



A REPORT ON THE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

Submitted to the NDCPD CAC
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Background Information: Photovoice blends a grassroots approach to photography and social action. It provides cameras not to policy makers, or professionals, but to people with limited access to decision-makers.

Photovoice has three goals. It gives people a way to record and reflect their strengths and challenges. It promotes conversation about important issues through group discussion and photographs. Finally, it engages policymakers. It entrusts people with an opportunity to use cameras as a means of recording community conditions and in becoming potential catalysts for social action and change, in their community.

Purpose: The purpose of the Photovoice project was:

- 1) To find out how well PhotoVoice works as a tool for conducting a community needs assessment
- 2) To increase Consumer Advisory Council (CAC) experience with using Participatory Action Research or PAR as an activity for developing leadership skills.

Methods: Staff members from the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) secured authorization from the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) to complete a PhotoVoice project. Members of the CAC were given portable cameras and decided to take photos of people, events, and items in their home and/or community. They were invited to choose subjects for their picture that were important or sent a message that they were willing to share about their needs/lives. The project was initiated by CAC members in the spring of 2007. Photos were taken in the fall and reviewed by the CAC in the winter of 2008. Options for sharing the results with decision-makers were shared in the spring of 2008.

Seven members of the CAC decided to participate in the project. Each participant completed an icon-based form that highlighted their rights as a subject in a research study and signed the appropriate consent forms. All members completed their orientation and picture taking by December of 2007. The photos were processed and shared back with individual members who then had the opportunity to vet the photographs and remove any that they did not wish to share with the group. Each member shared his or her photos with the full CAC using IVN technology. Members participated in a discussion about what they learned and were able to share stories about their experiences.

The group was invited to use the chart in figure 1 below to think about each set of photographs.

S	What do you SEE here?
H	What's really HAPPENING here?
O	How does this relate to OUR lives?
W	WHY does this problem/condition or strength exist?
E	How could this image EDUCATE others?
D	What can we DO about it the challenges/strengths?

Figure 1: Photo analyses chart

Results: CAC members asked for assistance in compiling the photos into a variety of formats that could be used to share stories and messages with a wider audience. Several options were reviewed with the CAC members in the spring of 2008. These included:

- Online web page illustration
- IEP brochure shared by a family
- Training Powerpoint
- Newsletter story
- NDCPD Galleria

Some CAC members automatically organized their work into formats that could easily be shared. Others took random photos and needed support to share their results. All had ideas about how photos might be shared with a wider audience. Few suggestions for sharing the photos with policy-makers were made. NDCPD staff members were then asked to follow up on these suggestions to the extent possible.

To accomplish this, the staff presented samples of the photos within various formats to the entire NDCPD staff and asked for suggestions about how to follow up on suggestions made by the CAC members. Staff suggestions are represented in figure 3 below.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use to illustrate online courses • Use to illustrate webinars • Build into case studies as an example • Consider posting on a blog • Work into a poster session • Use to lobby the legislature • Use to train physicians at a luncheon • Illustrate fact sheets • Present as a story in a newsletter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share over project listservs. • Use as PSA photos on TV; billboards • Use as a recruitment tool • Make into a video "A day in the life of " • Use photos as a screen saver • Use as a "getting to know you" activity • Use as a visual when giving testimony • Create a brochure on transportation • Make a coffee-table book |
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Figure 2: NDCPD Suggestions

Evaluation: Several activities were used within the Photovoice project to evaluate its impact and help decide what was learned. Guiding questions were developed.

1. How well does PhotoVoice work as a tool for doing a community needs assessment?
2. What were the CAC members' experiences with Photovoice? Did this project help anyone to develop leadership skills?

To address these questions, each participating CAC member was asked to complete a simple survey with a Likert Scale and open ended questions. A summary of the results of the survey is included in Figure 3 below.

NDCPD Photovoice Survey Results						
	Strongly Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Photovoice was easy to do	1	1	1	0	2	5
Photovoice was fun to do	0	0	2	2	1	5
Photovoice was meaningful	0	0	0	5	0	5
Photovoice made a positive difference in my life	0	0	4	1	0	5
I have reservations about using Photovoice	1	3	0	0	1	5
I believe Photovoice will create a positive change in attitudes and perspectives	0	1	3	0	1	5
I believe Photovoice will create a positive change in policy or regulations	0	2	2	0	1	5
	3	7	12	8	6	35
	9%	20%	34%	23%	17%	Total

Figure 3: NDCPD Photovoice Survey Results

These results indicate that the majority of the participants agreed that Photovoice was easy to do, fun and meaningful and made a positive difference in their lives. Only one person had “reservations” about using Photovoice. Most believed it would make a positive change in attitude but few agreed that it would change policy or regulations.

Participants were also asked several open ended questions about Photovoice. Figure 4 below displays the responses which have been grouped by question.

