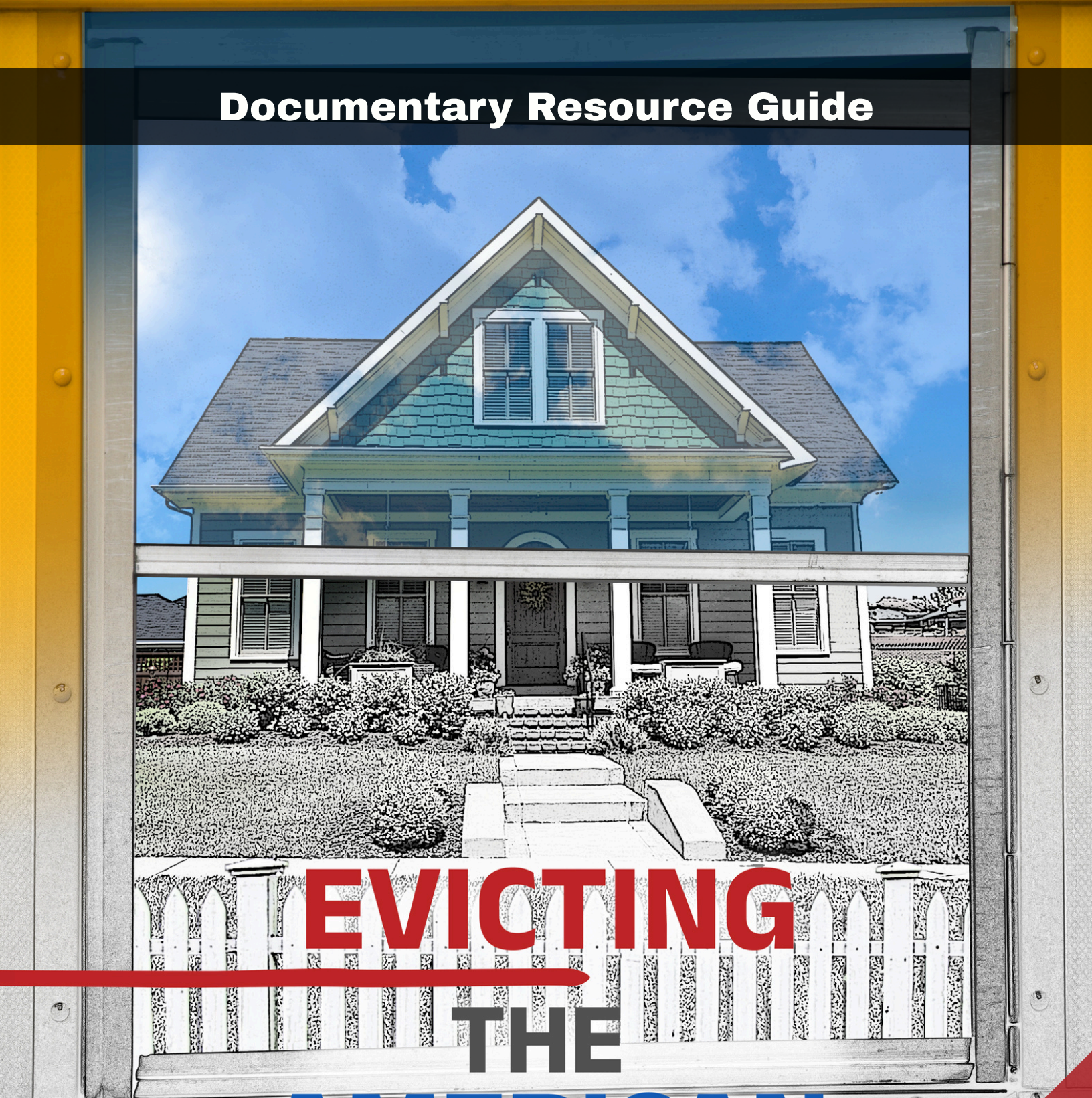
Documentary Resource Guide



# EVICTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

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**This resource guide was developed by Dr. Katherine Rowell.**

