

Transition Through a New Lens: Using Photovoice to Highlight Youths' Voices and Facilitate Employment Aspirations

Molly L. Taylor, Seb Prohn, Ph.D., & Richard Chapman, Ph.D.

Abstract

In this study, five youth with IDD were trained to use photovoice to share their employment and transition stories. Research, ethics, photography and storytelling were taught in the trainings. Results revealed that employment goals were inextricably linked to employment barriers, and barriers were community-specific, thus calling for community-based action.

Background

- Project PEACE is a community-based research effort to improve transition and employment outcomes for youth with IDD.
- Our approach to improving transition outcomes for youth with IDD is to collaborate with youth whose lived experiences will help us implement a transition plan created by and for the community.

Participatory Research Methods

- Photovoice is a research method in which stakeholders collect data by taking pictures and describing the meaning behind them.
- With photovoice, participants learn self-advocacy and communication skills through photography and storytelling training (Jurkowski, 2008).
- Youth aged 14-22 with IDD were recruited from the Center for Independent Living
- Youth attended 5 sessions, including 3 training sessions on taking photos and 2 discussion sessions for sharing photographs that reflected a) employment aspirations and b) employment barriers.

Participants

- Rachel: 22 year old Black female; her employment goal is to own her own childcare business
- Jaden: 15 year old Black male; his employment goal is to be a pizza chef
- Troy: 22 year old Black male; his employment goal is to be a meteorologist
- Avery: 22 year old Hispanic/Latina female; her employment goal is to work for a packing facility
- Kiara: 17 year old Black female; her employment goal is to be a nail technician

Themes

1. Self-Advocacy

- Each youth participant was able to identify their own strengths that related to their employment goals.
 - For example, Avery said her strength was "being a people person" and communicating, and Troy said his strength was in Science.
- Youth also discussed their employment goals and why they were passionate about pursuing those goals. This is demonstrated in Rachel's example below.



"I feel so comfortable and safe. That's how I feel when I work there, you know, and, uh, my boss has been telling me lots of good tips about taking care of kids." - Rachel

2. Employment Barriers

- When discussing barriers to employment, we found that barriers were both person-and-community-specific.
- Jaden's employment barrier was community-specific, in that he lacked transportation to and from his workplace.
 - When asked how he would overcome this barrier, Jaden said, "It's kind [of] hard... I need a car, right?"
 - This barrier could be addressed through improving access to and educating youth on using public transportation.

- Troy gives another example of a personal employment barrier below. In his case, more education on areas like math and science are needed to reach his goal of working in meteorology.



"Math is the hardest subject to do."

"Then you're saying the mountain is like math to you, you have a hard time learning that just like have a hard time climbing that mountain." - Troy

3. Planning for Goal Attainment

- Through discussing youths' employment goals and barriers, as a group we were able to identify pathways for youth to reach their goals and overcome those barriers.
 - Rachel's employment barrier was her struggle with managing finances of a business and lack of confidence with math skills.
 - As we talked about her struggles, Rachel decided that she would need to ask someone like her boss or her family to help her learn math skills. She also talked about persisting through failure by "just taking a deep breath, take a deep breath, you know, and try to do it."

Future Directions

- The next step for Project PEACE is to conduct Photovoice research in Richmond area high school classrooms.
- We will work together with intensive support teachers to deliver photovoice trainings, empower youth to tell their stories through photos, and share their photos with the community.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to our [Project PEACE](#) team and our research partners at the Center for Independent Living in Richmond, VA.

Project PEACE was supported, in part by grant number 90DNCE0004-01-00, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201.

Logo for the Partnership of People with Disabilities, featuring the text “Linking people. Changing lives.” Logo for Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of Education, featuring the school seal and the abbreviation “VCU”. Logo for Project PEACE, featuring an abstract illustration of a rainbow with an earth-toned color palette.