Photovoice Survey Question	Responses
What did you like about the Photovoice Project?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That I decided to give it a try and stick with it. 2. Easy & fun 3. No response 4. Gave an opportunity to take a closer look at what is important in life 5. I liked it because we got to see what other people’s lives and interests were all about
What did you dislike about the Photovoice Project?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The time of year we took the pictures (winter); Asking people if it would be OK to take their picture. 2. (Question mark) 3. Hard to do, due to limited transportation 4. Did not use given camera; used digital; not long enough – needs to be two parted 5. It wasn’t explained thoroughly enough. I was confused about the intention. I also wish it

	had been held at a different time of the year.
What was meaningful for you in this project?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That my family was in most of my pictures 2. To see and hear about everyone else's lives 3. Pictures of family and friends 4. To see the subject of my pictures feel good about his/herself. 5. The ability to show in pictures what was important in my life.
If you could change anything about the Photovoice process, what would it be?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think if it is tried again it should be done in the springtime. 2. Nothing 3. Different time of year 4. Use digital equipment 5. Have it at a different time of the year. Also have more time to take pictures, etc.
What will you tell others about Photovoice?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To at least give it a try. 2. It is a fun way to give others information 3. No response 4. Was meaningful 5. It really brings out other people and you get to know other people better
Where would you like to see the final products shared or displayed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Any and everywhere possible 2. As many places as possible 3. No response 4. Anywhere it can make a difference in people's attitudes 5. Probably at the NDCPD website and display case at MSU.

Figure 4: Qualitative Responses to Photovoice

Conclusions:

Photovoice can then be seen as an activity that may be used as part of a comprehensive system change initiative but which will probably not stand alone to bring about system's change. If Photovoice is to be used as a means of completing a community needs assessment, the group will need to understand that as part of the initial assignment. The directions "take photos of events, places, people that are meaningful" does not indicate that the participants should think about what is missing as well as helpful and does not lead participants to look at patterns or strengths.

Photovoice can be seen as an activity that provides an opportunity to develop leadership skills among a group. If that outcome is to be realized, several changes in how the project is implemented need to be considered.



Lessons Learned

Expectations: Most negative comments about Photovoice were due to disappointment. Those people who had the most difficulty using Photovoice were the most disappointed. They expressed negative comments not because they thought it was a bad project, but because they wanted very much to participate at a much deeper level, and found themselves unable to do so through no fault of their own. After looking forward to this activity for some time, they were naturally disappointed.

Orientation: Several important lessons about introducing this idea were learned. Careful attempts to explain in advance what the project was all about did not mean that everyone understood. Asking people to explain in their own words what they understood might have helped to clarify the purpose of the project. Also showing examples of Photovoice might have helped people to realize better how to take different kinds of photos that “send a message”. We might have brought in various specialists to help the group think about display options. We could have done more to get participants to look at what other people who used Photovoice had done. Using IVN technology and meeting infrequently also added to the difficulty of understanding and remembering the goals and intended outcomes.

Timing: The time of year during which we scheduled the activity turned out to be a critical factor for several participants. The ability of people with physical or sensory challenges to get out into the community to the places where they wanted to take photos was compromised during the winter. Even though our community has paratransit services that are generally available throughout the year the effort of scheduling and using those services is too exhausting for people to take multiple photos and the view in winter (snow and ice) was not what people wanted in what they hoped would be a “nice” photo.

Taking Photos: Even though we anticipated that using the camera might be a sticking point; several barriers surfaced that we did not anticipate. Although care was taken to purchase cameras with large buttons, and a training session on how to use them with time to practice was included, some people were unable to operate the cameras easily. Taking the photo required holding the camera with one hand while manipulating the button with the other and that two-step process proved difficult. One woman, who was blind, asked a friend to take photos for her and that worked fine. However, people with physical challenges did not ask to use this option. Nor did they once volunteer that they were having difficulties with the camera so that modifications could be made or someone could serve as a photography assistant that they might direct to take certain photos for them. Instead, only when the time came to share their photos, (which they agreed to do) and they observed other photos that had been taken by some with different challenges, did they share their frustration. Several important lessons were learned from these responses. We thought we had learned some of these lessons and found we had not or at least that we needed to re-learn them.

- 1) **People do not want to feel stupid in front of others, and often will not admit they can't do something or ask for help;**
- 2) **Options or alternative ways to get photos taken should be made available to all from the beginning;**
- 3) **Participants should be invited to weigh in on a general discussion of what might go wrong or be difficult and how could that challenge be overcome. This conversation should not be rushed and may need to be repeated individually.**
- 4) **People will not take responsibility for problem-solving unless they have ownership for the project.**

Photovoice will not be a true PAR experience unless researchers, even those of us that have disabilities ourselves, really make every effort to introduce Photovoice as an option and then involve the group in making decisions. Otherwise it is just another project that people go along with to please you.

Getting To Results The ultimate outcome for PhotoVoice is to influence others, particularly policy makers. The participants seemed weakest on this point. They really did not know what to do with the photos and needed lots of support to think about next steps. Participants with limited experience often just snap random shots and need encouragement on how to tell a story or how to select a photograph that can send a message. Part of building leadership is thinking about what to do with what you have. The Photovoice process has several ways to facilitate the discussions that lead a group to think through what to do with the results.

PhotoVoice may work best in a face-to-face environment with adequate funding when implemented by people with a thorough understanding of the PAR process. PhotoVoice is more difficult to implement using IVN technology especially with long delays between meetings. Although not costly, PhotoVoice requires adequate funding. After starting, we learned that anticipated support had been delayed and we would have to proceed on a shoestring budget. Finally, again because people treated this as a project and waited to be told what to do next they did not really take ownership for finding a home for the results. They did ask for and received a report on the outcomes. It will be fun to see what is done with the results.