



Peer Perspectives - Special PhotoVoice Edition

PhotoVoice is a program designed to both increase people’s participation in their community and give them a powerful tool to confront the stigma surrounding mental health, homelessness and alcohol and other drug issues. During a PhotoVoice class, people learn about biases and stereotypes, how to cope with and overcome ignorance, prejudice and discrimination, and the importance of language. This is important, because people with mental health, homeless and/or alcohol and other drug challenges

often find themselves facing prejudice, discrimination and ignorance about their experiences from the community in which they reside. It can prevent someone from rebuilding confidence in themselves and their ability to make and sustain a meaningful recovery. They may be discouraged from participating in community events, have difficulty making friends or have low expectations put upon them. They may also face barriers in finding equal housing and employment opportunities.

People leave the class with education about the importance of

PhotoVoice Project See Me For Who I Am



When you have a mental illness, there are lots of barriers to overcome. In this picture, the fence represents a stigma that separates people from the community. If you take down the fence, everyone has the opportunity to work, relax and enjoy their lives.

Devon Roberts
Creative Writer

During a PhotoVoice class, people learn about biases and stereotypes, how to cope with and overcome ignorance, prejudice and discrimination, and the importance of language.

advocacy, and a tool to put that advocacy into action through art. The art project consists of a photograph taken in the community to speak to or represent the challenges around prejudice, discrimination and ignorance that people face. Along with the photograph, participants create a written narrative to explain its meaning. These projects are then displayed around the community to raise awareness. In all, twenty people, from all ages and walks of life, completed the class and projects that are now being displayed around the community. See the inside of this issue for an example of some of these projects.



**Contra Costa Behavioral
Health Services
Office for Consumer
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2013**

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See Me For Who I Am Featured Projects from 2013 PhotoVoice Classes

Do you see the window on the left? How about the window on the right? If you could choose, which window would you use in your home or look through more often? I relate closely to the window on the right. In 2011, I was diagnosed with depression. I'm not perfect. Sometimes my vision of myself is blurred by other people's misunderstanding, stigma, and judgments. This window reminds me of myself because I have

People could not see clearly through my actions to the hiding depression on the other side.

been called useless, stupid, boring, and lazy. People could not see clearly through my actions to the hiding depression on the other side. Most people would call the window on the right useless, stupid, or boring because they can't see clearly through it. I don't. I can see that this

window shines light through beautifully, in an amazing way the window on the left



could never do. Kind of the way I live my life, my own way. Blessed with an outlook different than everyone else's. How can you help people like me? Always, seek first to understand.

Cassidy Sumrall
Musician, Loves Life
Plays Flute, Piano, and
Loves to Sing

This picture is of two finches in a cage. They are trapped in their cage and cannot get out unless someone lets them out and gives them their freedom. They tried constantly to get out by pecking at the chicken wire. After a while, they



stopped pecking at the chicken wire as much. They learned not to try and

persevere, and just gave up. People with mental illness feel trapped

People with mental illness feel trapped because people are negative about them and their illness.

because people are negative about them and their illness. If people were more positive about them and their illness, they would not feel so trapped. They would be like free finches, flying in the wilderness.

Mark Zabrovsky
Retired Courier

What do you see? I see a guitar with broken strings. This photo was taken in a beautiful garden. The photo is really about people understanding that just because it's broken doesn't mean it's useless.

There's something going on that the casual observer may not see, which is that people judge things by the way they look on the outside and not by the



inside or what it or they have been through. The photo really represents not to judge at your first glance. This relates to our lives by everyone judging each other by their first glance. This problem exists because

The photo is really about people understanding that just because it's broken doesn't mean it's useless.

people are over judgmental. This image could possibly educate others by teaching them to, "seek first to understand, then to be understood," before judging something or someone you know nothing about. In conclusion, just because it or they have differences, doesn't mean they're not worthy.

Miranda Chappa
Loves to Learn

My photo is of a tree really growing in the parking lot of County Hospital. The cone is a bright orange notification to all who walk along, ALERT! ALERT! The tree represents me. It has been diagnosed unhealthy, has been bandaged up quickly, and received a treatment. It is not quite the same as all the other trees. The note taped to it declares, for your safety, "Be Careful!" And the neon cone continues to warn you



as long as you can see it.

