

I'm trying find out if I can  
have a better life or not.

# PUTTING FILMS TO WORK

WORKING FILMS





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In early 2019 eight Georgia-based organizations were selected for Putting Films to Work (PFTW), a year-long institute offering training and support from Working Films to leverage the power of documentary media to advance their organizing, educational, and advocacy goals. The program is helping organizations embrace nonfiction film as a critical resource and a natural component of what they do; resource the organizations and individual leaders with specific films and the skills to put them to work; and increase the strategic use of documentary films in community settings, creating more opportunities for Georgians to engage around issues of critical social importance. Launched with a two day convening and training in April 2019, the program of film screenings and events hosted by the organizations and Working Films continues through March 2020.

## THE 8 ORGANIZATIONS

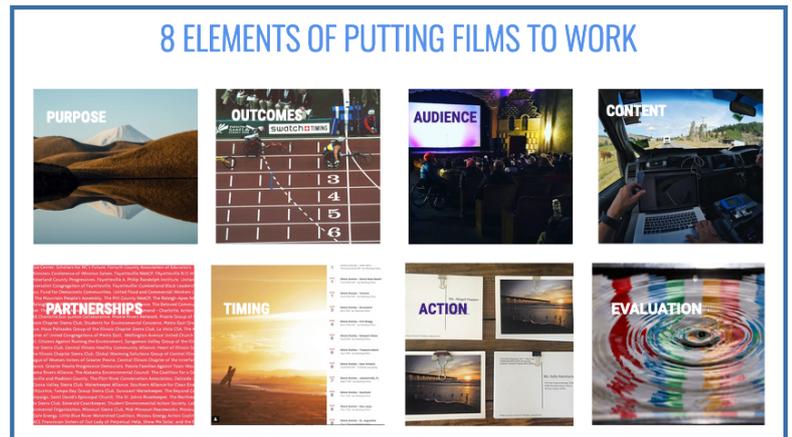
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# KICKOFF TRAINING

Putting Films to Work began with a two day training April 25 and 26, 2019. The eight organizations, selected through a competitive application process, came together with Working Films staff members Anna Lee, Molly Murphy, Andy Myers, and Gerry Leonard who have three decades combined experience leveraging documentary film to advance social justice. They were joined by guest instructor and expert impact producer Ani Mercedes of Looky Looky Pictures. The convening was co-facilitated by Melinda Weekes Laidlow of Beautiful Ventures, a creative social enterprise that influences popular culture, disrupts anti-blackness and elevates perceptions of Black humanity.

For two days organizations were introduced to Working Films' curriculum, which centers on the eight elements required to put films to work. Case studies of film and organizing campaigns by Working Films and Looky Looky Pictures were featured and each organization had individual time with the training team to create initial plans for how they will use film strategically in their work going forward. Each participating organizations received funding to support costs for three film events.



## Participant Feedback

The following is a summary of data collected from the anonymous post-training survey: 100% of respondents agreed with the following: "I understand how I can apply my learning from this training to my work" and "The Eight elements are a useful tool for planning how to use documentary film in my work."

### Selected Quotes:

*"It was helpful to do a "deep dive" into the elements of Putting Films to work as I feel this was the crux of the training. It was through the understanding of these elements that I gained a clarity and appreciation for STRATEGIC use of film."*

*"I would recommend the training to other organizations that have a interest in exploring creative ways to engage their community and spark dialogue."*

*"As documentary film has always been a passion of mine, it was eye opening to see how it could be integrated into the work I do every day! I was eager to soak up all I could on the strategic ways that film can be utilized to further our mission/goals."*



## HIGHLIGHTS OF WORK TO DATE

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The Counter Narrative Project (CNP) builds power among Black gay men and works in solidarity and coalition with all movements committed to racial and social justice. The Counter Narrative Project has been committed to using documentary storytelling to advance their work for justice, even prior to joining the cohort. They wanted to deepen their learning, particularly to explore new forms of storytelling and evaluation of impact. Their first screening event furthered these goals and aimed to reach audience members not currently working and collaborating with CNP. They wanted to bring new allies and partners into CNP's work - organizations focused on harm reduction, domestic and gender-based violence, policy advocacy, voting rights and racial justice.

