

Stories of a lifetime

Outside the Frame's Annual Gala premieres original films by and about youths experiencing homelessness.

BY SARAH HANSELL
STAFF WRITER

The opening scene: 23-year-old Jacob Averi speaking at his mother's memorial, his sister at his lefthand side. His mother was a drug addict throughout his life.

His eulogy addresses her directly. His first sentence: "I forgive you."

"I don't want you to miss us or be sad or feel guilty anymore," he said at the memorial. "Just be at peace. You deserve it."

The scene is from "Hairapy," a short film shot this past summer starring Averi, a former program participant of Outside the Frame, an organization that empowers homeless and marginalized youth through teaching them filmmaking and bringing those films to audiences across the city.

"Hairapy" and other short films created by and with the youth participants of Outside the Frame will be debuted at the their Annual Gala on Nov. 13. The event's theme is Leaving Home.

"I think people that haven't experienced homelessness, they think leaving home is like, 'oh, go West, young man, you decided to leave your mom and dad's house and strike out, good luck,'" said Nili Yosha, Outside the Frame's founder and executive director. "But if a young person chooses to leave home early, it's because the streets are better than where they left, and that's kind of what these stories show."

Leaving home is a reality Averi knows all too well. He became homeless within 6 months of aging out of the foster system at 18, but it wasn't the first time. He had been homeless on and off growing up with his mother and sister, and Child Protective Services (CPS) had been involved since he

IF YOU GO

What: Outside the Frame Annual Gala: Short films by and starring youth experiencing homelessness, a Q&A with the young filmmakers, and a Lifetime Achievement Award to Tia Plympton

When: 6:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 13: Doors open 5:30 p.m. with free refreshments, cash bar

Where: The Armory, 128 NW 11th Ave., Portland

was 5. When we was 14, he and his sister were removed from their mother's home and put in foster care.

"I got home from school and my mom was crying," he said. "She opened the door and she was like, 'you're not supposed to be here.'"

CPS had planned to pick up him and his sister straight from school, not allowing them to say goodbye or even pack a bag.

At 18, he had no place to go.

"I didn't really have, obviously, any family I could rely on," he said. "I didn't have any resources available to me."

But he did already know about Outside In, a health and social services organization for homeless youths, and was able to find shelter there. At the time, Outside the Frame was a small program at Outside In called Guerrilla Theatre. One of his friends talked him into trying it. He laughed as he explained that she bailed but he stayed — "forever."

"A lot of it was just having somebody believe in you," he said. "You know, also just that trust that you kind of build with people when they're giving you cameras that are



IMAGE COURTESY OF OUTSIDE THE FRAME
A scene from "Hairapy," a short film by Jacob Averi with Outside the Frame, a film program for youths experiencing homelessness.

thousands of dollars and they're not really worried about it.

"It's kind of weird because we call them youth and whatever, but that's just a classification. But I don't think I had ever been treated more like an adult or more like a person without being looked down upon or people just expecting me to fuck up."

Outside the Frame now offers a three-week summer intensive where young people learn all the ins and outs of filmmaking, from filming, to audio and lights, to screenwriting and character development. They also offer weekly workshop that provide a consistent and supportive framework for youth to hone their skills.

The organization also does outreach and education, showing films to varied audiences, from social work students to high schoolers to kids in juvenile detention.

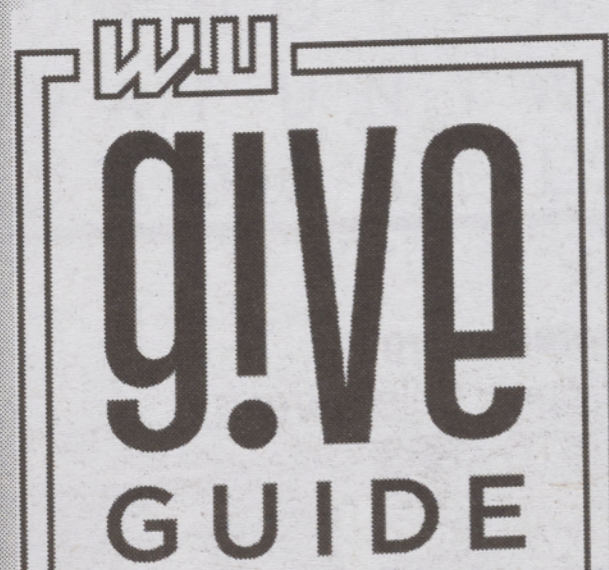
"It's life-changing," said Yosha. "It's a program they want to participate in that gives so much creative freedom and control, versus a lot of the prescriptive programs, like

'here let's take you and civilize you. This is: 'no, here, come and get some tools that you don't have access to and express and create and teach us.'"

Averi got the job at New Seasons, is a peer mentor at Outside the Frame, and has a "semi-steady" housing situation, he says. He continues to create films with Outside the Frame, and is a strong proponent of Housing First solutions to address homelessness — quickly providing people stable and permanent housing without barriers. He credits Outside the Frame with his drive to work with youth now, which he does as a peer mentor.

"I want to help them get to the point where I am," he said. "Because of this program, even though the point where I'm at isn't fantastic or anything, my life is a lot better than it has been, and it's a lot better than it could've been. And I'm not going to say it's 100 percent because of this program, but a lot of it is due to the people that I met and the things that I learned about myself."

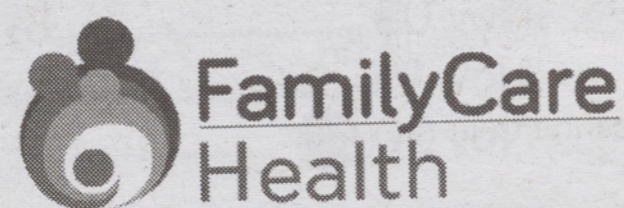
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