

From Snapshot to Civic Action

Using Photovoice to Engage a Public
Housing Community in the Examination
of Neighborhood Context



Meredith C.F. Powers, Darcy A. Freedman,
Ronald Pitner, & Tanjenique Paulin-Anderson

In collaboration with the participants of the
From Snapshot to Civic Action Photovoice Project

May 2, 2011

► About the Photovoice Project : “From Snapshot to Civic Action”

The goal of this photovoice research project was to engage residents of a public housing community in the examination of strengths and concerns about their neighborhood environment. Photovoice uses a combination of photography and group discussions as a tool for empowering participants to guide data collection and inform social change. This photovoice study is part of a broader study entitled, “Creating Healthy Environments through Community Engagement,” which is designed to reduce neighborhood crime and perceptions of crime through increased community engagement. Information gained through this photovoice project will inform the next stage of the Creating Healthy Environments Study, which is focused on implementing community generated interventions to address neighborhood concerns identified through photovoice.

Our project included two groups of residents living in public housing communities in South Carolina: (1) a Youth Group: 6 African American youth (ages 12 – 17 years) and (2) an Adult Group: 12 African American adults (ages 21-67 years). These 18 participants were invited to photograph and critically reflect on the strengths and concerns of their community. Participants each completed 30+ hours of group discussion, reflection, and analysis of their photos from June 2010 thru February 2011. Participants selected up to 10 final photos of their community that best represented concerns they wanted to address, and strengths they wanted to build on. Participants each wrote titles and captions for the photos they selected. This resulted in a collection of 172 photographs, titles, and captions for use in dissemination efforts, which are designed to engage the wider community. Participants generated ideas, themes and several community-engaged solutions to the concerns they identified, ranging from community clean-up efforts to increasing awareness of available resources.



▶ About this Summary Report

This summary report was developed in collaboration with the Photovoice participants. The summary report is designed for engaging the community in further discussions in hopes of achieving action and community change. It is divided into two sections: "Community Strengths" and "Community Concerns." Not all photos are displayed here, but we tried to get a sample from each artist that best represents the various themes. Finally, we organized the themes into five overarching categories reflected throughout the photovoice project. The following themes were identified as key factors for creating healthy neighborhood environments: (1) Sense of Place and Place Attachment (e.g., ownership, social and physical incivilities), (2) Collective Efficacy (e.g., social cohesion, sense of community, learned helplessness), (3) Social Capital (e.g., social support networks), (4) Community Development (e.g., capacity building, need for better resources), and (5) Collective Action (e.g., agency, need for collaboration and participation).

▶ Acknowledgements

This photovoice research project would not have been possible without the support of the following: Our Funders: Kresge Foundation Healthy Environment Program and USC Arts and Humanities Grants Program; The Photovoice Participants: Nicole Ashmore, Floyd Cutner, Diane Dixon, Shaniqua Dixon, George Green, Keyona Hagler, April Herbert, Brittney Hunter, Emma Johnson, Natoria Jones, Shamar Miller, Tanjenique Paulin-Anderson, Catherine Prioleau, Quanella Prophet, Debra Washington, Suzette Weathers, Cleopatra Weston, and Starr Yon; and Our Collaborators: Columbia Housing Authority and USC McKissick Museum.



Lucky to Live Here

We (the residents) have pride in the community and our home, and have a sense of place. People care about our neighborhood.

Beauty in the Community

From sun up to sun down, my community looks the same. It's a blessing to live in such a beautiful place.

~ Natoria



The Great White

My house describes how beautiful our neighborhood is, and how houses are pretty.

~Starr



We Come Together

There is a sense of community and connection among residents through friendships, gatherings, meetings, cookouts, teams, mentorship, and social support networks.

Baby on Board

A baby is about to be born onto a rocky situation. I can be a person for her to run to. We are a group of women who come together to take charge.

