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Vocational Empowerment Photovoice

Leader's Guide



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Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation

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Published by:

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation
College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Sargent College
940 Commonwealth Avenue West
Boston, MA 02215
<http://cpr.bu.edu/>

The production of the *Vocational Series in Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Recovery* was directed by Marianne Farkas.

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant with funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and from the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDILRR grant 90RT5033). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this project do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

ISBN: 978-1-878512-60-4

Acknowledgements

First, we want to acknowledge the many contributors to the material contained within Vocational Empowerment Photovoice (VEP). Bill Anthony, Mikal Cohen, Karen Danley, and their colleagues researched and created seminal material in Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Supported Employment, and Recovery from which VEP springs. The work of Boston University's Mikal Cohen, Marianne Farkas, et al, on Rehabilitation Readiness provided a cornerstone for this material, as did the seminal work of Carolyn Wang and Mary Ann Burris at the University of Michigan on Photovoice Methodology. Alexandra (Sasha) Bowers had the vision of bringing Photovoice to mental health, and she introduced our staff and students to the beauty and methods of Photovoice. For these and other seminal materials, research, and knowledge, we are grateful.

There are many people who helped us to shape this curriculum. We would like to thank all the students who participated in the original Vocational Empowerment Photovoice classes through the Recovery Center at Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. We invited their vocational recovery stories, and they responded with openness, bravery, persistence, and hard work. The creativity and inspiration they showed in their work with Photovoice, and their feedback and everyday participation inspired us to further develop these materials.

The *VEP Leader's Guide* and *Workbook* were further refined with the support of the staff of Thresholds in Kankakee, IL and Pilgrim Psychiatric Center in Brentwood, NY. Many thanks to Angela Thinnies, James Janusz, Kelly Lane, Ryan Canedo, and Kathleen Guzman, who were the first group leaders outside of our own staff to teach Vocational Empowerment Photovoice.

Lastly, we want to thank Patricia B. Nemec for her work in reviewing and revising the initial curriculum materials, Deborah Bennett for her assistance in editing and improving the curriculum, and Sue McNamara for her work on final edits, design, and preparation of all of the VEP materials.

Our final thought is that these materials would not be possible without the countless people who have shared their stories of recovery which have inspired our work. Our fervent hope is that these materials will offer support and hope to those who are in search of a meaningful vocational life.

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| Table of Contents | Pages |
|---|--------------|
| Introduction for Group Leaders | 8 |
| Background on the Curriculum | 8 |
| What is Vocational Empowerment? | 8 |
| What is Photovoice? | 8 |
| How to Use the Curriculum | 9 |
| What's in the Curriculum | 9 |
| Using the Workbook | 11 |
| Using the Leader's Guide | 11 |
| Tips for Leading the Group | 14 |
| Photovoice Exhibit | 16 |
| Exhibiting the Final Vocational Empowerment Photovoice work | 17 |
| Session 1: Introduction to Vocational Empowerment Photovoice | 18 |
| Schedule for Session 1 | 18 |
| Background for Session 1 | 18 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 1 | 19 |
| Lesson Plan 1 | 20 |
| Session 2: My Working Life | 35 |
| Schedule for Session 2 | 35 |
| Background for Session 2 | 35 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 2 | 36 |
| Lesson Plan 2 | 37 |
| Session 3: Writing Your Photovoice Narrative | 46 |
| Schedule for Session 3 | 46 |
| Background for Session 3 | 46 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 3 | 47 |
| Lesson Plan 3 | 48 |
| Session 4: My Vocational Values | 57 |
| Schedule for Session 4 | 57 |
| Background for Session 4 | 57 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 4 | 58 |
| Lesson Plan 4 | 59 |
| Session 5: My Vocational Identity | 69 |
| Schedule for Session 5 | 69 |
| Background for Session 5 | 69 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 5 | 70 |
| Lesson Plan 5 | 71 |