CNP's first event within Putting Films to Work was a screening of *I Am Not Your Negro* on July 31st, 2019 in Atlanta, GA at the Phillip Rush Center. The film, directed by Raoul Peck, is a revision of letters written to James Baldwin's literary agent describing his next project, "Remember This House." The book was to be a revolutionary, personal account of the lives and assassinations of three of his close friends: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. The event also included a reception prior to the screening, which featured a pop-up Virtual Reality (VR) mixer. Atlanta City Councilman Antonio Brown joined the Counter Narrative Project and their allies for a post screening discussion.



Screening of *I Am Not Your Negro*



Pop-up Virtual Reality Mixer

GAIN's mission is to provide free immigration legal services to victims of crime and persecution. Their goals for using film are to educate and inform people who care about immigration, but don't necessarily understand the system behind it, and who are unfamiliar with the services that GAIN provides. Specific young professionals into GAIN's work.

GAIN hosted a free film screening of the CBS News Originals documentaries, *The Darien Gap: A Desperate Journey to America* and *Seeking Asylum: An Immigrant's Journey* on Thursday, September 12th at Landmark's Midtown Arts Cinema.

This two-part series follows the story of Shahab Shahbazi, an Iranian migrant, through a dangerous 60-mile stretch of jungle separating Colombia and Panama that thousands cross every year hoping to reach the U.S. After a dangerous journey, Shahab's future is no less uncertain when he reaches the border. Asylum-seekers like Shahab risk their lives to reach the U.S. every day, but once they arrive they discover their journey is far from over.

Following the screening was a discussion featuring Monica Modi Khant, GAIN Executive Director, and Adam Yamaguchi, an award winning producer, CBS News correspondent, and interviewer in *The Darien Gap: A Desperate Journey* and *Seeking Asylum: An Immigrant's Journey*. During the event there was also a showing of the short film *UnDocuJoy* by Define American, that challenges victimizing representations of people who are undocumented by showcasing authentic moments of joy.

***"Because of the training we received in the Putting Films to Work program, our film screening was a more robust experience than any we have had before. In particular, we appreciated the opportunities to identify both our purpose and what voices may be underrepresented in our process, and to craft a respectful post-show conversation that inspired action. The combination of that reflective process and the event planning assistance provided by the Working Films staff enabled us to create a captivating and participatory event which was critically important to building compassion and understanding for asylum-seekers in the U.S."***

**- Kate McNeely, Director of Development, GAIN**





Georgia Justice Project (GJP), an organization that has served low income people in Georgia who have been affected by the criminal justice system for over 30 years.

GJP wants to use screenings to encourage employers to engage in second-chance hiring and to engage in policy change efforts. To achieve this they hosted a free screening of *Life After Life* on Tuesday, October 8th. The documentary film directed by Tamara Perkins explores the struggles that three men face when they return home after completing their prison sentence. Following the screening, GJP used the stories captured in *Life After Life* to frame a discussion featuring GJP's Executive Director Doug Ammaron, around issues of reentry in Georgia, and the barriers to housing, employment, and other opportunities that people face after coming in contact with the criminal justice system.

***"Putting Films to Work has been a great resource for Georgia Justice Project in our mission to spread awareness of criminal justice reform issues in Georgia. Framing a conversation around a documentary film helps the audience put a face and a story to critical issues. Our first screening with the program this month was met with rich discussion and enthusiasm for our work around reentry and our campaign to expand expungement in Georgia."***

***- Erika Curts, Development Associate, GJP***





LaGender, Inc. a non profit organization led by African-American trans women that empowers, and lifts up the spirits of transgender woman of color in the metro Atlanta area, hosted a free film screening of *Happy Birthday Marsha!* on Saturday, August 31st, at ArtsXchange.

