

Audio Transcript: Shameka Sawyer

TV Producer, *5 Shorts Project*

I am Shameka Sawyer, and I've been a member at PhillyCAM since 2013. I was inspired to become a media maker, I want to say, ever since I was like a teenager, I used to make funny videos and funny tapes with my older brother. And yeah, from there, I just was really interested in the power of storytelling, especially visually. So when I came to college here at the University of Pennsylvania, I had some electives in video production and cinematography. And from there, it just sparked something in me where I was just like, I love how media making can have an impact on someone's thoughts, how media making can educate people as well, and how media making can also create these conversations around issues that maybe people didn't feel too comfortable just speaking about, without having some type of push to do so. The Five Shorts Project is a project that teaches individuals how to create a short film from inception of the idea to actual distribution, which is PhillyCAM. I want to say about three years in, more people started coming up to me asking, "Well, how do I make a short film? I don't know how to make one, so how do I do this." So then I transitioned into actually teaching people how to make short films. It's been a journey, but it's been a beautiful, beautiful journey to see the work that has come from it and see people who never made a film before win awards at film festivals. The premiere is the highlight when you see someone who thought that they were too old, or they needed more time where they didn't have the skills to make a film, actually see their work on a screen and hear an audience react to their work, it's such a beautiful thing to watch. I think I'm just in love with seeing other people realizing their potential.

I started working with youth in 2021 and the reason behind it is in 2020, I lost my younger brother to gun violence, in Germantown, in Philly. And almost a year to the day of his passing, his son, my nephew, was shot. He survived, but it sparked something in me where I was like, you know, a lot of us are dependent on other

people to solve this problem, but we too have resources that we can utilize to help solve this problem. So I knew I only really know like, video production. And I said, "Well, how can I take that and use it as a tool to help solve this bigger issue?" So part of it was similar to what Five Shorts Project does is, you know, take individuals and teaching them filmmaking. But with the youth, they get to learn how to work together to create a short documentary about solutions to gun violence. So it's not like their own stories, but it's more so about, like, how can we look at this problem, and really listen to our youth to see how they feel about it and what they believe the solutions are? And granted, we know we don't have the answers, but the key is to get them to thinking not about the issue, but solutions for this issue. PhillyCAM is a great stepping stone for helping people to really figure out you know, this video production stuff, but also to building connections and learning how to work in community. Learning how to how to collaborate with others and just feeling confident in what you're bringing to the table.