

Peer Insights

R E P O R T

Q&A with Holly Carter

Veteran Journalist & Documentary
Filmmaker

Principle Series:

Family Office Insights sits down with Veteran Journalist and Documentary Filmmaker Holly Ornstein Carter to discuss how the power of filmmaking is transforming the lives of children with her initiative BYkids, helping them become citizens of the world and more empathetic human beings with global impact.



Family Office Insights is a voluntary, “opt-in” collaborative peer-to-peer community of single family offices, qualified investors and institutional investors.

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Q: What is BYkids and how was it started?

A: [BYkids](#) believes that we can understand the world's challenges- and how to best meet them- through the personal stories of young people. BYkids is a global movement that uses storytelling through film to inform, engage and inspire action. It provides children around the world with the training and the video cameras to make short documentaries about their lives. Renowned filmmakers mentor these young people in the art of filmmaking. Through innovative distribution platforms-- including streaming into classrooms by Discovery Education, screenings by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, the UN Association of New York, and notably, the recent national series on Public Television-- BYkids films enable fresh perspectives on issues from poverty, disease, displacement, civil war, repression, to access to education and tolerance to be experienced by a global community. Millions of people are joining our movement, seeing our films, developing and engaging with our educational curriculum and supporting the production of a new series of films.

With my own young children, I was having genuine and honest conversations and I realized that kids are the best kind of reporter. They are authentic storytellers, without fear or favor. They just tell it like it is.

To have a strong democracy, we all need to be good citizens of the world, especially our future generation. With foreign news bureaus closing, there is a devastating global gap in our news and information. BYkids is working to bring global stories to a wide American audience, and to do it in an authentic way -- giving a voice to the storyteller. In the process of listening carefully to others, we also hope to ignite young people to find their own voice and to feel comfortable telling their stories and the stories of their communities.

Q: How do you think film can engage students and teach empathy?

A: Our films allow you to be alone in the dark with a new friend—an inspiring kid who's lost both parents to AIDS or a kid who's challenged Islamophobia. We want viewers to connect on the universal experiences of being young, of being human. They are talking about their life for the first time on film, which is quite powerful. Film accesses our heads and hearts in a way that reading doesn't. It makes all of these personal stories feel as if we are all speaking the same language. War goes away after you've made friends, because people don't shoot their friends. In our messed up world, we're missing the ability to understand someone's situation as our own. It can't happen out of fear or hatred. We should be able to walk a mile in someone else's shoes.

Q: Where do you think the value lies in storytelling?

A: I'll give you a perfect example. We were invited to screen *Poet against Prejudice* with the Bergen County school system and the school chancellor and police department during anti-violence week to start a conversation about Islamophobia, bullying and immigration.

The audience meets Faiza. In the film, she introduces us to her father, mother and cousins. The father speaks emotionally about what it took for him to give up his big house in Yemen to give his kids a better life in America and the film cuts to the father crying. He said he had to memorize the street signs because he didn't speak English, but needed to drive his daughter to school. In that moment, you realize this man gave up everything he had in Yemen to give his kids a better life. In Bergen County, many of these kids were meeting a Muslim for the first time.

Q: How can people access these short films?

A: The films are available on Thirteen.org after their recent national broadcast on Public Television. They are also streamed into half the schools in America through Discovery Education. Additionally, teachers have portions of the films and curriculum on the PBS Learning Media and PenPal Schools offers the films and a 12-week curriculum where each American student is paired with a pen pal from another country to work together on a shared curriculum around each film.

We want the films to be the beginning of cross-cultural conversations, especially in the classroom.

Q: What will Season Two for BYkids look like?

A: Season One of *FILMS BY KIDS* includes five films about the following: the first was made by a young boy orphaned by AIDS in Mozambique; the second film was made by the exiled King of Tibet about cultural preservation in the face of persecution; the third was made by a young tribal Indian girl fighting to be educated; the fourth was made by a teen in Colombia who was displaced like 4 million others by the drug war; the fifth film was made by a Yemeni immigrant to Brooklyn who faces harsh Islamophobia and bullying.

Season Two is new and different. We are tackling topics including how climate change is affecting coffee growing communities in Nicaragua, child marriage in Senegal, race in New York City, indigenous life in Guatemala and trafficking in Vietnam. For this season, we will be working with some outstanding mentors including Marshall Curry, the Academy Award-winning documentarian who will be helping with the one in New York.

Q: How do you source your stories?

A: We are theme-based. The Board and I decide what themes we want to tackle. We look for a country that's not featured prominently on the news and work with a nonprofit to help us choose a child to work with and then we send our mentor there to create a storyboard and to make sure the story is visually appealing. The kid oversees the editing process and then we have a 27-minute film at the end of months of hard work.

Q: How can you impact the space going forward?

A: Our sweet spot—which we will continue to pursue with a vengeance—is personal storytelling through film. We are about more than just youth-produced media. We are about real impact and moving the dial on informed citizenry as a way to strengthen our democracy. We are making art, made by kids and having these films be seen far and wide.

