



Community Concerns

Focusing on the Social Benefits of Photography

(NAPSA)—When community members photograph their daily lives, they may find that the bigger picture begins to emerge. In young hands, a camera can be a gateway to healthy habits, lifestyles and communities.

Researchers gave cameras to teens in inner-city Baltimore and asked them to take pictures of positive activities that were alternatives to joining a gang.

“The project gave participants courage to talk to adults about community issues,” says Seante Hatcher. She is the community relations coordinator for the Johns Hopkins University Prevention Research Center (PRC), one of 35 community-academic partners the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds to find innovative solutions to health challenges. The “Photovoice” technique shows that taking pictures can empower the photographers, document their perspectives and deliver their messages.

Taking photos can also be used to engage policymakers in discussions about sensitive community issues. The University of Michigan PRC, for example, used Photovoice in the town of Flint to help youths express their emotions about neighborhood violence. The result was a visually compelling story that helped bring funding for local violence-prevention projects.

“Photovoice bridges age, race and gender. The pictures speak in a language common to everyone,” says Joyce Moon-Howard, DrPH, a researcher at the Columbia University PRC. The center has used Photovoice in interventions to promote healthy eating and in programs to encourage teenagers



The process of taking photos can be used to involve young people in positive activities and engage policymakers in discussions about sensitive community issues.

with HIV to share their feelings about living with the disease.

“The project used both the lens of the camera and the lens of the HIV-positive young adult,” says Alwyn Cohall, M.D., director of the center. “Participation reduced the isolation and stigma of dealing with HIV and gave the teenagers a sense of belonging.”

In a separate study, teens took and shared pictures of nutritious foods and were inspired to try more fruits and vegetables, he says. Dr. Moon-Howard identifies group discussion as a vital aspect of Photovoice. A set of photographs, she says, creates a “series of meaning” that helps a group identify issues of mutual concern and can motivate change.

For more information about CDC’s Prevention Research Centers program, visit www.cdc.gov/prc.