

# Film series captures profiles of poverty

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*Special to Go Triad*

Within the cavernous converted warehouses of Revolution Mill Studios, small groups of students crowd around a bank of computers. Working together in pairs and teams, they edit clips of film, add audio to video and cue scene cuts. Their ages and races vary greatly, and yet none of that seems to matter. They're far too focused on a common goal to notice anything beyond what's on the screen before them.

The students are part of the Welfare Reform Liaison Project, a local nonprofit organization that helps displaced workers and ex-prisoners, teaching them various job skills, such as video production.

During May, they worked in teams to create documentary films for the "Faces of Poverty" series, which will be screened June 16 at Carousel Luxury Cinemas in Greensboro.

The series allows the students to learn skills in film shooting and editing, while capturing the stories of the impoverished.

"One thing that's really amazing is how excited folks get when they get to tell their own story," says Fred Newman, vice president of operations for the Welfare Reform Liaison Project. "They'll start talking about what life is like from their perspective, and we have a couple of people who've said, 'I just have to get this out.' You really get an appreciation of their stories and talents, and just lives in change."

And even when they're telling the stories of others, that enthusiasm never falters. Program participant Thomas Therrian, who struggled to find work after losing his business, has spent the month interviewing and filming homeless panhandlers around Greensboro. His film, "Walk in My Shoes," explores the lives of the men and women people see every day, standing on corners around town with signs.

"Mine focuses on the people with the cardboard signs, talking about what's behind the sign ---- it's about the people behind the sign," Therrian says. "These people just opened up to us. Some of them live in the woods, and one guy lives in a vacant parking lot, and another fellow sleeps behind the 'Welcome to Greensboro' sign off of Randleman Road."

Getting to know these people, and hearing the stories of hardship that forced them to beg on the street, made Therrian re-evaluate his own life and realize how perilously close he came to ending up in that same spot.

"If it wasn't for my family, that could've been me," he says. "If I didn't have my family to give me a place to stay and help me out, I could've ended up just like some of these guys. It made me think a lot and appreciate everything I have."

Therrian hopes to transition back into full-time employment once he completes the program. But through the project, and the skills he's learned, he could even see himself getting involved in film production as a career.

"This program has just been wonderful," Therrian said. "I've had some rough patches, and I just wanted to get working again, and I thought this would help me out. It's taught me a lot of patience, a lot about dealing with people. And then I've learned a lot about film and editing, which I really enjoy."

And for Newman and the others who work on the Welfare Reform Liaison Project, opening up a world of new interests and possibilities for these students makes all the hard work worthwhile.



Thomas Therrian

## Want to go?

**What:** "Faces of Poverty" film series

**When:** 6:30 p.m. June 16

**Where:** Carousel Luxury Cinemas, 1305 Battleground Ave., Greensboro

**Admission:** Free (because of limited seating, you must get tickets in advance)

**Information:** 691-5780

"The people in our program are working their way out of poverty," Newman says. "They do this on their own time, and they've really had a chance to learn, and this is a different experience that they wouldn't have otherwise. It's not just about the video, it's about the growth and change process. The video is just a means of achieving that."

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