

TIME WELL SPENT

The Craftsbury Community Care Center

A Documentary Photography Collaboration
Between Students and Elders
in the Northeast Kingdom

During spring semester 2007 Johnson State College Advanced Photography students partnered with residents of the Craftsbury Community Care Center—a senior living environment whose residents range from independent to minimally assisted—to create a series of photographic portraits. Students interacted weekly with elders. The relationship that grew out of this contact helped students understand the nature of aging and while bringing companionship and joy to a very appreciative group of older people.

During the time students were at the Center they photographed residents individually and in groups, and documented various aspects of their lives. At the conclusion of the project these images were framed and presented as a traveling exhibition, accompanied by reflective statements written by the students as the project progressed.

During the three months the exhibit was shown at the Center, many visitors had praise not only for the beautiful photographs but also for the positive impact that the photographs had upon their loved ones in terms of pride, identity, and a sense of belonging.

According to project leader, photographer John Miller, introducing a service-learning component to the course made it far more challenging in terms of teaching. It also challenged students who, until they had begun to develop entrée and a connection with a senior, found the project quite daunting. Over time students began to enjoy small successes and ultimately the pleasure of seeing their work framed in an exhibit, which they celebrated together with the senior participants.

Through this project student photographers came to appreciate how very hard work coupled with uncomfortable challenges can create something that is meaningful for themselves and others. For more information about the project contact John Miller at John.Miller@jsc.edu.

Time Well Spent will be on display at the Vermont Folklife Center June 25 through September 6, with an opening reception on June 27 and a Student Photography Seminar on June 28. For more information go to www.vermontfolklifecenter.org.