~ Debra



Golf Etiquette

James Clyburn's First Tee in Columbia is a great getaway for me. My Columbia Housing Authority team and I began playing last summer. It brings a sense of unity, togetherness, discipline and relaxation. It's also a great way to stay active and fit. The

First Tee program is not only a golf program, it's a learning program for young and old. In the background, we have some kids gathering up their practice balls as part of their discipline and responsibility. Golf is not only a sport, it teaches you the values important in life: discipline, determination, honesty, focus and a sense of fair play. ~Floyd

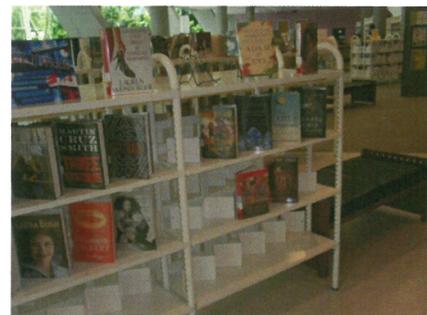
Facilities for Our Abilities

There are places to get resources and support in our community such as the Tillis Center, churches, hospitals, fire stations, schools, Columbia Housing Authority, libraries, and recreation facilities. Caring organizations exist in the community that help us create opportunities and are positive influences in our community.

A Good Place for Resources

It is a place where you can go to get your home work done, use the computer, and play games. It is a good resource for them (the residents) because they don't have to walk a long distance to use a computer. They do events here, hold meetings, and kids programs. It's a place we are proud to have in the community.

~ Nicole



Lost Without a Book

A good getaway. A whole world is open with each book. A land of fantasies.

~Keyona

We Can Make Changes Now

We have hope for the future, motivation to change and community readiness. We believe we can create change personally and collectively. We have a realistic view of the change process and know it takes time. We have a sense of unity and need all to participate. We also have a sense of urgency, we need changes now.

Marching Toward Change

Parade for annual church revival represents change in focus. It used to be a formal parade. Now it is focused on youth and their values. This shows the changes in values and ideals in my community.



~ Catherine

Ants Go to the Games Too!

We need to be like the ants; gathering food for the winter and hard times. Like the ants, we could unify as well and work toward a common goal.

~Emma



We All Belong

We value everyone and respect diversity in our community.

Nobody's Different

Don't be ashamed of who you are. Have confidence in yourself and don't let anybody tell you that you're nothing. A parking space shouldn't be a reason you're picked on.

~ April



God's Gift

They let anyone come to the church. They don't push anyone away based on how they look. They help people when they need help. The church feeds and clothes everyone.

~Quanella

With Hope and Faith

Faith and church are important to us.

Living with Faith

I see a church that has gone through challenges, but the people still have faith. I would like to see more people attend church, then maybe the community would be better.

~Suzette



Everlasting Life

A visit to the cemetery to see those who have gone from here, especially my son who tried to avoid the streets and gangs but unfortunately he didn't see the trouble ahead of him. It's up to all of us to realize the trouble around us and be aware we have to stay one



step ahead. One day all of us will be together again, if we have faith. The tiny speck in the sky is a half moon. At that moment, I knew half of my life was gone, but with faith, life everlasting is only the beginning. ~Floyd

Respect Your Elders

The elder adults are important and valued in our community and are strong assets, but may be forgotten or neglected. The older adults in our community are provided for in housing opportunities, care baskets, and social activities and spaces. However, we need to provide more services more regularly.

Oak Read High-rise

This is Oak Read High-rise at 2211 Read Street. This building has 8 floors with apartments for seniors 55 and older. This building was open September 30, 1967. It is a blessing for the seniors in this community.

~ Catherine



Don't Throw Me Out, Use Me

Look at me. At one time, I was the quality in every American home. Now, I'm old and discarded. Technology has left me in the cold. As seniors, we're old but we still have quality, and I hope we're not left out and discarded in the cold.