Katherine R. Rowell, Ph.D., recently retired from full-time teaching at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, where she taught sociology for over 28 years. She is currently teaching part-time and serving as a Del Mar Encore Fellow with the Dayton Foundation, where she is supporting the Montgomery County 2 Gen Collaborative. Dr. Rowell has won numerous awards for teaching excellence: the American Sociological Association Teaching Excellence Award (2012), the United States Outstanding Community College Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement of Scholarship and Education and the Carnegie Foundation in 2005, and the 2005 North Central Sociological Professor of the Year. She has traveled extensively, including a Fulbright trip in 2003 to South Africa, Botswana, and Swaziland; a peace conference in Mongolia; and, most recently, presenting at a Child in the City conference in Dublin, Ireland.

Her research interests focus on housing issues, including homelessness and eviction. Dr. Rowell earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, and a Ph.D. in sociology from Ohio State University. In 2021, she was awarded a Mellon American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship, which led to the publication of a book focused on children, eviction, and housing insecurity in the United States. These funds also assisted with seed money for this documentary.

You can learn more about the book and her eviction work:

- Facing Eviction and Housing Insecurity - Facing Project
- S05 E08 - A Place to Call Home - Indiana Public Radio

# ABOUT
# EVICTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Recent statistics have shown that a record number of children face homelessness in the U.S. and the age at which someone is most likely to be homeless or in a shelter is infancy.

**Evicting the American Dream** amplifies the voices and counter stories of children and families confronting homelessness and eviction and explores the root causes and systemic issues that perpetuate this epidemic.

Often when we hear the words “homelessness” and “eviction,” there is a dominant narrative that says: “there is nothing we can do to prevent this from happening.” This film seeks to reframe, humanize, and transform how the wider public understands eviction and homelessness and the ways in which this is preventable.

Access the trailer and additional resources at: pcusa.org/evicting

# COUNTER STORIES PRODUCTIONS
# PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) recognizes the value and importance of amplifying voices and stories. Using film as a resource to increase awareness on social justice issues, Counter Stories Productions seeks to connect and equip communities while cultivating wider circles of engagement and action.

Throughout the co-creation of these documentaries, Counter Stories Productions maintains an ongoing cyclical dialogue with community partners to "reflect-back" the common themes and intersectional issues. Clips are periodically shared with partners for feedback. Once there's a rough cut of the documentary (and before it's released to the public), the film is screened for community partners for review and further direction. This entire process for each documentary is time-consuming and labor intensive, but it is essential to gathering the voices and community partners who need to be centered in these films/resources.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is the emergency and refugee program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

**Learn more:**

pcusa.org/CounterStoriesProductions

CounterStoriesProductions.com

**Host a Screening of *Evicting the American Dream***

Hosting a screening is a powerful way to spark meaningful conversations and drive change by:

- Educating: Create a learning environment to explore the factors highlighted in the film.
- Engaging: Foster thoughtful discussions on how to advocate for policy changes, and encourage audience participation facilitating guided discussions post-screening.
- Acting: Motivate participants to take the conversation beyond the screening and into their own communities.

**Download Counter Stories Productions' Screening Guide for more information.**

**Resources for broader discussion**

We hope this film encourages you to reflect on the challenges children and their families face when experiencing housing insecurity and eviction. Every child and family deserve the dream of having a place to call home, yet it remains out of reach for many. By working together, we can help ensure every child has the stability and safety of a home.

**Check out the Library Guide from Sinclair Community College, in Dayton OH** which provides detailed information on steps you can take and ways to learn more:

Home - Eviction and Housing Instability - LibGuides at Sinclair Community College

**How You Can Make a Difference:**

1. **Awareness is the First Step**—Understanding the scope and impact of housing insecurity is critical. Take some time to read and learn more about how our own lives interact with poverty in America. The Urban Institute has created a Housing Justice Library: Housing Justice Library | Urban Institute

2. **Donating is a Good Second Step** - Many local organizations are dedicated to helping unhoused children and those in need. Your financial support can make a significant difference.

3. **Volunteer and Support**—Consider volunteering with or supporting one of the many organizations directly impacting your community. Advocate for the voices of those with lived experiences.

