

**Scene @ heARTS:
Stories from our Youth**



PhotoVoice Project: An Evaluation Report

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the following contributors:

- Youth Advisory Board provided project oversight, organization, and energy at all stages.
- Evaluation Committee-combination of youth and adult board members (especially Olivia Walker) brought diverse perspectives from the heARTS community to engage in dialogue and co-structuring the project.
- Rebecca Lawrence provided training on photography, photojournalism, and energy for telling stories through sometimes unexpected media.
- Christen Pentek brought knowledge of evaluation, technology, and facilitating dialogue for project.
- Hannah Morgan brought consistency to communications, reaching out to collect and clean data, transcribing dialogues.

Executive Summary

PhotoVoice is a participatory action evaluation method that teaches photography alongside critical analysis (Bandurraga, A. et.al., 2013). All high school youth were invited to participate in the evaluation project. Youth were also recruited by each other to join the team of photographers and evaluators. The initial meeting covered the outline of our timeline and goals for using the evaluation data to communicate with board members, the greater community, and funders about heARTS.

The primary guiding question that youth determined for this project is,

“What is unique about heARTS?”

After dialogue prompted by photos and two sessions of organizing quotes and narrowing of themes, youth and facilitators agreed on five emerging themes from the quotes about the photographs. Youth made the final decision on fitting theme outlines and definitions. The four major themes and two subthemes are: Unconventional Art, Big Picture, Leave A Mark, and Community. Community is made up of Belonging and Safe Place. It is also imperative to have a space where youth voice is included throughout the entire process. Evaluation allows for the story and culture of a space to question what is working and where there is space to do more and better work.

Based on our findings, the recommendations of the youth in continuing work at courageous heARTS are:

- Listen to the youth, respect their time. Know their stories.
- Continue comfort. The youth value that they are comfortable being themselves here.
- Maintain acceptance of all ways of being.
- Live the core values: intention, creativity, gratitude, originality, courage, integrity, leadership, positivity.
- Continue to be in the community - physical space and in community engagement.
- Recognize trauma and know ways of working with it without naming it.

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Introducing the Project

courageous heARTS is a nonprofit based in south Minneapolis founded in 2013 by Lindsay Walz to bring art and creativity to facilitate healing. Utilizing youth development theories such as Hart's theory of participation, the educational paradigms of Paulo Freire and John Dewey, and radical love, the values of heARTS unites experiential learning and activism. courageous heARTS' mission is to co-create experiences with young people by offering them a safe space, built with the intention to heal and empower -- through expressive arts, community building, and leadership development.

courageous heARTS is entering their third year of praxis, and both youth and stakeholders saw the need to more formally evaluate the current programs and processes of heARTS. Working with the hearts, souls, and bodies of young people requires reflection every day, and this project serves to enlighten and record many of the dialogues that are shared every day in the space.

PhotoVoice became the method of choice, continuing the learning and engagement of young people through invitation from the very beginning of the project. The goals for the evaluation are threefold.

1. To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns.
2. To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs.
3. To reach policy makers and other stakeholders such as funders.

For this report youth will be defined as anyone 10-18. This is the current guideline for the heART Center, and this definition was decided to be used by the youth on the advisory board and evaluation committee.

Methods

PhotoVoice is a participatory action evaluation method that teaches photography alongside critical analysis (Bandurraga, A. et.al., 2013). This method fits well with the heART Center as an evaluation project because it includes an art form which is approachable by the young people at courageous heARTS. Initially developed as a 24 week curriculum, the Evaluation Committee developed a strategic plan to conduct a PhotoVoice project in a semester-long project.

Youth were recruited for the Evaluation team by trusted adult volunteers in the heART Center, with the intention of creating leadership building opportunities other than the Youth Advisory

Board that contributed to the space in constructive ways. All high school youth were invited to participate in the evaluation project. Youth were also recruited by each other to join the team of photographers and evaluators.

Sessions for discussions were typically two hours, and participation ranged from two to seven youth, with four to eleven people total. Youth came from diverse perspectives, including demographic identities such as student, athlete, artist, activist, organizer, Black, Latino, White, male, female, queer, heterosexual, gay. The structure was set as a 'fast timeline' consisting of six initial sessions.

- i. Introduction to evaluation and ethics, PhotoVoice, and setting goals, objectives, and audience for the project
- ii. Introduction to photography, basics and ethics
- iii. Pilot the photography discussion with the SHOWeD method
- iv. Focus group, documentation of stories
- v. Coding/Storytelling
- vi. Final Prep for presentation, voting on photos and narratives. The final preparation coincided with the third birthday of the opening of the center, so the evaluation timeline included the goal of presenting some sort of storyboard or gallery of findings at the celebration.