~ Floyd

Ancestors to Protégé

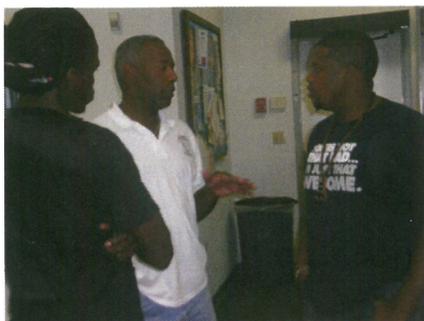
We value our African American heritage of struggle and victory. We want to build on the foundations of ancestors and roots. Don't forget the past. Segregation is part of our community's past, and evidence still exists today.

Pillars of Success

This is home. I'm surrounded by inspiration by low-income people from my community who have gone on to achieve greater things and have given back to the community. In our patio area outside our building, we honor these individuals by putting their photo and stories on the brick pillars. Each day we have hope of being better so we can serve our community as those who have served before us.



~Floyd



Helping Hands

Officer Myers explaining to his young students about life.

~Diane

Positive Personal Power

We are resilient and hard working. There is a strong sense of self and pride among residents. As individuals we have positive self-image and agency to improve ourselves and our community.

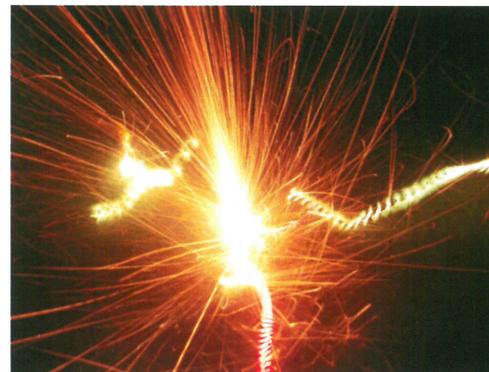
Sprout from a Seed to a Plant

This symbolizes community trying to come from hard times – sprouts from a seed to a plant. Everybody has problems in life. No one is perfect. We all fall down, but we get back up.

~Shamar



Unexpected Brilliances



Things are not always as hard as they seem.

Sometimes it starts with a spark or just a simple idea.

~Brittney

Natural Beauty

We value outdoor spaces for beauty, recreation, relaxation, and peace. We think it is important to maintain areas of natural beauty (trees, flowers, greenery) and parks (playgrounds and benches). Other neighborhoods look nicer than ours because they have well kept fountains and murals. We can use some of these ideas here.

Old Oak Tree

Oldest oak tree in the neighborhood.

This is a great place to sit around and have prayer.

~ Debra



What a Sight

Who takes care of them?
We need more of this kind
of beauty in our community

It is a pretty sight for sore
eyes.

~Cleo



Community Concerns

My Health is My Wealth

Health issues exist in our community. These include mental illness, sexual health, healthy living (such as exercise), nutritional, and emotional. Health issues need to be cared for, attended to, and "normalized" so that people know they can talk about issues and ask for help.

Sunset Drive

When I look at the sunset I
see myself bleeding.

Pain flowing in the air. The
devil trying to stop me.

When I look at the clouds I
know that God is beside me.

~April



Free, Take One...

It's always better to be safe than sorry.
Protect yourself and your community.
Lower the statistics for teen preg-
nancy, HIV, and other STD's in South
Carolina.

~Brittney

When "Just Say No" is Not Enough

There are substance abuse issues in our community such as illegal drugs, drug and alcohol abuse, and smoking. The anti-drug campaigns are not effective. We need places for people to ask for and get help from addictions.

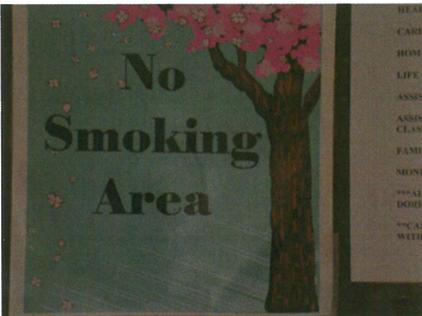
A Good Time?