4. **Political Advocacy and Action** - There are several ways you can prevent eviction and support affordable housing and advocate for systemic change:

- **Support the civil right to counsel**: Learn about and advocate for the civil right to legal representation for tenants facing eviction. Visit the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel to learn more, and consider supporting local organizations that provide free legal assistance to underserved populations, including tenants facing eviction.
- **Advocate for affordable housing**: Support efforts to create and maintain affordable housing options in your community. Organizations like Coalition for the Homeless, Fair Housing Groups, Legal Aid Organizations and grassroots efforts to support affordable housing work to ensure everyone can access safe, fair, and affordable housing. These organizations focus on policies and practices that protect tenants' rights and expand affordable housing opportunities.
- **Contact your representatives**: Contact your local, state, and federal representatives to express your support for policies that promote affordable housing and tenant protections.
- **Support tenant unions**: Get involved with or support groups like those advocating housing justice. Learn more about the broader movement for housing rights here.

5. **Support Best Practices in Your Community for Sheltering Families and Children and Support the McKinney Vento Offices in your local Public Schools**:

- What Interventions Work Best for Families Who Experience Homelessness? Impact Estimates from the Family Options Study

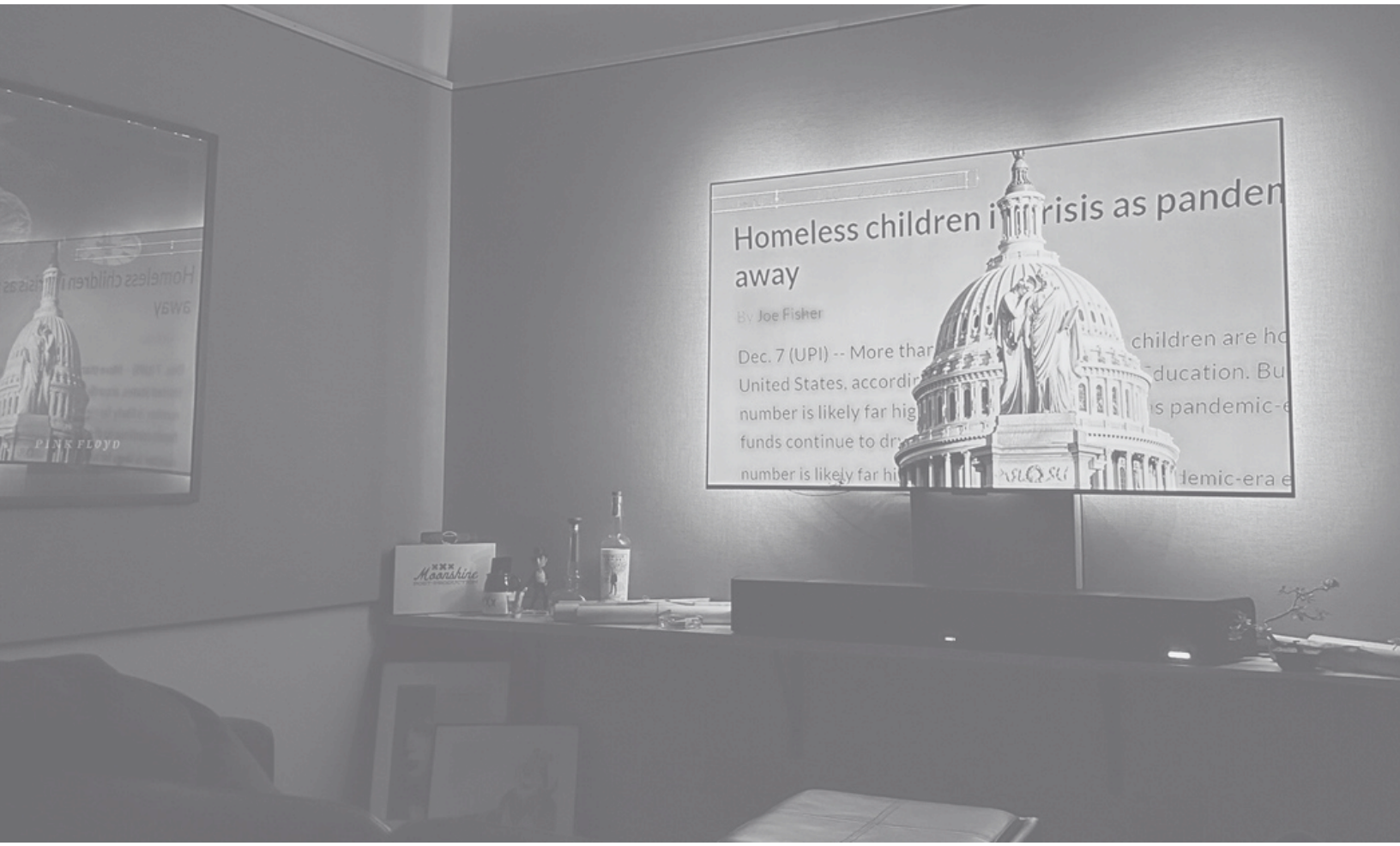
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act | National Center for Homeless Education