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Session 6: The Costs and Benefits of a Working Life (Part One) | 83 |
| Schedule for Session 6 | 83 |
| Background for Session 6 | 83 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 6 | 84 |
| Lesson Plan 6 | 85 |
| Session 7: The Costs and Benefits of a Working Life through Interviewing Others (Part Two) | 99 |
| Schedule for Session 7 | 99 |
| Background for Session 7 | 99 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 7 | 100 |
| Lesson Plan 7 | 101 |
| Session 8: Vocational Supports and Services | 120 |
| Schedule for Session 8 | 120 |
| Background for Session 8 | 120 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 8 | 121 |
| Lesson Plan 8 | 122 |
| Session 9: Setting Goals | 137 |
| Schedule for Session 9 | 137 |
| Background for Session 9 | 137 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 9 | 138 |
| Lesson Plan 9 | 139 |
| Session 10: My Vocational Journey | 149 |
| Schedule for Session 10 | 149 |
| Background for Session 10 | 149 |
| Materials and supplied needed for Session 10 | 150 |
| Lesson Plan 10 | 151 |
| Three Booster Sessions: Follow-Up | 164 |
| Schedule for Booster Session | 164 |
| Background for Booster Session | 164 |
| Materials and supplies needed for Booster Session | 165 |
| Lesson Plan for Booster Session #1 | 166 |
| Lesson Plan for Booster Session #2 | 170 |
| Lesson Plan for Booster Session #3 | 175 |
| Individual Sessions Guide | 180 |
| Footnotes | 183 |

Appendix: Tips for Administrators and Supervisors Implementing Vocational Empowerment Photovoice

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| INTRODUCTION | A-3 |
| Spanish Language Version | A-3 |
| Who is the Appendix for? | A-3 |
| Why Use It? | A-3 |
| When Should the Tips for Implementing VEP be Used? | A-4 |
| I. BACKGROUND ON THE VOCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT PHOTOVOICE CURRICULUM | A-4 |
| What is Photovoice? | A-4 |
| What is Vocational Empowerment? | A-5 |
| II. ADMINISTRATOR TIPS: PLANNING TO IMPLEMENT THE VOCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT PHOTOVOICE PROGRAM (VEP) | A-6 |
| Introduction | A-6 |
| The Goals of the VEP Program are to: | A-6 |
| Before You Start Vocational Empowerment Photovoice (VEP) | A-6 |
| Successful Implementation of the VEP Program | A-6 |
| Preliminary VEP Agency Questionnaire | A-7 |
| Plan to Enhance VEP Implementation | A-8 |
| Funding VEP | A-9 |
| Ethical and Safety Considerations of Photovoice | A-9 |
| Celebrate Participants' Photovoice Pieces | A-9 |
| III. TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS | A-10 |
| Who Should Supervise VEP-trained Peer Teachers? | A-10 |
| Supervision Outline | A-11 |
| Questions for Supervision: | A-11 |
| Additional Tools for Supervisors | A-12 |
| What is the VEP Fidelity Scale: | A-12 |
| Who Can Assess the Fidelity | A-12 |
| What Are the Items | A-12 |
| Content Fidelity Scales | A-14 |
| Process Fidelity Scales | A-28 |
| Sample Certificate of Achievement | A-30 |
| References | A-31 |

Introduction for Group Leaders

Background on the Curriculum

The purpose of the *Vocational Empowerment Photovoice* (VEP) program is to help people think about work and empower them to set a vocational goal. For many people who have a diagnosis of a serious mental illness, it is hard to imagine working. It may seem like there are just too many barriers, and it may be hard to know where to start. This program will invite participants to consider pursuing a meaningful vocational life.

What is Vocational Empowerment?

The word “empowerment” means that a person feels that he or she has a sense of control over his or her situation. It’s not “power” in the sense of controlling other people, but more a sense of having the right and the ability to make decisions about one’s own life.ⁱ Vocational empowerment is about feeling confident in one’s own ability to get and keep a job.

