

section 5



PHOTOVOICE

Our **Photovoice** project consisted of four sessions, each with a particular goal and activity.

The first session was an information session where parents and youth were introduced to the concept of Photovoice using a PowerPoint presentation and a presenter to explain the purpose of Photovoice and the methods to be used. Adults were in one group while youth were in a separate room, and were given a similar, though more age-appropriate presentation.

Some topics discussed were the meaning of community and why we take photos. This was especially important to give the younger participants an understanding of the purpose of the project. Both groups were told that participation in the project would require a commitment to attend and fully participate in all four sessions. At the end of the information session youth and parents were asked if they were interested in participating. Those who chose to participate were asked to fill out a release form to allow us to share their photos with others.

The second session was an introduction to photography. Two photographers explained the artistic and technical elements of photography and did a show and tell session where they explained the elements in a photo

using their own work as an example. When the photographers had completed their presentation, participants were asked to choose one photo from a wide variety of laminated photos. They were then split into groups where they discussed why they chose that particular image and what it meant to them. The goal of this exercise was to encourage participants to get comfortable discussing photography and also to start looking for and describing the different elements of a photo.

Participants were given their cameras near the end of this session and sent out on a scavenger hunt looking for different subjects and items in the area. When they came back they were separated into groups and again they discussed their photos. At the end of the session, participants signed out their cameras so they could work on their community photos before the next session. The photographs to be taken were intended to respond to two questions: 1) what do you like about your Ottawa community? and 2) what would you like to change?

The third session consisted of a photo review. Participants brought back the cameras and the photos they'd taken during the week, and described their photos. At this point they were asked to explain what they thought were their top two photos and why. The group also had some input at this point, but ultimately the choice for the top two photos was left to the participant photographer.

The fourth and final session

was a writing workshop and final wrap-up. Participants were split again according to age group with parents in one group and youth in another. The groups took part in different creative writing and descriptive exercises aimed at encouraging free-form thinking and expression. The participants then wrote about their own photos describing not only the photo's content, but also context and what the photo meant to them.

The final product of the project was two photographs taken and chosen by participants with some input from the group. The individual participants then wrote a descriptive paragraph about each of the photos they chose.

The Photovoice process revealed a great deal about the participants' perspectives on living in Ottawa's Inuit community, and life in Ottawa in general. In line with all Photovoice projects, the focus was the impact photographs can have in conveying powerful messages, and in acting as a means for self-advocacy. While participants were asked to be mindful of composition, lighting, framing, and focus, the priority was ultimately to be the content of the photo. The emphasis was always on the message and story within the photo, not the quality of the photograph itself.

One notable and unexpected result of this project was the intergenerational dialogue

that emerged. Parents and youth brought very different perspectives of community to the table, and this in turn led to discussions that may not have emerged had the project been done with one age group. The large group also began discussing different issues depicted in their photographs. Some themes that emerged were the problems with traffic, environmental degradation, lack of maintenance of recreational facilities, lack of community activities at night, and issues surrounding identity and belonging. Many participants also focused on Ottawa's natural beauty and history as sources of pride.

The different experiences and life stages of participants most likely contributed to the diversity of viewpoints presented in the final photographs. This diversity also likely improved the overall quality of the discussion.

The project resulted in many participants feeling excited about the medium of photography, and wishing to continue taking photographs to express themselves. It also seemed to increase awareness of certain issues and fostered a healthy discussion about different aspects of life in Ottawa's Inuit community.

The photos that were taken as part of this Photovoice project were shown in a community photography display in May 2009. This exhibition was another opportunity for participants and the community at large to discuss the issues depicted in the photographs. >>>>



“Jasmyn”

In this picture, Jasmyn is being herself. She's out in the city. She gets to be crazy. She feels free to be whoever she is, wherever she is. She wasn't like that when we were in Labrador. I think she got that from me.

In Labrador they think I should be who they think I am, and I think it was the same for Jasmyn. In Ottawa we have anonymity. We don't have to worry about people saying "don't do that!", or "don't do that!", "you're not being like everybody else".

photographer » Holly Jarrett



“Anonymous”

You don't know who these people are. You can't identify them. There's no definition to who they are or where they have been. You lose a little bit of who you are and what makes you who you are in a city. I'm Inuk. You can't see that I'm a woman, an Inuk, a sister, a daughter. You don't know that these are my children. Because of the anonymity, we lose a little bit of who we are.

No one looks me in the face and smiles to say "hello" here in Ottawa, outside of the Inuit community. If I see an Inuk walking down the street or on the bus, I always speak to them.

photographer » Holly Jarrett





Untitled

I tried to take a picture of the sun. I thought it would be like a beautiful afternoon but everything was dark except for the sun and it was soo kool.

photographer » Christina (14 yrs)



“Perceptions”

I hope these words and photos illustrate a point and could help invoke a change for the better. I am including this second photo I am calling it "Perceptions". As you can see in this photo, as you look at a photo your perceptions can shift around as you take in what you have read, what you see, and, how he looks. When you consider everything that happened to my son, he found joy in something simple and in that moment the events of the two weeks we were in CHEO disappeared for a moment.

Thank God we have the services of CHEO in this city as I shudder to think what might have been had we lived somewhere isolated or a small town without these kinds of services. The city and province are doing many things right but obviously there are still some things that need to be fixed. I leave you with this photo.

photographer » Brian Horvath



“Katsua’s Brother Keenai”

What is happening? He’s loving me. He affects my life by making me happy. He is sitting in my old high chair for the first time. Katsua is happy that we adopted his brother so they could be together. Cynthia now has two brothers.

photographer » Katsua (4 yrs)



“The City Builds Spaces for Communities to Grow”

This space was provided for youth to come and go, practicing their sport in their own way, at their own pace. This skater has friends waiting their turn, willing to cheer a successful trick or ruefully sympathize with a spill. Different overlapping sets of youth, (skaters, bikers and taggers) all use this space for their activities with no apparent conflict, so there is art and action going on all over with no teams, uniforms or coaches required.

photographer » Jennifer Harris



“Preventable Deaths”

Over the years I've heard different stories about how there's been six or seven deaths that have occurred all over the King Edward stretch since 1994. The most recent was a cement truck that got in a collision with a small Toyota Corolla Vehicle. The woman who was driving the car did not make it out alive. Before that, a senior citizen got killed just by crossing at the intersection. It's sad just knowing that it could all have been prevented by re-routing tractor-trailers. Traffic in general in the downtown core is a major issue.

photographer » Glen Boyer



“Trees in the City”

The trees in green had colour all year. The other trees are waiting to bud later when summer is near. Growing up together in a city field outside boundaries and fences of steel. This is what makes all cities beautiful.

photographer » Gary Lewis