6. **Advocate for the United States to Ratify the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child** - The United States is the only country in the world that has not yet ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, a vital international treaty protecting children's rights. Support initiatives like the UNICEF USA Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, which works to promote children's rights and well-being in cities and communities across the U.S. You can learn more about why ratification matters and how you can support this effort by visiting Human Rights Watch.

7. **Globally, Think About Sustainability and the Role We All Play in Consumption** - The global housing crisis is deeply connected to sustainability and economic inequality. Consider how your consumption habits and the companies you support may contribute to housing inequality. To better understand the scope of the crisis and explore practical solutions, read the World Economic Forum's article on the global housing crisis. Investigate whether companies or your retirement plan investments are aligned with responsible housing practices. Watch the film Push for insight into how global forces affect housing affordability and access. Take time to explore Socially Responsible Investing (SRI), a way to ensure your financial decisions support sustainable and ethical business practices, including fair housing.

8. **Support Human Rights Globally and Locally** - Learn about the efforts in your community to promote human rights. Supporting these types of movements is essential for ensuring the rights of all individuals, including access to safe, affordable housing.

9. **Look for Sustainable Ways to Create a Just Economy for All** - Sustainable economic practices are critical to ensuring a just future for everyone. Support initiatives that foster cooperative businesses prioritizing community ownership and equity. These efforts help build stronger, more resilient local economies where wealth is shared and essential services like housing are accessible to all. Think about how your choices—whether as a consumer or investor—can contribute to a fairer, more sustainable economy that benefits everyone.




**Read more about ways to reduce eviction:**

- 7 strategies for reducing the number of evictions in your community | Bloomberg Cities
- Eviction Prevention as Strategy to Reduce Homelessness | National League of Cities
- Eviction Prevention: Reducing Harm to Households and Society | Institute for Research on Poverty - UW Madison

Many other local and global organizations are working to support unhoused children. We encourage you to learn more, ask about the efforts happening in your community, and find ways to make a difference.

**What Is Criminalization of Homelessness?**
Criminalization refers to laws and policies that punish people for life-sustaining activities in public, such as:
- Sleeping in tents or cars
- Sitting or lying on sidewalks
- Eating or storing belongings in public spaces

72% of U.S. cities have enacted some form of these laws. In 48 states, basic human survival in public places can result in fines, arrest, or jail time, further entrenching poverty and homelessness.

**Why Criminalization Doesn't Work**
- Expensive: Policing and jailing people experiencing homelessness costs 3x more than housing.
- Ineffective: Criminal records make it harder to get jobs and housing, worsening homelessness.
- Harmful: Raids and arrests break trust with service providers and cause trauma.
- Unconstitutional: Some laws risk violating civil rights and may trigger legal action.

Sources: USICH, National Homelessness Law Center, NLIHC, Housing Not Handcuffs

**What Works Instead**
Evidence-based solutions include:

- Housing First: Provides immediate housing with voluntary support services.
- Permanent Supportive Housing: Combines housing with wraparound mental health and recovery care.
- Encampment Resolution Principles: Developed by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), focused on compassion, not punishment.