Employment is an important part of feeling active, productive, and like a contributing member of a community. Having something to do during the week, like going to a job where people count on you to show up, gives a structure to a person’s life, along with a sense of importance—that one is valued and needed. Many jobs involve dealing with other people, so working also can provide a social network. What a person does for work provides a sense of identity, too. Of course, a paid job gives a person a regular income, making all sorts of choices and options possible that were out of reach before.

For many people with a diagnosis of a mental illness, working does not seem possible. People may be afraid of losing their benefit check or worried that co-workers might find out about their history of using mental health services. Because of these fears and many practical barriers to working, people may not feel empowered to work. The *Vocational Empowerment Photovoice* program will help build that sense of empowerment.

What is Photovoice?

Photovoiceⁱⁱ is a method by which people identify, represent, and enhance their community by creating photographs and text to “define for themselves and others, including policy-makers, what is worth remembering and what needs to be changed.” It is a way that an individual or a group can capture strengths, problems, or concerns by combining photographs and written text. The writing and the photographs are used with group discussions that help people reflect on themselves and their situations in a positive way that educates and increases their confidence. As described in the Leader’s Guide for *Combating Prejudice and Discrimination*

through Photovoice Empowerment, “Using a camera places the power to represent the world in the hands of people living with a mental illness, freeing them from some of the constraints of other modes of communication.”ⁱⁱⁱ

How to Use the Curriculum

What does the Vocational Empowerment Photovoice Program consist of?

The group is designed as an interactive, dynamic class with several components, to be led by peer leaders well-versed in VEP.

- **Class Sessions:** The curriculum is divided into 10 class sessions. Each session lasts two hours and focuses on a different content area. The Class Sessions are the main component of VEP and the subject of most of this curriculum.
- **Booster Sessions:** Booster Sessions allow the class to connect, review, and share progress, and keep momentum going after the regular Class Sessions are completed. There are three Booster Sessions, scheduled one month apart. The Booster Sessions start one month after completion of the weekly Class Sessions.
- **Individual Sessions:** In order to support participants to work on vocational goals and Personal Action Plans, peer leaders are asked to support people individually starting within a week of the end of the weekly Class Sessions. It is anticipated that Individual Sessions occur weekly, for approximately one hour, as desired by the person. The official end to the Individual Sessions is the third Booster Session, however, leaders may support people to work on their goals, supports, and plans after that.
- **Optional Exhibit:** For many, the culmination of the class and their experience with vocational empowerment is an exhibit of Photovoice creations, in which the Photovoice work that participants have produced in class are hung for all to enjoy, celebrate, and be educated and inspired by. Exhibits may occur in various spaces, including the building where classes are held.

What is in the Curriculum?

The curriculum includes two books: this Leader’s Guide and a Workbook for participants. For each Class Session, there is a detailed lesson for you to follow in the Leader’s Guide, and a section in the Workbook for participants to follow along.

How to Use the VEP Curriculum

- **Before:** *Before your first Class Session*, you will need to schedule dates, times, and a location for classes. Make sure to schedule Booster Sessions and an Exhibit, if you intend to hold one, in advance as well.

Prepare a handout inviting people to participate in the program. The invitation should include a brief description of the program, and the dates, times, and location of the group. Include details about how to sign up and contact information for you, the group leader, in case a participant has questions.

Generally, we suggest recruiting 8-12 people for classes, given the level of interaction in the group. You may want to limit new participants after the second class session, given that the sessions build on the content of the last session.

This class may be best for people who are considering work, but are not yet in the process of getting into jobs or school. As you recruit, prepare for the upcoming class by reading over the *Workbook* and *Leader's Guide* in full, so that you understand the content and method of teaching.

Before each Class Session, we recommend reading over the Background of the upcoming Session, Schedule, and prepare any Materials and Supplies needed. Review in detail the Lesson Plan for each Session, especially the section that you will be teaching. If there is more than one leader co-teaching VEP, split up the Class Session content well before the Session begins so that there is time to prepare. Plan to use only the time allotted in the Lesson Plan, so that co-leaders have a chance to teach their sections.

