



## An Introduction to PhotoPals

In September 2007, two Bowdoin students created PhotoClub, an extracurricular program for fifth grade students at Woodside Elementary School in Topsham, Maine. Fifth grade students elected to join PhotoClub, were taught technical photography skills, and used those skills to explore their school, their homes, the natural environment, and the community of Topsham. The fifth graders were encouraged to see their world in new ways, to develop their own photographic style, and to reflect on their sense of place and identity within their home community. At the end of the programs, the students' images were displayed in photography shows in their home community, and the students spoke about their experiences as young photographers. PhotoClub was as much about teaching students new skills as it was about providing students with an outlet for self-expression, exploration, and pride in their work.

Since August 2009, with the generous help from the Omprakash Foundation ([www.omprakash.org](http://www.omprakash.org)), PhotoClub has grown into PhotoPals, a program that looks to link students in PhotoClubs around the world through the universal language of shared images. Images from past PhotoClubs – located in Alaska, Maine, India, Nepal, and more to come! – can be seen at [www.photopals.shutterfly.com](http://www.photopals.shutterfly.com). These exchanges have encouraged PhotoClub students not only to inquire and learn about other students' lives abroad, but also to begin to see their own lives differently from that new perspective.

Now, we are looking to expand the PhotoPals program to the larger Omprakash-affiliated volunteering community. We envision a succession of PhotoClubs being run by teachers here in the United States and by volunteers traveling around the world, providing services to needy schools and organizations and empowering students and children with the joy of photographing their world. We are seeking volunteers who are self-motivated and organized, who believe in the value of cultural exchanges, and who want to go beyond the basic needs of their partner organization in order to initiate such exchanges.

If you are a volunteer or teacher interested in teaching digital photography to students abroad or here in the United States, please review the Eight Essentials of a PhotoPals Program and the Camera Grant Application, available for download on the PhotoPals homepage and on the Omprakash Foundation website. If you have any questions, please contact Rosalind Worcester ([rosalind.gael@gmail.com](mailto:rosalind.gael@gmail.com)) or Sam Modest ([s.j.modest@gmail.com](mailto:s.j.modest@gmail.com)).