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THE JECH GALLERY

Visions and voices: HIV in the 21st century. Indigent persons living with HIV/AIDS in the southern USA use photovoice to communicate meaning

Visions and voices: HIV in the 21st century used photovoice, an innovative and action oriented qualitative method of participatory action research,¹⁻³ to uncover the realities of indigent persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) through photographic documentation and Paolo Freirean-based critical dialogue, and share these new understandings with local community members and leaders, policy makers, and advocates to develop plans to effect change.

Fifteen indigent participants in an urban city in North Carolina were provided cameras and took photographs based on photo assignments decided upon by the participants through consensus. This photograph, which was taken by a participant, of cardboard characters, illustrates the numbers and diversity of PLWHA. The participant provided this photograph with the caption, "I am HIV positive. How are you going to accept me?" As he explained, he could not take pictures of real PLWHA because of the stigma that continues to be attached to HIV/AIDS. Yet, his caption suggests that this PLWHA is not going to tolerate anything other than acceptance. After nearly a quarter of a century of the HIV epidemic, the question is not, "Are you going to accept me?" Rather, the question is, "How are you going to accept me?"

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Figure 1 I am HIV positive. How are you going to accept me?

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