

# Home Inc - Media Giraffe Profile

## Home Inc

Alan Michel - Director and Co-Founder

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## About

Alan Michel first started working with teenagers in Boston early in the 1970s, when he began taking cameras around the Bromley-Heath Housing Project while working towards a masters in fine arts at Tufts University. He hasn't stopped since; in fact, he went on from that project to co-found HOME, Inc, a non-profit teaching students to use the media, and he still serves as its director to this day.

HOME is a program that helps design media education classes in public schools. Students get actively involved in their classrooms, analyzing media content.

One of Michel's earliest projects, and, in his opinion one of his greatest, was one that had teens profiling senior citizens, including a 90 year-old dance instructor who founded the Red Cross in Korea. The project was "an opportunity for people to talk to each other who didn't normally talk to one another," says Michel, who adds "It was an aha moment."

In the beginning, he worked with black and white reel films, which he describes as a difficult and tedious to edit. "I guess the only reason we continued with it was the technology kept getting better," Michel jokes. Today HOME uses various video and digital technologies to help schools throughout Boston install and improve media education and literacy programs.

HOME projects generally address issues that directly impact the teens working on them. Early on, HOME worked on a project with the Job Corps of America, specifically looking at women in the Job Corps. The teens worked with focus groups as a research source, and ultimately created a music video about the core. "It really resonated with kids that were thinking about job core," Michel recalls, describing the project as an "interesting and fun project to do."

The music video became a common thread through HOME, Inc's various projects, including the Get The Facts About AIDS! Project. When the project was first established, AIDS prevention education was deeply controversial. According to Michel, the AIDS crisis was the first time sexuality and sexual behaviors were addressed in public schools, and the subject of AIDS was linked with the sensitive and divisive issue of homosexuality. Many programs were kicked out of the school systems.

"We were really successful because we didn't prescribe anything," Michel says. "We had the kids do research and ask other kids how they think they should prevent AIDS." The HOME, Inc approach was more favorable to the public school systems, and began a partnership between HOME and the Boston Public Schools.

Today HOME has Media Labs in multiple public schools around Boston, and is looking to expand to other Boston Public Schools and outside of Boston. In addition to media education classes, HOME runs an after school program and a summer project, which pays students to create and produce a magazine style television show. The goal is to have a four year program for high school students to get involved in, and to create a pathway jobs in media. "That's what's exciting about having a partnership," says Michel. "This past year we had several kids get college scholarships."

"There's always risk," Michel says about going into a new school or beginning a new project. "There are people who don't really want change or who don't want extra work. There's always a group out front, the experimenters, who want to try it. Then there's the people who say I want to see it done It's inevitable no matter the school." Part of HOME Inc's success within the public school system is due to HOME's ability to alter its programs based on an individual school's needs, often working with a media teacher already working in the school. "Part of the philosophy of the lab is that we experiment. We try things."

Schools with a full HOME, Inc program receive an on-site HOME staff-person who helps with the project, and helps teachers with the transition from lecture-style classes to media lab classes. "It's definitely a learning curve for the teachers," admits Michel, who says that teachers have to adjust to the idea that there may be students in the classroom who know a particular aspect of the subject better than the teachers themselves.

The students also play a larger role in the classroom than many students and teachers alike may be used to. The projects are very much a collaborative effort, with the students working to brainstorm, research, and produce media pieces. The pieces may be shown at a school assembly, or they may be put on a local television program. Topics for the program are chosen based on what is most impacting the students' lives, and range from health issues, like AIDS, to jobs, to violence and respect.

Many times, HOME's media programs have an impact on discipline problems within the school. "A lot of the students that seem to have discipline problems, it's because they're bored, or they don't feel like they're being heard," explains Michel. That's not to say HOME is meant to combat discipline problems, or that it is a cure-all. "Some kids are better off on a basketball court. That's their environment."

Still, Michel credits HOME projects with improving the lives of students beyond those in the media lab classrooms. "[HOME, Inc projects are] a way of opening the door to young people who don't quite feel they belong. It's a window into the world," describes Michel. "[HOME] really raises the visibility of the kids. It's one of the real motivators for the kids It gives the kids a voice."

The students aren't the only ones who get motivation from HOME, Inc. Alan Michel says that the programs motivate him, too. "I guess the biggest thing that motivates me is when I see it working," he explains. "The things that happen in a collaborative lab are really exciting That's one of the great things about media."

Update:

Over the 2008 summer break, Home's TeenTV project expanded to English High School, where teens put together three half-hour episodes, including reports on Pet Pals, a program that brings volunteers with pets to nursing homes, and The Food Project, which is a farming project in Boston that allows teens to grow local produce and sell it at a Farmer's Market. Students also covered the 2008 election season.

TeenTV Episodes Available Online

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