



# PhotoVoice

PhotoVoice is a process that empowers people to document a situation using photography<sup>i</sup>. Instead of experts coming in to a community and setting the priorities for what needs to be changed, PhotoVoice helps residents to express what they value in their neighborhoods and what they feel are priorities for improvement<sup>ii</sup>. By taking a picture of something – a crumbling school, the price of a food item at the store – the participant is showing other people what his/her lived experience is.

Since a picture is worth a thousand words, this is a powerful tool for building bridges between people; groups such as migrant workers, teens who have HIV and residents concerned about gang violence have been using PhotoVoice since 1992 to share their ideas with local leaders and to make a positive impact in their communities<sup>iii</sup>.



The examples shown were created by local middle school students<sup>iv</sup>.

Abigail, Dallas County - "Runner"

This picture is good and bad. It represents good because the runner is doing something to stay healthy. However, it is also bad because she is running on a very busy stretch in our town. Many people feel safe running on this road because it is across from our campus, which makes it a highly populated area. However, it truly needs sidewalks for the safety of anyone who would like to jog, walk or bike here.

Policy and environment changes – such as higher standards for school nutrition, improved walking and biking paths or tighter regulation on alcohol and tobacco advertising – are usually the final goal of projects, but the specifics can vary by community. Research shows that many of today’s health challenges, such as obesity, can best be tackled by listening to the community to hear what local improvements could be made to help them made lifestyle changes.

After learning basic camera functions, participants photograph parts of their community that are important to them or have a big impact on their lives. Then, the participants write captions about the photos. To do so, the photographer follows these guidelines:

- P** Describe your Picture
- H** What is Happening in your picture
- O** Why did you take a picture Of this
- T** What does this picture Tell us about life in your community
- O** How does this picture provide Opportunities for you to improve life your community

The next stage in the PhotoVoice process is holding a public exhibition to begin a dialogue with other community members. Digital platforms can also be used to share and exchange ideas about what is really happening and how to make it better. The goal of exhibitions is that people will:

- learn from each other;
- understand that an alley – for example – does not have the same meaning for everyone;
- and forge relationships for ongoing collaboration.

Finally, participants can engage with leaders in their communities. By sharing the evidence they have collected and telling their story, they have the power to change an elected official's vote or get a new item on the agenda.

### **PhotoVoice with preadolescents about health topics**

There have been programs using PhotoVoice with preadolescents, or tweens, as an empowerment tool. Traditionally advocacy has been reserved for high school or college students, but the hands-on medium of photography has proven to be an effective entry point into this work for younger people.

The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) Project is one example of an after school program that focused on 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to help them develop leadership skills, identify strengths and weaknesses of their schools and perform service learning. They improved the parts of their schools that they prioritized as issues; one group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys led a park clean-up day<sup>v</sup>.

Students, teachers and parents in both rural and urban schools have utilized PhotoVoice to document what the barriers are to living a healthy life from their standpoints. Further, participants can express what their ideas for solutions to problems are to local decision makers. One example of this is Latina teenagers in California who spoke at City Council meetings,

showing the photos they took, in order to have neighborhood swimming pools reopened so that they could exercise close to home<sup>vi</sup>.

OASIS Generations for a Healthy Community uses PhotoVoice to engage young adolescents in advocacy about healthy eating and active living. Youth explore community health, how food access and infrastructure impact health outcomes and what they can do about it. As they are discovering what their school and neighborhoods do and do not offer, they are also developing leadership and teamwork skills. They practice interviewing each other, writing their ideas and critically thinking about the root causes of issues. Youth are mentored by adult volunteers 50 plus in the OASIS program.



Jada, St. Louis - "Know Your Food"

What you see in this picture is a healthy grocery store in St. Louis that is helpful to people because they sell fruits and vegetables and energy drinks that help our bodies become healthy and energetic. If every neighborhood had a store like this they wouldn't have to travel a far way to find good food. The girls in the picture are from Marian Middle School. We went on a field trip to this store to take pictures for media, and to learn more about healthy food. This is the only store in St. Louis with a carrot as a logo. They're showing us that it's healthy to come to this store.

<sup>i</sup> Wang, C.C. (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Youth Participation and Community Change*, 14(1/2) 147-161.

<sup>ii</sup> Partnership for the Public's Health, Public Health Institute. (n.d.) PhotoVoice as a Tool for Youth Policy Advocacy. Oakland, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.partnershipph.org/pph-resources>

<sup>iii</sup> Kramer, L., Schwartz, P., Cheadle, A., Borton, J.E., Wright, M., Chase, C., & Lindley, C. (2010). Promoting policy and environmental change using photovoice in the Kaiser Permanente community health initiative. *Health Promotion Practice*, 11(3), 332-339.

<sup>iv</sup> Daw, M. (2009). Youth as agents for change – direct voices. Retrieved from <http://www.photovoice.org/html/ppforadvocacy/>

<sup>v</sup> Dahan, R., Dick, R., Moll, S., Salwach, E., Sherman, D., Vengris, J., & Selman, K. (2007). Photovoice Hamilton Manual. Hamilton Community Foundation. <http://photovoice.ca/>

<sup>vi</sup> PhotoVoice Missouri. (2012). University of Missouri Extension. Retrieved from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/64950943@N05>

<sup>vii</sup> Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A.C., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C.C., & Minkler, M. (2007). Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 27(2), 241-261.

<sup>viii</sup> Latina Teens Urge City Leaders to Re-open Pools, Boost Activity Options." *Salud-America!* E-Newsletter, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Fall 2010. <http://www.salud-america.org/sites/www.salud-america.org/files/upload/Fall2010.pdf>.