Q: What's next for BYkids?

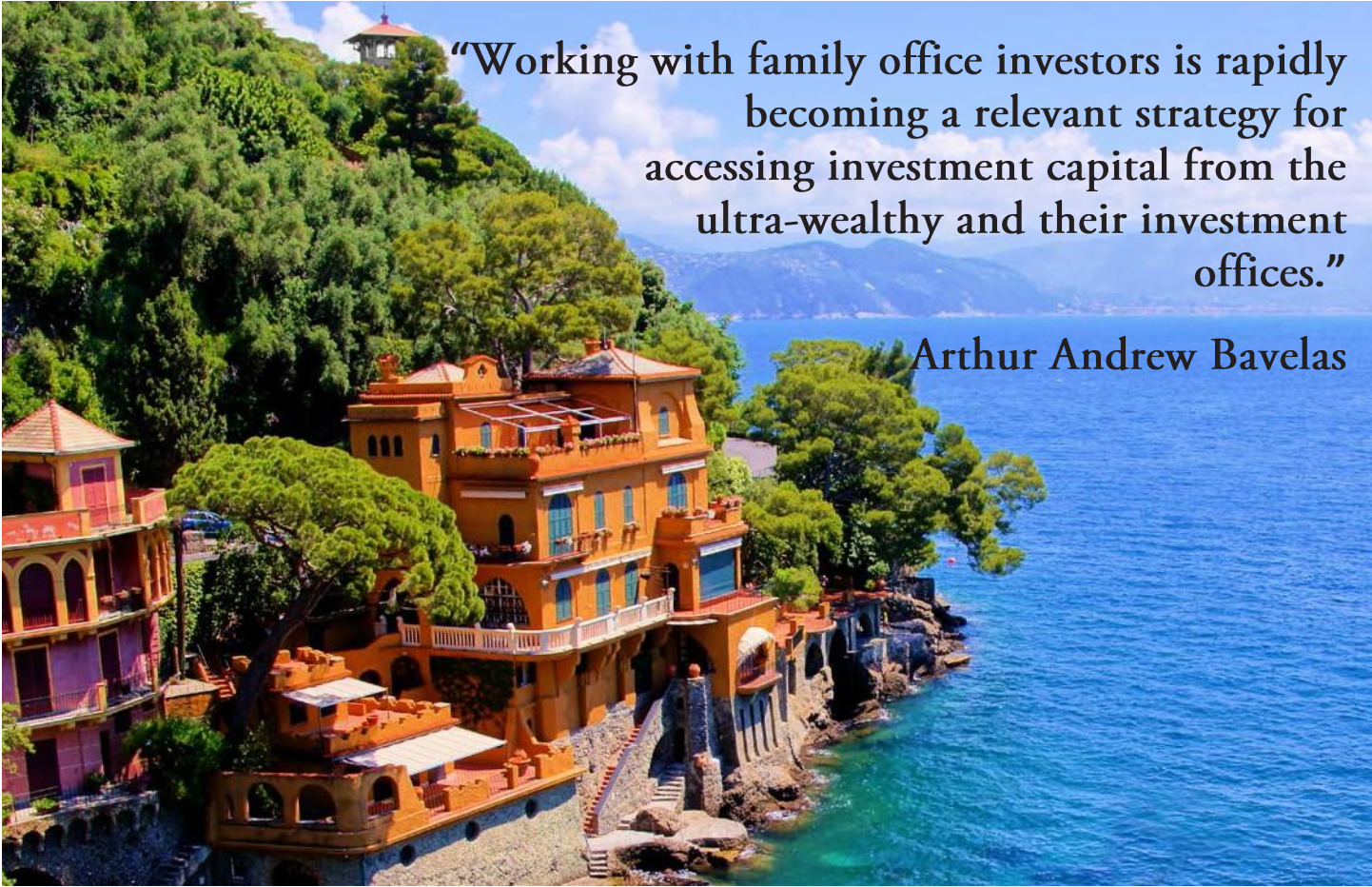
A: We want to increase our reach and impact. We want our films and the curriculum to reach the other half of schools in America. I would love it if we were in every classroom in America, creating global citizens of the world with big hearts. My personal view in life is: bigger, in terms of quantity, is not the goal. Impact really is.



Holly Carter

Holly Ornstein Carter is the Founder and Executive Director of BYkids. She started her career as a journalist at The New York Times and has worked for 20 years as a journalist, editor, documentary filmmaker, fundraiser and non-profit leader.

Before founding BYkids, Holly ran the Global Film Initiative, a foundation bringing feature films from the developing world to major cultural institutions across the country in an effort to promote cross-cultural understanding. From 1999 to 2003, she produced Media Matters, a monthly PBS magazine show about journalism and concurrently worked as a consultant for The After-School Corporation, a non-profit initiative founded by George Soros that brings quality after-school programs to New York City public schools. For more information, please visit <http://bykids.org>.



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Arthur Andrew Bavelas