

Case Study: Participatory Photo Mapping in South Madison

Who:

Researchers in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Environmental Design Lab study the environment and health. There the word, environment, refers to everything around us that humans built or created. For example, some companies provide bike racks, which means their employees are more likely to bike to work.

The Environmental Design Lab wanted to involve young people in a study using Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methods. CBPR methods involve community members in the research. Then, the communities get extra help to learn more about good things and problems where they live. The Environmental Design Lab called this project, Youth Mapping for Safe and Healthy Neighborhood Initiative. Lab researchers worked with a community center on the south side of Madison. Community center staff asked youth ages 10-18 to take part in the project.

The Battle:

Madison, Wisconsin's state capital, is also home to a big university. People who live close to the Capitol and University have a lot of opportunities for happiness and health. Those opportunities might be things like access to health foods, safe places to walk and ride bikes, nice, clean playgrounds for children, and funding for community projects. However, Madison's neighborhoods are often segregated based on income, different races, ethnicities, and culture. Often, neighborhoods where people of color and people with lower income levels are further from the city center, with fewer opportunities for happiness and health.



Youth took photos of their community through Photovoice.

The researchers wanted to find out what young people from south Madison thought about their community, the environment, and their health. They wanted to use something called "Photovoice" to learn from the youth. Photovoice is a way to collect information about what people think and how they feel using pictures and stories.

Raise Awareness and Engage Others:

The researchers knew support from community center staff members would be important to this project. The young people that live in the neighborhood really trust community center staff, but they do not trust adults they do not know. So, to involve youth in the project, the researchers first needed to involve the staff.

Later, researchers, youth, and community center staff shared what they learned about their community. They decided to present the information to community leaders who make decisions

for the community, like city officials and businesses in the neighborhood. If the leaders agreed with what the youth presented, they could help change how people see their environment and how healthy they are.

Make Your Plan:

The plan for this project was different than some CBPR projects, because the research lab organized it. They planned to start by finding out how community youth saw their environment. They would do this in two steps. First, the youth would help the researchers create a special map of the community. Second, researchers and young people would walk through the community's neighborhoods. They planned for youth to record their walk with GPS, digital cameras, and voice recorders.

Next, youth and researchers would use the map, photos and stories to plan together how to change the environment to make it healthier and safer. They planned to present to police officers, nurses and doctors, community leaders, and reporters.

Implement Your Plan:

Youth at the community center marked a map with "places I know", "places where I spend time" and "places where I do activities of daily living", like going to school. Then, as they walked through the community, youth took pictures of what they saw and told stories about the places. The researchers put the pictures on a map. Then, the youth told researchers about how healthy or safe these places were. They told them how the environment made them feel.

The youth presented the information to community leaders. They asked them for help to make their community a better place. Two examples of changes the youth asked for were about issues at a neighborhood playground and at a busy intersection.

Evaluate Your Plan:

Fifty youth participated in the project. The youth and researchers learned a lot. They realized healthy food was not sold in places where youth felt welcome. Youth did not feel safe in places where healthy food was sold. Researchers also found out that youth from one cultural group play soccer on a nearby field, but youth from another cultural group do not go there because they do not see people that look like them there. Instead, they choose to play sports in a less safe area because adults they know who can help are nearby. After attending the youth-led presentation, police officers changed the way they interacted with community youth. Then, youth led neighborhood tours for clinic staff to help them understand how the environment affected health in the community. Next, city officials made a plan to rebuild a busy intersection to reduce accidents between cars, pedestrians and bikers. Finally, the city paid to update playground equipment so that youth would feel safe being active in the parks.

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Extension

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