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As we live out the slogan, “Men and Women for Others,” in Loyola’s nurturing environment, we make lifelong habits of learning and being. A socially beneficial way to develop the habit of social justice is to document the experiences of others in their struggles to overcome injustice, and to share those experiences with the world. This is an obligation of professional communicators that we would like to inculcate in our Communication students.

The Department of Communication’s Documentary Production course (CM374D) has been an excellent vehicle over the years for sharing inspiring social justice stories and for helping undergraduate students to develop a lifelong commitment to social justice. As instructor of this course, I have been personally inspired by many social justice stories shared by my students. I have been privileged to witness their personal growth. The topics of the student documentaries have been varied, including people experiencing homelessness in Baltimore City, urban food deserts, helping convicts reenter society, and after-school athletics for kids living in the inner city. The course documentary project has inspired many Loyola undergraduates from privilege to embrace opportunities to make a difference.

Perhaps the most inspiring story of all was captured by five enterprising Communication majors in 2007. Their 43-minute documentary, “A Fighting Chance,” is about The Tender Bridge, an after-school sports program for junior high school Baltimore inner city boys. The program picked up the kids in their neighborhoods and transported them to the playing fields. It operated on donations and was staffed by volunteers. Mark Conner was the director. He wanted a documentary that would show the real Tender Bridge story. Loyola students delivered.

“A Fighting Chance” begins with young boys talking to the camera about their violence-filled lives, about gunshots ringing in the night, about their bleak futures. The Tender Bridge was an oasis of hope for them.

Only student team captain Alexandra Cirillo had previous video production experience, but her teammates were eager to learn and poured themselves into the project.

Schawn Walters, Jaclyn Schiemel, Kaitlin Williams, and Jenna Wilson all took turns operating the camera and contributed to the editing. Their main challenge was having too much good material. “A Fighting Chance” won Loyola Film Festivals Best-of-Show, and Cirillo went on to a successful career as a documentary filmmaker in New York City.