

PHOTOVOICE AND CONSUMER-RUN MUTUAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

**Edited by: LOUIS D. BROWN, VICKY L. COLLINS,
MATTHEW D. SHEPHERD, SCOTT A. WITUK,
and GREG J. MEISSEN**

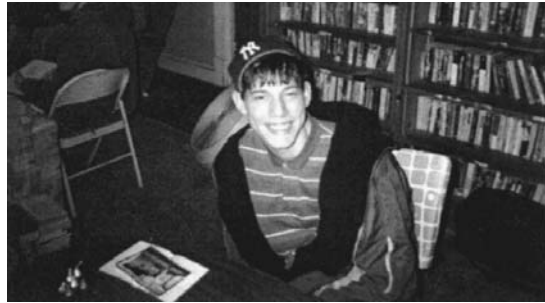
*Self-Help Network: Center for Community Support
and Research, Wichita State University, Kansas*

BACKGROUND

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology where community members use cameras to generate and interpret their own data. Originally developed by Caroline Wang and colleagues, the process can empower participants by enabling a greater degree of participant control over what data is collected and how it is interpreted (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

This photovoice project was implemented at two mutual consumer-run support organizations, Project Independence in Wichita, KS and P.S. Club in Wellington, KS. These organizations are nonprofits operated by people with psychiatric disabilities. Their primary functions are to maintain a drop-in center, foster mutual support, and provide leadership opportunities for members.

Participants were asked to take pictures of what goes on at their organization and how people benefit from the experience. One-on-one interviews with the photographers and those photographed were used to interpret the photos. The results provide an insider's understanding of these organizations.



**by Clifford Smith/
P.S. Club**

“I took this photo because I like the big happy smile on Justin’s face. He’s a friendly open kid and I enjoy being with him. He cheers the place up.”

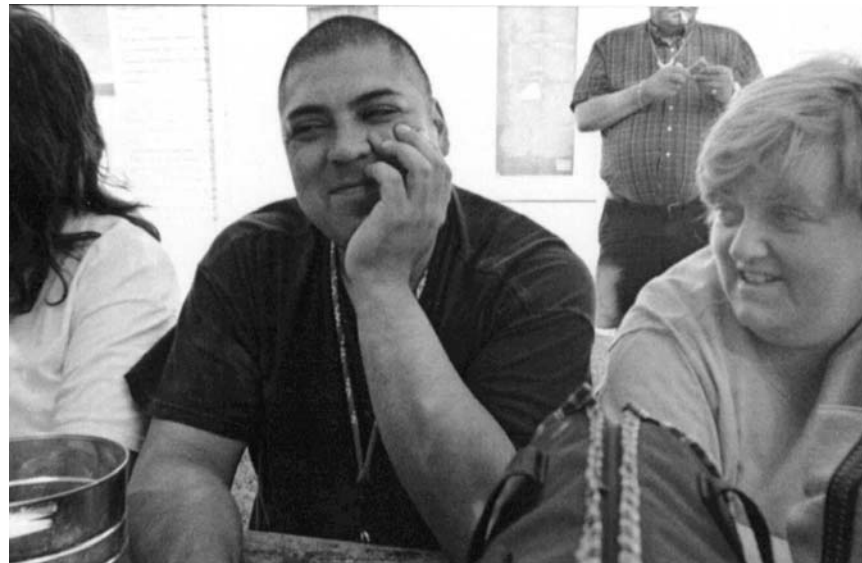


Photo by Alicia Turner

Words by Fabian Ludlow/Project Independence

“[In this picture] I was having a good time being with friends. . . . It’s comfortable here. It gives me something to do. I play pool, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, socialize. I get to see people I’ve known for a long time. . . . Usually, if I’m around people I kind of shut down. Staying active and seeing people here every day helps keep me from shutting down around others.”



**Photo by Terry Palmer
Words by Clifford Smith/
P.S. Club**

“One of Maxine’s grandchildren is shaking hands with me while Bruce and I are playing cards.”



by Billy Watson/Project Independence

“This is my friend [Linda Jaynes, a member of Project Independence] and my son [at Billy’s home]. My boy gets along with her. She will come over, hang out, help us with the baby, and stay for the night. She’s the nicest friend I’ve had. I wish there were more people like her. She is like an aunt to our baby.”



by Buddy Wells/P.S. Club

“Bruce and Bill are in the back room taking a smoke break. A lot of conversation goes on back there and I was back there talking to them. . . . Bruce is a friend who likes to joke around a lot. . . . Bill shows me that even though he has a mental illness like I do, he is able to do what he does as director. That has been encouraging to me, to know that I can do more than I think I can.”



by Ruth Hill/P.S. Club

“See no evil, hear no evil, and talk no evil. We can do no evil and have fun. . . . I give the P.S. Club a grade of A+. Everyone gets along with everyone. It’s good to feel that I have friends now.”



by Buddy Wells/P.S. Club

“Bruce, Bill, Terry, and Kenny are sitting around the card table, holding hands to show the closeness of members of the club. . . . You can just feel at ease and not feel the pressures of the outside world, worrying about questions like, why aren’t you working out in the public, making gobs of money. You don’t have to worry about that here. You just come here and talk with one another and joke around, never feeling like you are put on the spot. . . . [This place has] helped me to be more outgoing. I don’t feel alone. I don’t feel like this problem is just my problem and nobody else has it.”



**by Terry Palmer/
P.S. Club**

“This is Bill Fleming, our executive director at the P.S. Club, having a pop to drink and rubbing his belly cause he just ate lunch. He is always in a happy mood. No matter what is going wrong he is in a good mood. . . . He stands up for his friends. He is an all around good guy. We all respect him. We all get along real good. Anytime you tell him anything he listens to you.”



**by Stephanie Maness/
Project Independence**

“This is a picture of Eric and Mary goofing off, showing the friendship that they have. . . . We’re all friends here and we all get along. We all try to help each other out and when one of us is having a bad day we are there for one another, trying to pick each other up.”

CONCLUSION

One major theme that repeatedly surfaces in the images and interpretations is that of close relationships within these organizations. These close relationships serve a variety of functions. Sometimes they give members positive role models that they can relate to. Other members may be a good listeners or simply fun to joke around with. At times relationships become strong enough for people to help each other outside the organization, such as the friend who was, “like an aunt to our baby.” Regardless of the function of the relationship, each one plays an important role in enriching the lives of members. The term *mutual support organization* appears fitting, as members repeatedly express the importance of the supportive relationships formed at these organizations.

REFERENCES

- Wang, C. C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*, 369-387.
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Direct reprint requests to:

Louis D. Brown, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Fellow
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Department of Mental Health
624 N. Broadway, P.O. Box 576
Baltimore, MD 21205
e-mail: ldbrown@jhsph.edu