

I began my fellowship at United South End Settlements (USES) located in Boston's South End in August, and in the two months since then, I have learned a tremendous amount about the South End from an historical perspective, about the United South End Settlements, and about the community members USES serves.

United South End Settlements is located in the South End of Boston, what is now regarded as a hip and trendy neighborhood though the stereotype does not accurately describe its complexity. The South End first greeted thousands of immigrants arriving to Boston in the nineteenth century. From its inception, the South End has been regarded as a vibrant, diverse community. Harriet Tubman passed through on the road to freedom, and her statue stands at Columbus Circle. In the 1950s, urban renewal gained momentum, and with the more recent movement of gentrification, the South End has earned its current reputation of being artsy and cultured. However, many people within the Boston area do not know that fifty percent of the residents in the South End live below the poverty line. While the median income is quite high, with multi-million dollar condos expanding daily, the same economic, educational and social needs that immigrants experienced in the nineteenth century remain for low-income families today. The voices of low-income families in the South End have been silenced amid the directives of newcomers to the neighborhood. It is the mission of USES to give a voice to the under-represented people of the South End and Lower Roxbury communities through its various programs.

A hundred and twenty years ago, settlement houses were centers of community outreach and unique in the respect that those who served also took up residence at the house. At that time, the settlement house movement focused on sanitation and housing issues for the community. While the focus has changed in the present era to education, arts enrichment, and family challenges, United South End Settlements remains dedicated to serving a wide range of needs within the community. During my first two months, like many Hine Fellows before me, I have pitched in and helped in whatever ways have been needed (from creating visual newsletters, posters and other publicity materials) and have, in the process, met the many programs USES runs, including:

- Early Childhood Education: serves the infant, toddler, and preschool ages with approximately half the slots state-funded.
- After-school Program: includes children ages 5-12 from diverse backgrounds.
- The Children's Art Centre: the oldest museum and art center designed specifically for children in the country celebrated its 90th anniversary just last week.
- Camp Hale: in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, this camp has been serving inner-city boys ages 7-14 since 1900.
- Artful Transformations Program: an art therapy program designed for high-risk girls to cope with the challenges they face.
- Adult Basic Education: with literacy, pre-GED, and GED levels, this program serves adults striving for an education.
- Senior Services: focuses on keeping seniors independent in their homes by assisting their various needs.

- Technology Education: addresses the need for many adults to become technology savvy in today's society.
- South End Center: offers community classes in anything from decoupage to American Sign Language.

The three programs that I am most drawn to are the Artful Transformations Program, Adult Basic Education, and Senior Services. The possibilities within these programs are so rich, and I know I will never be short of compelling stories and photographs.

The last two months have been interesting for me from a personal perspective. After arriving home from a year in the Philippines working as a missionary and human rights worker, I spent most of the summer months within the comfort zone of my hometown, family, and close friends. Although I've become accustomed to picking up and moving to a new place during the past five years, these transitions are rarely seamless.

Similar to my experience in the Philippines, many people within the organization have had trouble understanding why I am here. Despite presentations, meetings, and numerous conversations, many people at USES still believe I am here through the development office to "take great shots" of the organization purely for publicity reasons. I have to explain that documentary work is more complex than simply making an image. It's about becoming a part of the community while simultaneously extracting oneself to see beyond the banal to what is extraordinary.

Coming back to America has been culturally difficult. The American ideals (that too often have adverse effects) of productivity, efficiency, and independence are in conflict with behaviors that many successful documentarians cultivate. It is sometimes challenging to argue the value of sitting with a group of men who come to the Harriet Tubman House everyday to play checkers versus the value of learning the statistics about these men while at a computer. However, I am secure in my value system that puts people above output.

This much I know as true: as a Lewis Hine Fellow, my role is to understand people, to build relationships, and nurture an exchange of trust so that intimate photographs may be made. For me as an artist, the process is just as important as the product. If the process is collaborative and empowering, then the product will be compelling. I'm just beginning this process of exploration, but it is encouraging that I feel at home within the organization, secure in the relationships I have formed, and eager to see where my projects ideas take me.