The initial meeting covered the outline of our timeline and goals for using the evaluation data to communicate with board members, the greater community, and funders about heARTS. During the first meeting the group brainstormed the main goals for the project on large post-its in the center. The goals for this PhotoVoice project that were co-created by youth and adults were:

- More concrete data to share
- Reflect community voices
- Identify strengths and areas of concern
- How this space speaks to young people
- Core values
- Help people understand what this place is about
- Pilot evaluation tool to see if it works for us

- Record and reflect community (courageous heARTS) voices
- Identify courageous heARTS strengths and areas of concern
- Establish critical pieces of heARTS that speak to youth
- Offer additional leadership opportunities for youth to get involved in courageous heARTS (beyond the Youth Advisory Board)

The main guiding question that youth determined for this project is “What is unique about heARTS?” Potential emergent themes were also presented at this meeting, drawing from embodied experiences, the logic model, and Konopka’s positions for healthy youth development.

Through personal networks, we collaborated with a professional photographer who coached the evaluation team at the second session. The photographer’s training focused on photography as a medium, photojournalism, ethics, and legal rights when documenting human experiences in picture form. Youth decided to utilize their personal cameras and cell phone cameras to collect the PhotoVoice pictures. Three youth were identified and selected to prototype the discussion method, and young people were sent with the photography training to take digital pictures over the week and submit them via email or another electronic form to the community photography page online.

At the third meeting youth brought the prototype pictures and we introduced the starting point for a focus group discussion. To structure the discussion of the photos, the blueprint method we used was the SHOWeD method. This process consists of six inspiration questions:

- i. What do you **See** here?
- ii. What’s really **Happening** here?
- iii. How does this relate of **Our** lives?
- iv. **Why** does this problem or situation exist?
- v. How could this image **Educate** others (community, policy makers, etc.)?
- vi. What can we **Do** about the problem or situation? (Wallerstein, N., & Bernstein, E. 1988 & Strack, R. W., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K., 2003).

Utilizing these questions allowed our discussion to focus on the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of the youth while remaining focused on the intentions of developing a stronger understanding of the impact that heARTS has on the people and the Minneapolis community.

Youth began by huddling around cell phones and laptops, discussing the content of the pictures and writing initial blocks of 'caption' in about 10 words about the pictures that stood out to them. The youth photographers then presented their pictures, telling the story and motivation behind structuring each piece in the ways that they were captured. Further dialogue then followed, tracing the overlapping themes of each piece in relation to the context of heARTS.

Youth and facilitators decided that this process worked, requesting that the pictures have a larger device for showing.

The next meeting had about an equal number of participants and pictures, although this time the facilitators brought a projector to enlarge the photos on one of the walls in the center. This meeting we experienced some struggle with discussion, and both youth and the adults voiced that there was something missing from the conversation. Dialogue consisted of the captions and a few more sentences. Collectively it was decided that we would take pictures another week and have a third week of discussions. Youth feedback also stated that writing the 'captions' felt stilted and unhelpful. Youth agreed that the dialogue was lacking and sent themselves back into the field to collect more pictures and informed that we would continue collecting richer data for the project. We met the following week for the 5th time with more pictures and returned to the analysis on smaller devices for viewing the photos. Facilitators dropped the 'caption' phrase and searched for deeper dialogue about the culture of the space than for short quotes.

The 6th - 8th meetings happened over a shorter period of time, and focused on discussing what quotes from the dialogue were important, as well as what themes should be titled. The two youth facilitators (Morgan & Pentek) had met independently prior to these meetings to establish preliminary themes and begin the discussion by outlining potential themes from the first project meeting and the quotes from the dialogues about the pictures. The team utilized a sticky wall that held the quotes, but allowed for movability. Youth restructured the themes and quotes, eliminating some sets of the quotes, while advocating for other voices to be included that had been missed in the creations of the data sets. These quotes were then paired with pictures, and a subset of these were decided collaboratively to present at courageous heARTS' birthday celebration.

Findings

The people involved in the project submitted a total of 87 photos: 46 pictures were taken and submitted directly by youth, 41 were submitted by Morgan, who is one of the facilitators of the

project. Morgan pulled from the words, projects, and inspirations that the youth brought to her —taking photos during the meetings and throughout classes as requested. In addition to collecting photos, facilitators recorded focus groups. These discussions were transcribed, and quotes came from over 60 pages of typed up dialogue from the discussions of the photographs. Relevant quotes were grouped by facilitators into about 8 themes. At the next meeting youth rearranged and narrowed down the quotes and reformulated the themes into the final themes. After two sessions of reorganizing quotes and narrowing of themes youth and facilitators agreed on five emerging themes from the quotes about the photographs. Youth carried the final decision of which outlines and definitions for the themes fit. The five themes are: Unconventional Art, Big Picture, Leave A Mark, and Community. Community is made up of Belonging and Safe Place.