Cities using Housing First have saved millions and housed thousands. One example: $2.4 million saved and 1,000 housed in one year.

**How You Can Advocate**

1. Speak Up: Contact your city council or state representatives. Oppose anti-camping bans.

2. Educate Others: Share stories, facts, and videos (see resources below).

3. Support Alternatives: Volunteer with or donate to housing-focused nonprofits.

4. Know Your Rights: Many anti-homeless laws are being challenged—learn more at homelesslaw.org

**Faith-Based Approaches**

Faith communities across the U.S. play a substantial and innovative role in addressing homelessness:

• United Women in Faith emphasizes that criminalizing homelessness is unjust and ineffective. They advocate for solutions rooted in affordable housing and moral responsibility.

• A 2017 Baylor University study found that faith-based organizations provide nearly 60% of emergency shelter beds in surveyed cities. These organizations deliver comprehensive services—healthcare, recovery support, job training—and produce significant taxpayer savings.

• Faith-based groups emphasize long-term relationships and transformation, addressing homelessness's isolation and root causes.

**Homelessness is a housing and public health crisis, not a criminal justice issue. Communities thrive when solutions are rooted in dignity, housing, and support, not handcuffs.**

**Key Resources and Films**

- Housing Not Handcuffs
- Invisible People
- National Homelessness Law Center
- USICH: Collaborate, Don't Criminalize
- NLIHC 2024 Advocates' Guide - Section 6.8 (PDF)
- Southern California Law Review Article
- Under the Bridge: The Criminalization of Homelessness 2017 Documentary
- United Women in Faith - Housing Not Criminalization
- Baylor University - Institute for Studies of Religion Study (2017)
- Locked Out: New documentary film examines the effects of evictions and foreclosures in Detroit
- Research shows far-reaching costs of eviction filings to tenants - regardless of the outcome in court
- Poor Single Mothers Impacted the Most by Evictions

# ADDITIONAL FILM RESOURCES BY COUNTER STORIES PRODUCTIONS

**Flint: The Poisoning of an American City (2019)**
With over 15 million views through streaming platforms worldwide, this documentary amplifies a wide spectrum of voices from the current struggle of Flint residents and explores the critical question of how this could happen in the U.S., and how this tragedy should serve as a warning for the rest of the country.

- Winner of The Susan A. K. Shaffer Humanitarian Award, Impact DOC Awards, The Frank Little Award for Self-Sacrifice and Social Change

Available on: Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Tubi, Kanopy, all Major Cable Providers OnDemand

**Trigger: The Ripple Effect of Gun Violence (2017)**
This documentary explores the impact of gun violence through a public health lens, while examining the 'ripple effect' that one shooting has on a survivor, a family, a community and a society.

- Official Selection of The Martin Luther King Jr. D.R.E.A.M Film Series and Winner of the Impact DOC Awards

Available on: Amazon Prime, Apple TV, Tubi, Kanopy, all Major Cable Providers OnDemand

**To Breathe Free (2016)**
This award-winning short documentary follows the 5-year journey of a Syrian family fleeing the war in Homs to the refugee camps in Jordan and starting a new life in Washington, D.C. Using home movies, phone video, family photos and interviews with family members and former refugees, this short documentary gives an intimate and unique perspective not seen in current media reporting on the refugee crisis.

- Winner Best Documentary short - Covellite International Film Festival, Best Documentary short - Beaufort International Film Festival, Impact DOC awards, Platinum Award - International Independent Film Awards

Available by request

**Locked in a Box (2015)**
“Locked in a Box” is an award-winning short documentary that follows the stories of individuals held in the U.S. immigration detention system and those who visit them. Since the 1990s there has been a massive expansion of the immigration detention system up to 34,000 immigrants in detention on any given day in approximately 200 different facilities, many of which are for-profit prisons. Locked in a Box helps strip away the political rhetoric to see the human cost of detention.

- Winner of The Immigration Advocacy in Documentary Film Award, Impact DOC Awards, Achievement in Documentary Film Award,The DeRose-Hinkhouse Award for Documentary.

Available by request