- **During:** As a group leader, you will follow the script in the *Leader's Guide* to provide information, instructions for activities, and questions to get discussions started. As the leader, it is your job to help participants to share their experiences, participate in discussions with each other, and work on exercises and activities.

Each Class Session is expected to involve a lot of discussion, as past experience shows that those conversations are the key to helping participants to feel empowered. Keep in mind that while you will be following the *Leader's Guide*, the participants will be following along in the *Workbook*.

- **After:** *After each Class Session*, review with co-leaders your experience with the class. Note what went particularly well and what was difficult, confusing, or took a lot of time. Use your learnings to tailor the next Class Session. Plan with co-leaders how you will split the teaching, if necessary, and begin to prepare for the next session.

Support individuals between Class Sessions to complete assignments as needed. Encourage participants to keep coming to the class, and as necessary, explore why a person may not be

coming to class. Use empathy and listening skills to hear the person out, share relevant stories of recovery to inspire hope, and offer to support the person to come back to class.

Using the Workbook

Each participant needs to have a *Workbook* along with a pen or pencil to write during the *Photovoice* sessions. You may want to remind participants to bring the *Workbook* to every session. It is a good idea to bring a few extra blank *Workbooks* to each session, in case a participant forgets his or hers. You also will need your own copy of the *Workbook*.

Using the Leader's Guide

The following sections are included in the *Leader's Guide* for each group session:

1. An overview of the session

For each class session, you will find a brief summary and the goals for that session. This will give you a general idea of what will be covered.

2. A training schedule for each module

Each class is designed to last two hours. A general outline is included for the schedule for each session. Suggested times also are listed in the session plan, but having the whole schedule laid out will give you a better idea of the flow of the session. An optional 10-minute break is scheduled in the middle of each session. Remember, times are approximate. Be sure to start on time and end on time; and let the participants know that they need to come back from the break within the allotted 10 minutes.

3. Background on the session content

Before you lead a session, be sure to read the background section for that session. This will help you be prepared to answer questions and guide discussions. Reference sources and other notes are listed at the end of each session plan, if you would like even more information.

4. A list of materials or supplies needed for that session

Some sessions require cameras. Whether each participant is provided a camera to keep or is loaned a camera will be a decision made by the sponsoring program or agency, as the costs will differ. Ideally, participants will have access to a digital camera, since it will provide immediate

photograph viewing and make it easier to review photos during class. Single-use disposable digital cameras are available, but these often require being returned to the manufacturer for producing the photos. It may be possible to find one that can be processed at a local store. Some single-use cameras are labeled as “digital,” but they really include film that can then be converted to a digital image.

Disposable cameras are not a bargain, and the number of photos that can be taken are limited. If Photovoice becomes a regular offering at your agency, it may be worthwhile investing in regular digital cameras that can be collected and re-used with a new group.

While it is not necessary that all of the cameras are the same, it is important that the cameras are able to connect to whatever you will be using to print or display the photographs.

Some sessions will require access to either a printer or a laptop and projector. Printers will allow leaders to print out photos that participants want to discuss following Photo Mission assignments. Projectors and laptops will allow for viewing by the whole class at once.

Some printers are designed to work with a particular brand of camera; others work through a computer program that can read pictures from any camera. If using a projector, make sure you have the cords and connectors needed to connect both machines. Be sure to check all of your equipment in advance, so you know that it works and you are clear about how to use it.

If you decide to have an exhibit at the end of the 10 weeks, you will need to print and frame the final photo missions created by the participants. You will need:

- A photo printer that will work with the cameras provided
- Cables needed to link the camera to the printer
- Someone to piece together the photos and short narratives into one Photovoice creation
- Paper for printing the photos
- Frames
- Hangers for the final pieces
- Optional: Refreshments for the Exhibit “Opening”

5. Session Plan

The session plan provides a script for you to follow. Every session plan is formatted in a similar way and is designed to fit into two hours. Once you have led a group through the program several times, you may choose to adapt and expand the content to match your presentation style and to best meet the needs and background of the participants. However, when you are leading a group for the first few times, it is best to stick closely to the script.

