

Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice



Workbook

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Class #1: Overview of the Community Photovoice Program

Program Introduction

Welcome to Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice (BCGP). BCGP is a program that will help you explore and expand your relationships with various communities in your life. It uses Photovoice, an innovative photography-based practice, as a creative tool. We will discuss the different ways we define community, and we will identify the different communities we are involved with or would like to become involved with. We will focus on setting personal goals to broaden and deepen our community connections in ways that feel meaningful to us. We will use cameras to help us picture where we stand with our current communities, and to imagine other ways we could become involved in the communities around us. No prior photographic experience is necessary, so let's start by learning how this program is organized.

How the Community Photovoice Program is Organized

Bridging Community Gaps Photovoice (BCGP) is a six-month program that includes the following components:

- Twelve weekly two-hour class sessions.
- Three follow-up “Booster” sessions to help track your ongoing progress with your goals for community participation. Booster sessions are scheduled to meet a month apart, starting one month after the 12-week class ends.
- Individual support, called “Community Coaching,” is available on a weekly basis for the entire six months of the BCGP Program, i.e., during the twelve weeks when the classes meet and during the three months of Booster Sessions that follow. Community Coaching is available either in person or by phone, and meetings may be held in the office or in the community. During the individual meetings, the class leader assigned to be your Community Coach will provide you with additional support around achieving your goals for community involvement.

Goals of the Community Photovoice Program

Together in class, we will:

- Understand how we may define community and what community means to each of us.
- Learn about the Photovoice process and create Photovoice works combining pictures and text that describe our relation to our communities.
- Learn about the resources in our communities that can help us feel connected.
- Expand our understanding of the barriers that prevent us from fully engaging in our communities and become empowered to overcome those challenges.
- Set a goal to help us become more connected to our communities.
- Learn about some of the ways that being part of our communities could be important to us.

Here's How You Might Benefit from the Community Photovoice Program:

You may:

- Learn more about your communities in general, what's going on in them, and how you can be a part of them.
- Deepen your connections to your communities of choice.
- Achieve a better understanding of what it means to be a member of a community.
- Learn strategies that may help you use your personal and community resources.
- Learn strategies that may help you overcome barriers to community participation.
- Learn how to use photography and write narratives about things that matter to you.
- Connect with others and share your hopes and expectations about getting involved with your communities.

We hope your participation in this program will not only benefit you personally, but also may help you give back to the communities you feel a part of.

Suggestions for Participating in the Community Photovoice Program

Here are a few suggestions for getting the most out of your experience in the Community Photovoice Program:

- First of all, relax and enjoy the class.
- Take part in discussions and exercises. Share your thoughts and ideas. Ask questions.
- Write notes on these pages. There are many worksheets where you can jot down your thoughts and ideas. You also can write down some of the ideas of your fellow students.
- Let your self-expression flow. Photovoice is about finding your own voice. Others in the class also will share and you can learn from them.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Finally, support one another. The Photovoice experience is essentially a group experience. Your fellow students and the class leaders are here to support, encourage, and inspire you.

Expectations for Students in the Community Photovoice Program

Everyone is an important member of the class. Some of the ways we can contribute to creating a positive experience for each other is to:

- Try to attend all of the classes of the program.
- Connect with your Community Coach to get support with anything that gets in the way of your getting the most from the class.
- Complete all of the assignments given in the class.
- Add your voice and opinions to the classroom discussions.
- Treat others in the classroom with kindness and respect.
- Treat anything personal that someone shares in the class as confidential.
- Notify leaders if you will be unable to attend a class.

The Leaders' Commitments to You

The class leaders will:

- Treat you with kindness and respect.
- Assist you in completing any assignment given in the classes.
- Provide you with the support you need to attend and participate in the classes.

What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a group process where you learn to share your viewpoints on a given topic through picture-taking and writing. The topic for this class is how to strengthen your ties to communities that are currently part of your life or to bring new communities into your life. You will have a digital camera to take pictures over the course of the program, and you will learn to write text to accompany these pictures. It doesn't matter if you never have taken a photograph because we will explain everything in much greater detail in Class #3.

Here is an example of Photovoice work created by a participant in a class at Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. Notice that it is a combination of a picture and a text.



My life is centered around learning. This picture is representative of one library I use to connect with the resources I need to expand my knowledge and to learn about new subjects of interest to me. Libraries also connect me with many communities through the events that are available in each library in other locations, such as music concerts, current event discussions, classes, computer trainings, art shows, and lectures. I have attended libraries since I was four years old.

Discussion: What does this photo tell you about community involvement?

What Is “Community” and How Is It Defined?

There are several ways we can define what community means:

- A group of people living in the same neighborhood or under the same government.
- The physical district or location where a group of people live.
- A group of people having common interests, such as a religious community, a business community, or a biker community.
- A group representing a subpart of society, such as the gay community or a community of color.
- Society as a whole.

Characteristics of a Community

Members of a community always have something in common. It could be that you live in a particular place (i.e., a beach community) or share an interest or characteristic with other members of a community (i.e., the Latino community). You could do something together with a group of people, and this shared activity connects you with others (i.e., a bowling league). This shared quality, interest, or activity is what sets a community apart from the larger society.

Roles within a Community

People may have different functions or roles to play within a given community. This does not mean that some people are more important than others. They just contribute in different ways. Here are some examples of different roles in a community:

- Member
- Leader
- Citizen
- Organizer
- Official
- Facilitator
- Guide
- Contributor

Depending on the type of community, there may be other types of roles. The most basic role is to be a *member* of a community. Members are the “building blocks” of any community. Leadership roles usually involve some responsibility for others and for guiding the community.

Multiple Communities

Most people are involved in more than one community at any given time. Over time, people may live in different places, develop new interests or let go of activities that they were once connected to. Typically, we share characteristics with different types of people, and we may feel part of many different, overlapping communities throughout the course of our lives.

Possible examples of types of communities include:

- Family
- Neighborhood
- Workplace
- Spiritual
- Ethnic
- Cultural
- Sports
- Arts
- Political/Advocacy
- Other associations/communities

People often can belong to more than one community at any given time. For instance, it is possible to be part of a local citizen's advocacy group and participate in a monthly book club. It is not "one-or-the-other."

Exercise: Our Current Community Map

We are going to make a "map" of our communities.

Directions:

Step 1: Take the post-it notes we have provided you and write down the name of all the different communities you consider yourself to be a part of. Put each community on a separate post-it and put your initials on the bottom right-hand corner of each one.

Step 2: When everyone has finished, the class facilitator will ask people to come up to the front of the class, one by one, and paste their post-its on the large poster we have provided. When it's your turn, please share with the class what communities you've written down and why each one is important to you.

Discussion:

- Did your understanding or appreciation for your community involvement change as a result of this exercise?