their voice and how far their voice can travel as they reach more audiences and influencers who can assist these youth in bringing about real change.”

NEW ERA OF ACTION FILMS CREDITED BEYOND CHICAGO

During the past six years of the *Film Festival*, more than 2,000 alternative high school students have produced a significant body of work – a total of 159 films that have reached wide audiences to share their messages and garnered notable awards.

Numerous CYCFF student films have placed in national film festivals – for youth and for professional filmmakers, including:

- **The Chicago International Film Festival**
- **The San Francisco International Film Festival**
- **Screen Test Youth Film Fest (Schaumburg Prairie Center for the Arts)**
- **Do It Your Damn Self (DIYDS)**
- **National Youth Video and Film Fest (Boston, MA)**
- **Reel Teens Film Festival (Woodstock, NY)**
- **The Frederick Douglass Family Initiative's National Video Challenge**

All Reel-Look Festival films have been webcast and broadcast on *Hard Cover: The Voices and Visions of Chicago Youth*, CTVN's award-winning youth-produced cable-TV series, broadcast in Chicago (on CAN-TV 19), Youth Channel in New York City, Phillycam in Philadelphia, St. Paul Neighborhood Network in Minnesota, and on the YouTube channel, hardcoverchicago. The 2013 Festival films will be broadcast and webcast again in June and July of 2013. For more information and to view a sample reel of work, visit the website, www.ctvnetwork.org.

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