Short presentations and frequent activities or discussions help you keep the participants' attention, but often present a challenge to you to move along quickly enough and manage the discussion times without getting off track. General times for each presentation, activity, and discussion are included in each session plan. It is a good idea for you to note the actual clock times (like 10:00-10:05) in your session, so you can track your time as you go through the group session. As you lead a session the first few times, you may find it helpful to jot times in the session plan, indicating how much time each part actually takes you. This will be useful to you when you lead the next group.

Each session plan includes prompts for you, the group leader, about what to do with the content. In general, text written in *italics* indicates directions to you and regular text indicates what you will say aloud to the participants. Here is an explanation of each of the prompts:

Orient

The symbol of the key indicates that a good orientation can help unlock participant participation. In order to participate, people have to know what is expected of them. You will orient participants by describing what will be coming up in the session, why it is included, what you want them to do, and what you will do.

Tell

The symbol of the clipboard indicates that you will be providing instruction from the lesson itself. The “tell” points are bits of knowledge that you are sharing with the participants. In general, the information in the “tell” sections is not included in the *Workbook*.

Read

The symbol of a book means you will read aloud, as a class, from the session plan. The content to be read aloud will be contained in the *Workbook*. Invite the participants to read a section aloud, rather than doing it yourself, whenever possible.

Show

The symbol of the pointing hand indicates a time when you need to demonstrate something or show the participants an example. Some examples will be in the *Workbook*, however, if participants seem to be confused or unsure, use the board or your own worksheet to give an example, clarify, or demonstrate how to do it.

Do

The symbol of the writing hand is for times when the participants will do an activity. Often, these will involve preparing written responses to questions in the *Workbook*.

Ask

The question mark symbol indicates that it is time for you to ask a question. Sometimes these questions are looking for short answers; at other times, you will be starting a lengthy discussion.

Discuss

The “back and forth” arrow symbols mean that you should allow time for the participants to discuss a question or experience. As the group leader, you want to encourage exchanges that go from one participant to another.

Review

The “re-do” arrow symbol means that you will be going over material that was already covered. Often, this will happen at the beginning of a session, where you will be reviewing what happened at the previous session.

Summarize

The check-mark symbol indicates that you are finished with one piece of the session and that it is time to wrap up what you covered. This often occurs at the end of a session, when it is accompanied by a preview of the next session (the preview is indicated by “orient”).

Break

The clock symbol will remind you to stick with the schedule and to tell the participants to come back on time from the break. The scheduled break is optional, but recommended.

Tips for Leading the Group

Part of your job as a trainer is to be an inspirational leader. A good leader is honest, forward-looking, inspiring, competent, and credible.^{iv} Credibility comes from your knowledge, your projected confidence, and from treating participants with respect. If there is something you don't know, then say so. Promise to look it up and report back—and then follow through. Honoring your promises, such as starting and ending on time, also helps make you trustworthy and credible.

A good Photovoice group leader will be organized and will deliver a smooth presentation, which comes from preparing carefully. Prepare ahead by reading through the session plan, including the background material.

As the group leader, you need to focus your attention on the participants, not on your notes. When you present, maintain a good pace—not too fast or too slow. In the group session,

demonstrate good “people skills” by involving participants—don’t just rattle on and on. Make eye contact with the participants (this means don’t just read the group leader script). Even if you feel a little anxious, try to concentrate on relaxing your body. If you look relaxed, the participants will feel more comfortable.

Orient participants at the beginning of each session and after each break. Orienting means explaining what you will be doing during that session or during a particular activity, why you will be doing it (the purpose or value of the session content), and who will do what. Explain your role as the group leader and clearly indicate any expectations that you will have for the participants. Each session plan gives you a script to use when you orient.

Because *Vocational Empowerment Photovoice* is about empowerment, be sure to offer choices and acknowledge strengths. It is important for the participants to feel included and appreciated.