*Happy Birthday Marsha!* is a film about iconic transgender artist and activist, Marsha "Pay it No Mind" Johnson and her life in the hours before she ignited the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City. The event also featured a special screening of LaGender's docuseries films *Positively Trans: You R Who You Say You R* and *This is the Day the Lord has Made*. Through these docuseries films, we follow the lives of LaGender's Kleopatra McGlothin and Dee Dee Chamblee, as they discuss the challenges trans women face every day such as homelessness, discrimination, and being HIV-positive.

Following the screening, members of LaGender held a discussion about the various obstacles and challenges that come with being a trans woman, and the strength and resiliency they seek to provide for their community of transgender woman of color. This event was held in conjunction with Atlanta Gay Black Pride.





Housing Justice League works with renters and homeowners to self-organize and defend their right to remain. They fight to preserve affordable housing, for just living conditions, to prevent gentrification, and to build community power for an Atlanta-wide housing justice movement.

Coming into Putting Films to Work, the organizations was planning for a Housing Justice Film Series focused on how gentrification has transformed cities across the US and deisgned to lift up stories of communities fighting for housing as a human right! The training helped them to build on their existing ideas and carry out successful three part event that featured the films *City Rising*, *Priced Out*, and *The Home Team*, which is about Atlanta's Westside.

Screenings audiences were invited to join actions following the events, including knocking on doors in Ashview and talk with folks about our BeltLine for All campaign..

HJL's most recent event was a screening held in collaboration with Southerners on New Ground. Together they hosted *Flag Wars* a film focused on Columbus, OH, where white, queer newcomers moved into a historic black neighborhood, displacing residents. A conversation about the intersections of gentrification and LGBTQ+ communities took place after the screening.



Housing Justice League  
presents the

# Housing Justice Film Series

Co-sponsored by:



**American Friends  
Service Committee**  
Atlanta Economic Justice Program

Join us to learn how gentrification has transformed cities and hear stories of communities fighting for housing as a human right!

# STORYSHIFT ATLANTA

## THE START OF A PUTTING FILMS TO WORK EVENT SERIES

In addition to supporting screenings held by the individual organizations that are part of the Putting Films to Work cohort, Working Films is leading the entire group in curating of a multi-part event series for Atlanta audiences. The goal is to engage individuals working for social and racial justice as well as the Atlanta film and creative community in dialogue and action.

We held the first of our planned events in this series in late September 2019, *StoryShift: An Evening Exploring Accountable Storytelling*. We screened excerpts of the *StoryShift* video series which lifts up examples of filmmaking processes that respect the power, agency, and direction of the people featured and those most affected by the issues raised. Clips from the new series prompted discussion among a panel of filmmakers, producers, showrunners, actors, and others in film and television, as well as social change advocates who use film as a resource in their work. PFTW cohort member, Charles Stephens, Counter Narrative Project, was featured on the panel. “This was a space for the film and media community in Atlanta to be in conversation with one another about how both the content they produce and the practices used to make it can best respect those who are featured,” said Hannah Hearn, Impact Coordinator at Working Films and producer of the *StoryShift* series. “The documentary filmmaking field and other storytelling sectors are in the midst of essential conversations about representation and power. *StoryShift* is Working Films’ contribution to this dialogue and the change that will result.” Working Films presented the event in partnership with with Beautiful Ventures.





## **WHAT'S NEXT**

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Each of the Putting Films to Work cohort members are continuing to plan and host screening events through March 2020 with support from Working Films. Georgia Appleseed will be hosting their kickoff event in January featuring The New York Times episode, *Segregated City*.

We are also finalizing the film selections for the PFTW film series. A screening of *The First Rainbow Coalition*, featuring filmmaker Ray Santisteban, in early January and another in February will feature multiple cohort organizations as part of the post screening discussion. A final wrap up event featuring the story of the cohort and their learnings will take place in March or April 2020.

## **THANK YOU**

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Working Films is deeply grateful to the funders who have made Putting Films to Work possible:

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