Unconventional Art:

The hallmark of unconventional art is that art happens in unexpected ways. Youth discussed how *"It's all about the process not the product,"* and that *"Everything can be art and art can be everything."* Youth remain grounded in the space throughout their art, noting both that *"Our tables are our story"* and that *"Your trash is our art."* The word 'trash' here is particularly intentional, capturing the capacity to recycle in art, the usage of many donated items in the space, as well as the youth's internal attitudes toward utilizing and reclaiming the whole of every experience.



Big Picture:

The idea behind the big picture is that heARTS is a communal space and interacts with the surrounding communities. One of the pop-up art projects created by the Youth Advisory Board is titled "Is This Art?" They went into the community and asked community members questions about street art. Two of the questions were: Who decides what art is? What do you think when you hear the word graffiti? They wrote the answers on colorful stickers and stuck them to a large board to spell out 'Is this art?'

Two of the youth submitted pictures of this project to PhotoVoice and said that at first all you see are the colorful squares but then you see the big picture, that it spells out 'Is This Art'.

The storytelling team said *"...It just looks like a whole bunch of kids doing art but then you could look at it in a bigger picture, its helping them step out of their comfort zone and helping them do other things in other parts of their lives as the bigger picture..."* in regards to the environment of courageous heARTS.

The youth also spoke about how what they experience and learn at heARTS goes with them into their personal lives outside of this space.

"Art is a reflection of you and you are a reflection of heARTS"

Leave A Mark:

"You're not only making one thing, there's always multiple outcomes to what you make, if that was from mosaic, like mosaic made those marks and someone painted the random blue on the table on accident and then the glitter got in there... it's kind of like a continuing thing like a continuing story." Youth who enter heARTS are encouraged to engage and act: *"Accidents that aren't meant to be fixed."* This action and presence carries over to the stories behind the art as well, *"...there isn't a right way to view art and it can be many things at once."* Youth state that the *"Power is in our hands;"* it is their decisions that carry weight in this space.



Community Belonging:

courageous heARTS is a space where participants felt safe and that they belonged. Further discussion revealed that heARTS was a space that created *"Unlikely*

friendships, creative nature, no limits.” heARTS brings diversity together, both of people and ideas. As the youth stated, “[We’re] many different types and colors, we’re all different types of people but we’re united because we love art.” “I’m thinking like harmonies and symphonies everyone has something to contribute.”

A huge piece of belonging was acceptance, and the clearest story came with a youth’s project with a fake baby (doll) that was brought with to the center. The exchange in our dialogue revealed the conversation:

“Oh my gosh can we just pretend that it’s a real baby and that she is genuinely mothering a child while she’s here?”

We accept everyone, even babies.”

Safe Place

“An open space that is free and safe is the best kind of space.” Youth also stated that heARTS feels like home. “Home is where I’m comfortable and I’m comfortable here too.”

Safety also connected to obligations and stress. As shared, *“It [heARTS] is like a place where I don’t have to think about anything, because I’m constantly thinking about things, and yoga, its relaxing and trying to be stress free for once.”*

“... a place where you just share your feelings and we try not to judge and stuff. Which is cool and that’s the same with this space where it’s okay to be yourself here.”

The Presentation

From the initial 87 photos, youth decided the top 8-10 would be printed and presented at the Birthday Event. Two of the youth picked the top 20 pictures that represented courageous heARTS and were the most visually appealing. Of the 20 pictures seven of them were process pictures of the youth on the PhotoVoice team. Then the youth voted online for the photos they wished to see printed for the event. Youth selected the eight photos and assigned corresponding quotes below to represent the project at heARTS’ Birthday Event. Please see Appendix A on pages 14 and 15 of this report for the eight chosen pictures.

So What?

Youth often struggle finding welcoming spaces that do not cost money in after school time. High schools typically have resources for academics and sports, but the arts are underfunded. Nation wide the after school hours have the highest rates of youth crime, but with solutions like heARTS the community thrives and artists have safe spaces to grow their skills and contribute to the community. These contexts typically have little to do with statistics, so the need to

collect separate data that quantifies the youth at heARTS would serve little value in illuminating how to improve the space.

