

The investigative team participated in a total immersion or engagement with the Birmingham Metropolitan community to manage this project. That is, we're not just delivering, but working with "community" members in a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework. We believe that by using a CBPR approach we will gain valuable ideas about ways to improve quality of life in Birmingham (1). Principles of CBPR Include:

1. Recognizes community as a unit of identity
2. Builds on strengths and resources within the community
3. Facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research/ education and extension
4. Integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners
5. Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities
6. Involves a cyclical and iterative process
7. Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives
8. Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners

CBPR is a time consuming process. Numerous issues relate to the time involved in CBPR, particularly the time required to establish and maintain trusting relationships (1, 2, 3, 4). In an effort to facilitate a collaborative partnership, each of the members of the project team attended neighborhood association meetings. Photovoice is a form of CBRP that has grown in popularity since its development in the late 1990s (5). Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Anne Burris as a method to understand community health needs through the use of photography (5). Photovoice enables researchers and practitioners to gain a new vantage point, and view the world through a different lens. As such, Photovoice can be thought of as a needs assessment tool, to appraise what is going on in a particular community, with a culture, or around a specific issue. Photovoice takes the information discovered through the needs assessment and communicates it through the powerful medium of visual image. Photovoice has three main goals:

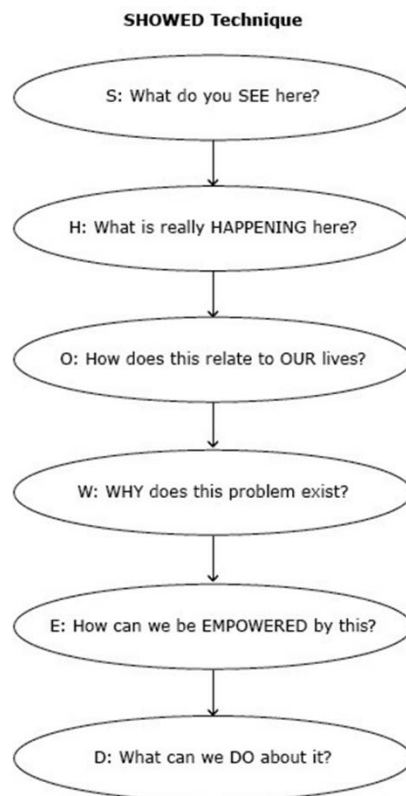
"To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and weaknesses. To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs. Finally, to reach policy makers." (5).

Researchers who use Photovoice typically distribute cameras to community members and ask them to document pictures about their lives. We distributed our cameras during a community stakeholder meeting at The University of Alabama at Birmingham Edge of Chaos. We asked

community members to take pictures of things in their community, which they felt impacted their quality of life. Through a series of other meetings, residents identified ten items they felt were either assets or barriers to a good quality of life. These items included (but not limited to) blight, transportation, food deserts, and green space/ parks. Participants were given prepaid envelopes containing disposable cameras and asked to return the cameras in one month. Two months later all the cameras were returned and we held a focus group to discuss the pictures in depth using the **SHOWED** technique. Through this technique participants engaged in critical discussions about community concerns in an effort to initiate social change (6, 7).

When participants arrived at The Edge of Chaos all pictures were laid out on large meeting room tables with numbers on the back. Participants were instructed to pick 5 pictures they wanted to discuss, could be their pictures or pictures from others. Once participants selected their pictures they were given worksheets and asked to answer six questions using the **SHOWED** technique (6).

- 1) What do you **SEE** here?
- 2) What is really **HAPPENING** here?
- 3) How does this relate to **OUR** lives?
- 4) **WHY** does this problem exist?
- 5) How can we be **EMPOWERED** by this?
- 6) What can we **DO** about it?



Participants were then asked to select one picture to share with the group for open discussion. In total we had 12 residents participate in the session. Following the focus group, the tapes of the

session were sent out to be transcribed by WordZXPRESSED. Once the transcripts were received, we worked to develop “themes”. Themes create a link between participant’s thoughts and empirical theory. Data are indexed by attaching codes, which are categories that briefly state what the information is about. The outcome of coding should be a more manageable and robust list of items (8). Additionally, we extracted data from the audio archive, this was done so that we would have direct quotes from participants about their experiences, many of these quotes are so vivid, that it would be unjust to modify them.

Overall the discussion focused on a “tale of two cities” “the have’s and have not’s”. Several themes emerged: 1) ultimately who’s responsibility is it to clean up a community, the city or the residents 2) Taxes, how can these dollars be leveraged to do good across the city (prioritization) 3) Issues of blight and crime seem to only happen in certain areas of the city, but would not continue in other areas and 4) what are the health implications of vacant homes and living near factories long-term. In terms of vivid quotes, the following were selected that represented the theme and spirit of the group. We have included the entire transcript so that the readers of this report can put these items in context.

“and it does affect you, you know. Not only that, it affects your property value. You know, and it makes you want to bring nobody to your house ‘cause people are going to come by, and they’re going to see all that, and they’re like -- it’s kind of ugly.” ~ Tawana Winfield

“That’s the bottom line. If you’re a homeowner and you’re able to write this off as a tax write-off and you not concerned about it -- you not using any money to fix it up, you just write it off every year, and that’s what is happening, and is the blaming of the city not enforcing what they supposed to enforce, because there are laws. Every house should be able to live in. If it’s a home, it should be livable. If it’s not livable, it should be brought up to code.” ~ Walladeen Streeter

“and the taxes on that house goes -- the taxes on that house goes up every year, and I call and ask -- is rotated, the government did it. Just put in an automatic rotate thing for the price rises on your house tax. If you don’t notice, it rises a percentage every three years automatically without anyone notifying you.” Chris Evans

“The police sitting right there on the corner. He see you all going in the store, but you all didn’t come out with no soda in your hand, no potato chip bag, no black bag, you know, black bag come out the store with your little groceries. Now why you gonna let them go on about their business? You ain’t gonna stop them or frisk ‘em when they been in there 30 minutes, maybe an hour and they coming out with nothing. I just don’t -- ‘cause I can sit on my porch and see all that, and you know, they see what’s going on. Okay, so they had [indiscernible] they come find their guys. They standing out there shooting and they get killed every day, every weekend.” ~Loretta Knight

“The reason I mentioned the other two is because I want you all to pay particular attention to the siding on this house. I’m sure you’ve seen siding like this throughout the city on abandoned houses. This is asbestos. It’s a \$50,000 mistake if you have the house torn down and it’s not been inspected. I’m a certified asbestos inspector, and the siding is basically okay until you break it. Then you have a problem. Kids and cars, traffic, whipping the wind, the wind blows, there’s, you know, a gust of wind. Then you might have a health problem, although the health problems are not gonna show up for quite a few years. Ms. Gunnerson [ph], our environmental enforcer, said that they don’t necessarily put these houses as a priority, because first the siding has to come off, okay? Before the house is demo’d, the siding on that house has to be removed. The asbestos has to be removed, so what I’m thinking -- what I would like to see happen on my empowerment is to encourage her to tear these types of houses down first and not last. There’s one in the carousel of pictures that you -- showing -- excuse me, I have a slight impediment. It’s a yellow house, but it has asbestos siding and it’s been burned, okay? Now that’s a real, real health hazard, because the kids going to Woodlawn walk past it. The cars going under the viaduct disturb the -- there it is, there it is, exactly. “~ Johnny Williams

Results from the transcript will further be summarized with the intention to publish a scholarly article from the data.

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