

Video Volunteers - Media Giraffe Profile

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Jessica Mayberry

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About

Three years after graduating from Oxford University, Jessica Mayberry travelled to India as a volunteer for Video SEWA, a video cooperative of the Self Employed Women's Association, an Indian non-governmental organization (NGO).

Now, more than five years later, she is still there, but now she heads up her own NGO -- Video Volunteers.

Mayberry began her career in traditional media, working for CNN and the Fox News Channel, as well as working on documentaries for Court TV. Then she worked as a Trainer for Video SEWA, before eventually launching Video Volunteers.

According to the Video Volunteers Website, "In 1999 the World Bank asked 60,000 people living on less than a dollar a day, to identify the biggest hurdle to their advancement. It wasn't food, shelter or health care. It was access to a voice. By empowering people to tell their stories, video gives a voice to the voiceless and to the people who tell their stories for them."

Video Volunteers is a non-profit attempting to help clear that hurdle, by training NGOs to establish and operate Community Video Units (CVU) --local production companies run by small community groups. Each unit operates with two video cameras, one TV/VCR, one computer and one wide screen for outdoor screenings. Each unit produces multiple videos on a monthly basis.

"I love this work because I love training," Mayberry wrote in an e-mail to the Media Giraffe Project. "I love working with disadvantaged people to express and articulate their ideas."

The Community Video Units are a joint venture between Drishti Media, Arts and Human Rights, a human rights and development organization which also seeks to bring about social change through use of media.

In addition to its support from Drishti, Video Volunteers is funded by a number of NGOs.

Each CVU has a full time trainer who lives and works at the unit full time for 18 months. During this time, NGO staff and/or community members undergo intensive training in producing low-cost videos for advocacy, fund raising, education and community awareness. When the training is completed, the NGO has one complete video and is able to produce more videos to help with their work.

Video training faster than writing

According to Mayberry, Video Volunteers uses video because "it's an alternative to literacy. We can teach someone to make a video in a few months, and it takes years to teach someone to read and write."

Mayberry says that video is also adaptable; the videos can be edited to use in a documentary, on a website or for mainstream distribution. To that end, Video Volunteers has established a YouTube channel, and a website called Channel 19, which runs the videos.

Video Volunteers was founded on the idea that media has the power to both bring people together and to incite action. The program uses video cameras to bring about social change.

“Every film has impact,” Mayberry wrote. “from getting doctors to come on time, government to take action, like building roads, toilets or delivering clean water -- and increasing people’s participation in local government.”

Finding the "action point"

Film screenings (which Mayberry says are attended by as many as 25% to 50% of a typical village’s residents) are followed by discussions on just how community members can take action, and each film has an “action point,” an action villagers can take the very next day.

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And Video Volunteers doesn’t seem to be alone in that belief, as it has received numerous awards and recognitions; from winning the Knight News Challenge to being asked to participate in the Global Social Benefit Incubator at Santa Clara University.

“I think the awards have perhaps helped some people to see that we’re not just making films, but we have a clear idea as to how they can create a concrete impact,” Mayberry wrote.

Video Volunteers is looking to expand that impact beyond India. Mayberry is looking towards Brazil, after a 2006 research trip.

“We are definitely interested to expand beyond India,” Mayberry wrote. “We envision this as a “global social media network” of community video producers.” Mayberry hopes that someday, community video units the world over might share their knowledge and their media with one another.

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