Drawing from the base of art and the healing nature of creativity, heARTS utilization of art as a social, critical feedback learning tool worked to the advantage of both the youth and the facilitators. The process was creative and flexible the whole way through, which aligns with the mission of heARTS to create a space to transform hurts, grow dreams and learn to thrive. courageous heARTS works toward a collaborative community where every being is recognized and heard.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In reflections with the youth, the presentations of the committee and facilitators at the beginning of the project were unclear. It may benefit heARTS to keep a couple of the same youth on the committee to provide insight and continued knowledge of the evaluation process.

Youth stated in the “first one [focus group], have to stick to ten words, all going to be exactly ten words, and we made them sound artsy” however, youth stated that they preferred the later unstructured focus groups without the pressure to write an artsy caption. The instructions and ‘mandates’ for attendance and word counts also may need to be changed from this pilot evaluation.

Youth also critiqued that in the end the “whole process sounds like too much. we get bored easily.” In trading participants and not having consistent attendance to the focus groups and project meetings. One of the overwhelming resources from the start are the time constraints of the youth. In working with the constraint, youth recognized that introducing the project through the conclusion may be better served spread out, as school work sometimes comes in waves. The other piece we discussed was the potential to divide the work into multiple groups, so that each person really only needs to heavily invest their resources for one or two steps of the project.

As one youth presented at the final celebration, the pictures “say a lot about the space that we’re in right now. It’s hard to quantify what heARTS is, which is what we were trying to do. In the end – place to make friends, and a place to make art, but also a place to bring your fake baby or help somebody with their art project or throw glitter over every single table.”

It is also imperative to have a space where youth voice is included throughout the entire process. Evaluation allows for the story and culture of a space to question what is working and where there is space to do more and better work. The recommendations that follow are directly

from the young people, recapping the highlights of the project as well as the need for broader community engagement through heARTS.

- Listen to the youth, respect their time. Know their stories.
- Continue comfort. The youth value that they are comfortable being themselves here.
- Maintain acceptance of all ways of being.
- Live the core values: intention, creativity, gratitude, originality, courage, integrity, leadership, positivity.
- Continue to be in the community - physical space and in community engagement.
- Recognize trauma and know ways of working with it without naming it.

This project discovered that youth create and maintain safe spaces for creating community and social change in partnership with heARTS. From a process standpoint, the use of PhotoVoice was effective, and more time clarifying the role of the pictures would benefit the project as a whole. Youth established and articulated that art can be unconventional and expansive, and that engaging in creativity can lead to seeing and understanding a bigger picture about how the world works. Youth feel encouraged to leave a mark, creating positive changes for future youth and for themselves in healing from everyday trauma. There is also community within the center and with the greater community through partnerships, creating safe places and a sense of belonging for participants.

Appendix A - Presented Photos



UnchARTed

"The power is in our hands."



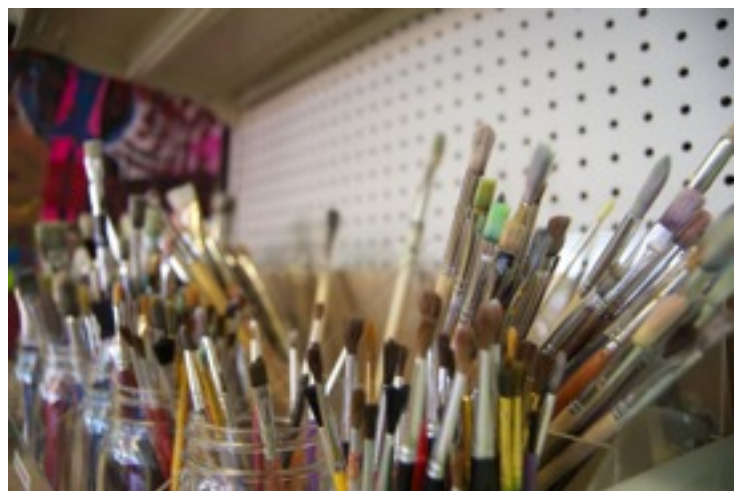
Helping Hands

"It's kinda like community and stuff"



Come Hither:

"An open space that is free and safe is the best kind of space."



Jug O'Love:

"We're all different types of people but we're united because we love art."



French Pens

“Picture of a carefree and judgement free space.”



Convergence

“Like harmonies and symphonies, everyone has something to contribute.”



Cat Dance

“heARTS is a non-judgemental space. From boredom comes ART. Weird things happen and that’s art too.”



Juxtapose

“Art is a reflection of you, and you are a reflection of heARTS.”

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