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## NYCSalt

FLAVORING AND PRESERVING THE LIVES OF AT-RISK YOUTH

About six years ago, Alicia Hansen and her friend Rebecca Locke started a small after-school photography class for high-school kids in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York. Working with disposable cameras, the women taught more than photography. They schooled the students on their potential, the options available to them and how they could alter their lives by tapping into their inner talents.

That small after-school program has evolved into a full-blown 501(c)3 nonprofit organization called NYCSalt. Hansen chose the name Salt because she hopes the program will both

flavor and preserve the communities it serves. NYCSalt's mission is to engage, inspire and empower New York City teenagers by providing professional-level instruction in visual communication. Hansen calls on her network of photographers and media professionals to help teach the kids. Photographers Bill Eppridge, Stephen Wilkes and Joe McNally, among others, have spoken to the group, and class field trips have included visits to magazine headquarters, news agencies, and the studios of prominent photographers.

At present, Hansen and six other photographers are working with a class of 14 kids, children of immigrants who have grown up in households where English is a second

language. Hansen and her associates meet with the kids once a week for two hours at her studio in Manhattan's Garment District. The door to the class is open other days of the week so the students can work on their photo projects, do homework or just hang out in a safe environment.

"The heart of the program is giving back to the community by sharing our talents and abilities as professional photographers," says Hansen. "Most kids don't get to learn about art because it isn't taught in many schools. We teach these children about applied art and show them the potential it holds not only for expression but as a career. It's amazing to see the sense of pride and confidence that awakens in these kids when they create something."

NYCSalt is looking for volunteers who are interested in opening a Salt chapter in other cities, and Hansen is raising funds to expand the NYC program by one or two more classes. She's also seeking the donation of equipment, and working on a corporate sponsorship program in which Salt students would provide artwork for corporate offices in exchange for funding.

Hansen wants to establish a model that can be successfully duplicated around the country. "My hope is to create an umbrella organization that can help other photographers who want to start a program," says Hansen. "I'd like to help others avoid all the tedious procedures of setting up a 501(c)3. With the structure in place, other chapters can serve more kids in more communities." ■

*For more on NYCSalt, visit [nycsalt.org](http://nycsalt.org). See more of Alicia Hansen's work at [aliciahansen.com](http://aliciahansen.com).*

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