

PHOTOVOICE

Engaging the Community through Community-Based Participatory Research

“ I want people to see that the way you see life is only one perspective, it isn't the way everyone else sees it...everyone sees things from different perspectives, and this is just one of them. ”

Photovoice participant

What is Photovoice

Photovoice is a research technique based on the idea that local residents understand community issues better than outside professionals. It is a method of working in communities with people who are typically under-represented and who have the least access to those who make decisions about their lives. It enables participants to:

- Record and bring life to their community's strengths and concerns
- Promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues
- Reach community decision makers in a unique visual presentation



The Current Photovoice Project

Photovoice has been used across the world by people of all ages to communicate their experiences with decision makers. In the current photovoice project, First Nations youth used photography to express their vision and experiences with the ultimate goal of enhancing community health and well-being.

This project grew out of the Grey Bruce Healthy Communities Partnership and Ontario's Healthy Communities Strategy as a means to gather understanding and engage the community in identifying priority health issues in an attempt to begin the process of effecting local change.

The Grey Bruce Healthy Communities Partnership focused on engaging community members who are not often sought out in the planning process and whose voices are not often heard. An opportunity presented to harness the passion and skill of a local community leader and photographer. This community champion was integral in recruiting a group of First Nations students to participate in the project. Ultimately, five students saw the project through to completion.



Methodology

The youth participated in regular meetings that took place over the course of the 2010/11 school year and summer vacation. They were provided with digital cameras and asked to use pictures to show the reality of their everyday lives and communicate about issues that are important to them.

Participants were provided with the 6 priority areas (physical activity, sport and recreation, injury prevention, healthy eating, tobacco use/exposure, substance & alcohol misuse and mental health promotion) identified by the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport within the Healthy Communities Framework. These categories provided a guide, but participants were encouraged to take photos of anything they felt was important to capture and share. Youth were asked to use their photographs to describe the things that they felt make it easy or difficult to be healthy. They were to consider the message that they wanted the picture to express and what they wanted their community decision makers to know about. The images and accompanying narratives provide evidence and become tools for the youth to be involved in community dialogue with the hope of affecting change.

Participatory Analysis of Data

Photovoice is a powerful and inclusive methodology because it places control in the hands of the participants from the beginning. It enables underrepresented groups to record and reflect their personal and their community's strengths and concerns through photographs which generate dialogue and shared knowledge about issues that are important to them.

Youth are active participants instead of being the subjects of outside research. They take on a co-researcher role in the collection, analysis and presentation of the data. After taking photographs, participants choose the images that they feel are most representative of their experiences. They then contextualize the photographs by telling stories about what the photographs mean to them and through dialogue with other participants.



Conclusion

In photovoice, as with any community development, the process is as important as the outcome. Sharing pictures and stories builds relationships, encourages collaboration and builds community spirit. It engages community members who have first-hand knowledge through experience of the issues that are affecting them. It helps us to learn from their lived experiences.

The youth involved in this project have already had the opportunity to reach decision makers in their communities with their photographs. Presentations have been made to Chief and Council at both Saugeen First Nation and Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation. Presentations have also been made to the Grey Bruce Health Unit Board of Health and at a local youth conference in Hanover/West Grey. The collection of photographs and stories is also schedule to be displayed at exhibits across Grey and Bruce Counties.

For more information, contact:

Lindsay Wonnacott, Health Promoter
l.wonnacott@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca

For more information on photovoice as a tool for engaging people whose voices are frequently not heard and whose perspectives are often overlooked visit:

www.photovoice.ca

http://www.pwhce.ca/photovoice/pdf/Photovoice_Manual.pdf