Your idea of a good time surely is NOT mine!

~ Suzette



Stop Smoking the Trees and the Leaves



People are being a bad influence for others and the kids for the future. It is bad for their health; people can get cancer. When people smoke, they are losing their life, but you cannot see that. Stop smoking the trees and leaves represent somebody losing their life, because the leaves will fall from the trees. Green leaves represent good health, but there are different seasons. The winter represents somebody's death. ~ Shamar

Community Crime Concerns

There are safety and crime concerns in the community. There are issues of graffiti, vandalism, violence, drug dealing, and gang activity.

Can I Take Your Order?

You might never know what you'll see when you go around the window. You might see a dead person. So you might want to be careful.

~Shaniqua



Memorial to My Daughter



She was a lovely girl, looking towards her future. She was a sweet girl, everybody loved her. She was a friendly child and an honor student. A child who never made it to womanhood. She was shot by a gang member, though they were looking for somebody else. My baby girl.

~ Diane

What's a Community without Ownership?

Some people don't care about our community. There are signs of lack of community ownership and pride such as litter, vandalizing, and broken windows. Even those of us who want to make changes, are not sure we can. We're not sure who "owns" the community. Is it the residents, the gangs, and/or management?

Grass Equals Trash

A lot of trash in front of an abandoned house. This makes people think that our community is dirty and trashy, and that people do not care about their neighborhood.

~ Starr



On Its Last Leg

This grill is broken down and has no more legs to stand on. It looks trashy and makes our community look bad. It's been there longer than I can remember. Someone needs to throw it away. ~Suzette



Stuck

There is a sense of powerlessness among some residents. There is a feeling of being "stuck" with no way out. Poverty is real in our community and must be addressed. Some people are struggling due to lack of money as well as education and health insurance.

My Community

There is not a hand reaching out to me; do you not see me?

~George



Honest Living

Yesterday, a seemingly homeless man asked me for money so that he could buy food.

I happily reached inside of my purse and passed him a granola bar.

He took it, thanked me, and threw it in the nearby garbage can.



My neighbor in this photo has never begged me for money.

He recycles cans from the neighborhood dumpsters.

It adds a whole new meaning to the term "Honest Living."

~ Tanjenique

Re-Resource Us

We need resources in the community, such as daycares, places for shopping, and libraries. Some of these resources used to be here, but they no longer exist. We need resources that are conveniently located in the community and that have good things for reasonable prices. A few resources are here such as parks and educational centers, but people don't know they are available. Better communication is needed to inform residents about community resources.

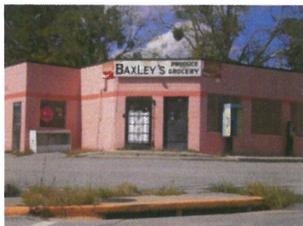
We Need a Day Care Here

No more daycare for Gonzales Gardens cause the owner pulled out. A big daycare sits in Gonzales Gardens. It's not being utilized. It just sits there. We need a new daycare here.



~Debra

Abandoned Building



This building has been abandoned for several years. It is surrounded by new homes and apartments in our community. In the future, it could be used as a historical building for printing and other things. This could be a change for our community. ~Catherine

If It's Broke, Fix It

Some resources do exist in our community. However, many resources are broken and need maintenance, upgrades, and/or repair. This includes broken windows, equipment at parks, lights, signs, gates, and worn out buildings and appliances. We are not sure who will fix these things in the community.

Dangerous Street Lights

The street lights are busted out. They need to fix them. It's dangerous without street lights. Anybody could be behind you and you wouldn't know it when it's dark at night. At nighttime people do bad things when there are no street lights. If fixed it would be a little bit safer. ~Quanella



Broken Water Fountain

When something in the community is broken or damaged, they need to fix it.