Discussion questions are built into each session plan to help you get everyone involved. You will find that discussions flow best when you use open-ended questions—that is, questions that require more than a yes or no answer.

Respect the knowledge and experience of the participants. Inviting them to share what they know will add to the flow of the group. Examples from your own experience also will enrich group members’ learning, but should not replace group discussions. Be careful to limit what you share, so you don’t end up monopolizing the group. Think through what you want to say, how you will say it, and exactly what you hope to accomplish by telling your own story. This will help your story to be relevant.

Summarizing participants’ comments, along with prompt and accurate reflection of their opinions and feelings, will encourage everyone to contribute to group discussions, while clarifying and summarizing the points made. This sort of response takes time, so be sure to allow for it. Highlighting similarities and differences among participants can help create cohesiveness while appreciating diversity. If you have a large group, breaking discussions or activities into pairs or small groups will maximize participation.

Demonstrate a positive and respectful attitude towards participants. Use “person-first” and “human experience” language—not technical terms or psychiatric labels.

Some participants may get off track from time to time. It is important to re-orient or redirect people as needed, so the group stays focused on the session topic and activities. At times, you may need to offer corrective feedback or guidance to a participant. For example, some people speak too much in a group, while others speak too little. You might consider discussing any such issues with individuals outside of the group. In addition, remember to orient the group to your expectations. For example, you might add to the orientation at the beginning of the session by saying something like, “Remember, we want to hear from everyone in the group, so it’s important to speak up, but also to encourage others to participate.”

Research in the field of higher education^v has identified several important components of effective instruction: repetition, variety, application, and evaluation:

Repetition: Key points need to be repeated often to maximize learning. However, you should not go over the same points time and again in exactly the same way. By asking participants to recall key points, you will be able to assess their learning and you will provide some repetition, which will help everyone remember.

Variety: Not everyone learns equally well from a single source or format. Some participants will find the “tells” useful, others will get more out of the “shows” or “dos,” while others will benefit most from the discussions. Varied approaches make the group interesting, but also will help everyone get the most out of each session.

Application: Ultimately, participating in this group should make a difference in the lives of the participants. With this in mind, frequent discussions of personal experiences, feelings, and opinions will be beneficial.

Evaluation: You will want to know how the program was helpful to participants. By encouraging participants to talk about what was helpful, you will give them a voice, which is part of empowerment, and also will get the information you need about how to do even better the next time you offer the program.

Photovoice Exhibit

While an exhibit is not required, it is highly recommended. Organizing a display allows you to invite agency employees as well as people using the agency's services. Many participants will have invested a lot of time and thought in their Photovoice productions and will welcome the opportunity to share their work. In addition, a public display related to vocational empowerment will not only inspire the participants completing the Photovoice program, but will carry an important message of recovery and opportunity to anyone viewing the exhibit.

One of the major goals of Photovoice is to educate the community and to influence policy makers. Your program can decide to display the VEP work within the agency or as a public exhibit. If you do hold an exhibit, plan carefully. It's important to brainstorm with the group about possible places to show the final work.

List some people or organizations who would benefit from, or need to see, the VEP exhibit. Think about:

- How can we get our work to the audiences who need to see it?
- Where should we display our work?

Take into account the needs for space, including the schedule and for how long the exhibit will be posted. There will be costs associated with printing and framing the photographs. With enough advance timing, you may be able to work with agency development staff or local community resources to raise funds or contributions for mounting the exhibit.

Exhibiting the Final Vocational Empowerment Photovoice work

- Check that you have all photograph release forms (if needed) before the picture will be displayed.
- Finalize the selection of VEP pictures.
- Finalize the narratives. Some participants may need to write or edit narratives outside of class.
- Make final decisions about the work you want to show.
- Format the photos and narratives so that they are displayed together as one creative piece.
- Print and frame the work. The participants should decide if or how long they want their names displayed.
- Hang the Photovoice pieces in the desired exhibit area.