

# Belonging, A photovoice project

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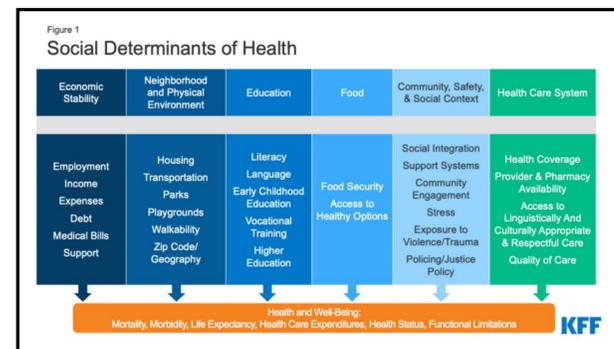
## Project Concept

This project was designed to advance our understanding of college students' knowledge of health and barriers to wellness by using the Photovoice concepts. The components included:

- pictures
- stories
- expository writings

The instructions

- asked students to focus on inclusion, equality, & visibility
- required self-reflection
- engaged students in discussions
- explored Social Determinants of Health in community settings.



## Methods

Throughout the year college students were invited to take pictures and write short stories representing:

- 1) Dimensions of health
- 2) Barriers to being the healthiest "you"
- 3) SDOH including how the determinants support/hinder health
- 4) Narratives to develop strategies for improving SDOH
- 5) A variety of environmental and social settings

Depictions were shared by students who have chronic illnesses or disabilities (recognizable and invisible); BIPOC students; and LGBTQIA+ students; as well as students who do not fit into marginalized categories.

3 steps to completing the project:

- 1) **Training:** regarding photography and SDOH
- 2) **Exploration:** jotting down ideas, brainstorming appropriate locations, taking pictures, and exploring and reporting census data
- 3) **Connections and Conclusions:** students highlighted and discussed photographs that were the most powerful/impactful and that show either efforts addressed or barriers due to a SDOH.
- 4) An **exhibition** of the final products will be on display at our University library in April, and next fall.

## Student Discoveries

**Neighborhood and Built Environment:** A local bus stop in McCalla, AL. This is an extremely popular stop, especially for school-aged children. This stop is on a busy 4-lane road where the posted speed limit is 45, yet most vehicles who use this rode drive much faster than what is posted. There are no sidewalks leading to this stop, nor is there any shelter available for those waiting for the bus. This is an example of neighborhood SDOH. To help address this SDOH I decided to draft an email to those on the city planning board. I suggested that they look at adding more safety features to this stop. I suggested that sidewalks and shelter would be beneficial. Knowing that these items can be expensive I also suggested there be more signs added to alert drivers of this bus stop.



**Economic Stability:** This medium-sized plaza has Walmart and various other facilities located in Niles, a suburb of Chicago. Due to the number of stores that are available in the area, it is very accessible for one to find a part-time or full-time job, and it really helps students to be employed along with attending school, but this also can lead to a shortage of openings in jobs from time to time. Since there are so many stores that are available, even if students are not able to find jobs in one place, it does not hinder them from looking at other stores for employment.

**Food:** Food is also an incredibly important factor in health. Not just in terms of 'eating healthy' but from a social standpoint as well. Choosing to continue to cook and eat my cultural foods connects me to my past, my heritage, and my identity. It also brings back the feelings of mom making soup when you're sick or sad. It provides an avenue to gather with friends and family and enjoy each other's company. This greatly improves my mood and mental health sometimes.



**Health Care System:** Since I finished chemo, I receive regular infusions to maintain my health and to keep my disease from progressing. It is long, and expensive, and makes me feel too tired, however, it keeps me alive, and that seems like the pinnacle of health to me. I understand the healthcare I have is an advantage for my health, a privilege not afforded to everyone.

An aspect of **Social and Community Context** is the relationship between people. In this image, you see a group of soldiers eating lunch. What isn't shown is the camaraderie between every one of these soldiers. They have trained together for the last six weeks and have become a community that supports and motivates each other. Every person has in some way a community that they rely on and is important to them.



## Student Learning Outcomes

Students were able to:

- assess the interconnection of the SDOH (ex. that economic stability can influence the built environment and visa-versa).
- broaden their personal and collective lenses for a better understanding of what is happening on a personal, community, national, and global scope.
- engage with photography in a creative and meaningful way to better understand the world they live in and qualitative research.



**Community Support:** While in class, a fellow classmate walked in with an injury. There was little space in the classroom for her crutches or a place for her to have room to prop her foot up. We improvised with an extra chair. This relates to how students who have disabilities, crutches or may be wheelchair bound, have difficulty being able to navigate safely through a classroom or have space that accommodates them. We do have elevators in buildings, but they are not always easy to locate.

### Community, Safety, and Social Context:

Plenty of accessible green space for physical activity, the trails are wide enough for wheelchairs, but they are not paved.



## Recap and Future Considerations

We used this in several classes with different learning objectives in mind:

- **Research Methods to understand qualitative research**
- **Foundations in Health Literacy to explore SDOH**

**Future Uses:**

- Explore one SDOH weekly, finding determinants that are supports/barriers for health.
- Use this method in several classes to build curriculum for a scaffolding and connection effect.
- Connect this method to program planning in terms of needs assessment and learning about the target community.
- Host a photography showcase highlighting student work and findings for your institution.
- Encourage students to present their work in classes for discussions and at conferences.

## Contact info

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