~Nicole

Children are the Future

We believe kids are our hope; they are part of us, our momentum to live and strength, our goal to go forward. We need to focus on developing our youth by providing additional resources in the community for children, youth, and young adults. There are not enough activities for children and youth that are positive. There is a lack of parental involvement and supervision.

The Future

"Chocolate" - That's what I call him when I see him. He is very bright. He is fearless and curious. He is open minded and full of life. He makes me feel proud and that something positive is going on. He makes my life brighter. ~Keyona



Strong Hold

The little girl is not wearing a shirt.

She's holding the baby's hand as the third child follows. The baby's diaper is nearly down to his knees.

None of the children are wearing shoes and it rained that day. This happens regularly. The eldest child is responsible for taking care of the younger ones. They are all just babies who are left to police themselves. This is not right; these children are stronger than they ought to be. ~ Tanjenique



Environmental Health Hazards

There are environmental health hazards in our community such as poor air quality, open wires, poor ventilation systems, and open holes in the ground and on the street.

Accident Waiting to Happen

This community prides beauty and essence.

Neighbors, management, and city workers.

An accident waiting to happen.

~ Suzette



Choked

When there is no air I feel choked like a lifeless flower; no room to breathe.

~Debra



"Us versus Them"

We want to improve our public image. We feel others (outsiders) view us negatively and marginalize us. There is a sense of "us versus them" with those who live inside and outside our community.

(Neighbor)hood Perceptions

I call it my community, you call it "the hood."

We're looking at the same thing

but to you, it don't look so good.

It's all about your perception, and you refuse to see the light.

Come out of those shadows 'cause it's 12pm- but to you it's midnight. ~ Tanjenique



Contact Information

Meredith C. F. Powers, MSW
Doctoral Student

Phone: 803-351-7197

Address: University of South Carolina
College of Social Work

DeSaussure Hall

Columbia, SC 29208

Email Address: MeredithCFPowers@gmail.com

Darcy Freedman, PhD
Assistant Professor

Phone: 803-777-1326

Address: University of South Carolina
College of Social Work

DeSaussure Hall

Columbia, SC 29208

Email Address: darcyf@mailbox.sc.edu

Ronald Pitner, PhD
Assistant Professor

Phone: 803-777-6797

Address: University of South Carolina
College of Social Work

Columbia SC 29208

Email Address: rpitner@sc.edu

Tanjenique Paulin-Anderson, MPA
Photovoice Participant

Phone: 803-466-7183

Address: 2601 Read St., Suite 12
Columbia, SC 29204

Email Address: cpr.asap@yahoo.com

Press on this Photovoice Project

- *University of South Carolina's Development and Alumni Relations* website (2011) "Photovoice: Turning snapshots into healthier communities" See http://giving.sc.edu/news.aspx?article_id=76
- *WLTX News (Taped and aired on July 16, 2010)*. Title: "Researchers hope to change Columbia high crime communities." See <http://www.wltx.com/news/story.aspx?storyid=90381>
- *WOLO News (Aired on July 14, 2010)* Title: "Can youth, USC researchers improve Columbia neighborhoods?" See <http://abccolumbiawolo.isinproduction.com/CustomContentRetrieve.aspx?ID=3186281>
- *Free Times (January 25, 2011-January 31, 2011)* "Columbia's public housing residents tell their own stories" See http://freetimes.com/index.php?cat=1992912064025693&Show Article_ID=11012501111866025
- *The Daily Gamecock (Tuesday, January 25, 2011)* "From snapshot to civic action" See <http://www.dailygamecock.com/mix/item/320-from-snapshot-to-civic-action>



Front Cover Photo by Floyd Cutner

Unity of Infinity

This mural, painted by City Year, portrays an unbroken chain of positive results. It also says, "say no to drugs" and "reach for the stars" with an image of astronaut Charles Bolden from Columbia. Turn the corner after this positive message and uncertainty is there, staring you in the face.