



Innovative Organization? Innovative Evaluation!

By Christen Pentek and Antonia Lowell

New organizations need to establish ways of evaluating the work they do to continue improving and to develop clearer goals for their intended audiences. Courageous heARTS (heARTS) is a community arts center in south Minneapolis, founded in 2013 with the intention of offering free programming and space for youth to find their inner artists and heal from potential and lived trauma.

HeARTS was created as an innovative organization in multiple ways. Through an active youth advisory board, heARTS has intentionally created a space where everyone is include, and all, staff as well as youth, work in partnership. Our community stakeholders participate in decisions on everything from projects to funding.

As we approached the second anniversary of the founding of heARTS, we wanted to look at the impact of our operation. We heard about the Photovoice method, and the heARTS' evaluation committee and youth advisory board were interested in using a form of it for evaluative purposes. A form of participatory action research used for raising issues, Photovoice teaches photography alongside critical analysis (Bandurraga, et.al., 2013). The evaluation committee members were drawn to the creative format and were excited at the idea that the evaluation itself would be an art piece, keeping art at the center of the action while teaching youth how to create dialogue for change in the community.



Drawing from youth from both within and outside of heARTS, we formed a Photovoice subcommittee of three to seven rotating members who created the



guiding question, “What makes courageous heARTS unique?” The members of the committee then took photographs in the community surrounding heARTS and also within the building itself, affectionately called the ‘heART Center.’ These pictures were then brought to meetings which we called “dialogue sessions,” where we reflected upon and engaged in conversation about the pictures.

Aligned with Courageous heARTS’ main value of youth leadership, teens controlled most of the process. From the choice of method, photography schedule, and dialogue sessions to the final themes and

presentation of the materials to the greater community in a speech at heARTS’ second birthday celebration, members of the Photovoice committee and youth advisory board were at the head of the project.

The Photovoice process created a visual documentation of what goes on at Courageous heARTS during weekday classes, board meetings, and the way we affect and interact with the community. As we looked through the photos we got a sense the comfortable environment created in the heART Center, with plenty of opportunities for silliness. In addition, we got a feel for the creative processes that go on in the space. But more importantly than that, the process gave us a clear view of what we want to work on in the future, and what we want to make sure we preserve at heARTS. Photovoice was the innovative evaluation process that our innovative organization needed.

To read the full report and see the pictures, please visit the heARTS evaluation webpage at <http://www.courageous-hearts.org/photovoice.html>.

Christen Pentek is a creative guide and co-facilitator who has been active at courageous heARTS since 2013. heARTS utilizes trauma-informed youth work, leadership development, arts, and restorative justice circles to transform and heal

the community in south Minneapolis. For more information about courageous heARTS, visit their webpage at courageous-hearts.org.

Antonia Lowell is a high school student, creative guide, and co-chair on the Courageous heARTS youth advisory board. Lowell doubles as the local heARTS fairy house guru and pen enthusiast.

References:

Bandurraga, A., Gowen, L.K., & The Finding Our Way Team. (2013). *"I Bloomed here": A Guide for Conducting Photovoice with Youth Receiving Culturally- and Community-based Services*. Portland, OR: Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, Portland State University.