Why elicit so much attention? How can anyone cope when there are so many outside forces at work? The cone is the stigma marking me, the label assigned to me. A warning to you: I am sick, broken. But is the cone ever really my

protective bandage?

Having a mental illness is not easy. It is not something people brag about, include in an introduction, or use as a conversation starter with a stranger. It has been so stigmatized that people become uncomfortable, label it with a long stare, avoid eye contact, look down on someone, talk louder, slower, ask inappropriate questions.

And while the consumer works to end the stigma, the media alerts us to the worst case scenario. If we change the

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stigma from one that causes fear, shame, embarrassment, from one where people do not need to live life as a version of their own self, we envelope and protect the suicidal, homeless, the isolated, unheard. The cone and the stigma do not need to be cautionary.

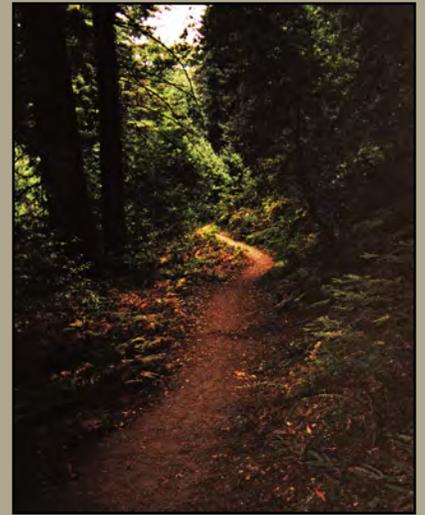
How will you react the next time you see a cone?

Nicole Groenveld

See Me For Who I Am

This is a picture of me and my beautiful children. I have been stigmatized for being a parent with mental illness by society. I have lost my children due to this stigma. I am a great parent no matter who judges me.

Brandi Archimede
Loving Mother of Two



Most people assume that the path for a person with mental illness is dark and hopeless. With help, guidance, and insight, it is possible to reach the light of recovery and wellness.

Anonymous

A Charming Dog



This is a charming dog, waiting for someone to acknowledge her. Everyone likes to be acknowledged once in a while. It shows kindness and love for others. Reaching out to someone with a mental illness would be a good start for breaking the stigma that keeps people with mental health conditions from being recognized. It shows acknowledgment of their presence when you say a kind word or do a kind act.

Fred Harris
One of Peace

PhotoVoice Unveiling

The long awaited debut of this year's PhotoVoice projects happened at Crestwood Healing Center on April 11th, 2013. At the unveiling, people that participated in PhotoVoice came and explained their project to the audience, which included family, friends, and community members involved in PhotoVoice. Projects were as diverse as the participants themselves, who were of all ages and walks of life. Some were about people's personal experiences, others about more broad issues they saw in society. All of them were extremely revealing of the deep prejudice people with mental health, homeless and alcohol and other drug issues face in our community. Many in the audience, as well as the presenters themselves, were visibly moved. After the presentation, participants were awarded certificates of achievement as a thank you for participating in the project.

This private viewing will be followed by many public presentations in the coming months. The next viewing

is scheduled to be at Mental Health Consumer Concerns in Concord in May to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month. Projects will be on display for



PhotoVoice facilitator and participant Lisa Bruce welcomes people.

several weeks. Call or email Roberto Roman at the Office for Consumer Empowerment for more details about this and other upcoming presentations if you would like to attend: Roberto.Roman@hsd.cccounty.us, (925) 957-5210.

Submit Your Work to Peer Perspectives

We are looking for stories of recovery, poems, artwork and wellness tips from consumers and family members. Email or mail your articles and images to the address below.

This newsletter is presented to you by the Contra Costa Behavioral Health Services Office for Consumer Empowerment.

Email articles to:
Roberto.Roman@hsd.cccounty.us

Mail articles to:
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Martinez, CA 94553

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Fred Harris explains his PhotoVoice project to the audience.



Brandi Archimede shares her PhotoVoice project, featuring a picture of her family.



There were many PhotoVoice projects on display during the unveiling.



Nicole Groenveld also shares her project with the audience.



Janae Randall receives her PhotoVoice certificate and a gift bag for participating in the program.



PhotoVoice facilitators Jennifer Tuipulotu, Jami Delgado and Crystal Whitehead pose for a photograph as they help set up the exhibit.