

Connecticut Youth Research Activist's PhotoVoice Project: Reducing Racial, Ethnic and Economic Health Disparities

The photos and narratives in this exhibit displayed last month in the basement of 410 bring a youth perspective and voice to the health care disparities dialogue. The exhibit also introduced youth from groups who are disproportionately affected by chronic health and mental health problems to issues that result in such disparities. Developed by the Youth Action Research Institute of The Institute for Community Research (ICR), the project provided training and technical support to a group of adult teachers and facilitators, who in turn worked with youth to implement local PhotoVoice projects.



PhotoVoice, a research methodology developed by Caroline C. Wang, enables individuals to explore and document issues that affect them using photographs. In general, it is designed as an elicitation technique, which offers greater insight to the researcher. It also serves as a stimulus to engage affected populations in actions and the policy-making process. ICR expands on this methodology by engaging youth as the researchers and placing not only the camera, but also the tools of research, in their hands.



The photos and narratives in the exhibit are the work of Waterbury high school youth who participated as members of the Youth Health Services Corps of the Northwestern CT Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and Hartford Youth Action Researchers from The Institute for Community Research. Each youth group selected a health care disparity identified in the documentary series entitled *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, which premiered nationally on PBS in Spring 2008.

The Waterbury youth focused on the segment, "In Sickness and in Wealth," which explores how the distribution of power, wealth and resources shape opportunities for health. The Hartford youth chose to reflect on the "Place Matters" segment, which raises the question: Why is your street address such a strong predictor of your health?

Following training in photography, each youth took a series of photos on themes related to the issue of wealth or place, selected and reflected individually on the photo and then discussed the selected photo as a collective, using the SHOWED method which asks the questions: What do you See here? What is really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem or asset exist? How can we become Empowered about this issue? What can we Do about it?



Individual and group explorations, reflections, research and discussions are summarized in the narratives which accompany each photo. This project was developed in collaboration with the DPH Office of Multicultural Health, the Youth and Career Development subcommittee of the New England Regional Minority Health Conference Planning Committee, and with financial support from the CT Health Foundation and the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

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