STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS

The experiences of residents in high support mental health services.

Dublin, Ireland
2022
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**Storytelling with Photographs**

Published in 2022

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HSE
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Introduction

‘Storytelling with Photographs’ was a project developed with PhotoVoice and HSE, which took place in March 2022.

The project’s aims were to:

- Capture the experiences of service users living in HSE residences
- Provide supporting information on the housing and support needs of the service users, in their words
- Understand the current service provided in the HSE residences, and have information on the support needs of the residents living there captured by support staff

The project looked at the experiences and perspectives of ten residents in long term mental healthcare residential settings. All residents were considered high support, and received 24 hour nursing provision.

Over the course of a two week period, PhotoVoice delivered a series of photographic storytelling workshops with these residents, and separate workshops with six staff working in different roles within the service.

All participants were based in and around Dublin, and the workshops took place in a variety of settings, including different healthcare facilities.

The aim of the project was to engage with a range of perspectives, as part of a programme to improve service provision, based on the insights shared.

The PhotoVoice component will contribute to a larger research piece, which will use the images and stories as a starting point for further engagement.

Both staff and residents were invited to share their views on a range of topics, and encouraged to explore ways to share their own priorities. PhotoVoice’s approach in the workshops enabled engagement and access in a way which goes beyond other forms of research.

Throughout the workshops, participants were encouraged to consider how photography could be used as a tool of communication. Photographic activities were assigned which participants could interpret in their own way.

By ensuring that control of which stories were shared remained the choice of participants, attendees were able to articulate their experiences as they would like them to be understood.

The images and captions which participants wanted to share are contained within this book.

PhotoVoice, 2022
About PhotoVoice

PhotoVoice is an award winning charity based in the UK. Its vision is for a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own story.

Its mission is to promote the ethical use of photography for positive social change, through delivering innovative participatory photography projects.

By working in partnership with organisations, communities, and individuals worldwide, PhotoVoice helps build the skills and capacity of underrepresented or at-risk communities, creating new tools of self-advocacy and communication.

PhotoVoice works in the UK and internationally with individuals, local communities, and partner organisations.

Established as a charity in 2003, PhotoVoice has worked on over 120 projects worldwide.

More information about PhotoVoice can be found at www.photovoice.org

Project Facilitators:
• Tom Elkins
• Natasha Mulder

About HSE

The ‘Storytelling with Photographs’ Project took place in the HSE Adult Mental Health Services, Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow, Community Healthcare.

This project with PhotoVoice is part of a broader project exploring Community Living Pathways funded by the Service Reform Fund.

The aim of this mental health service is to create a pathway to community living for all service users, which includes those living in HSE Residences.

Within the CHO7 area, there are a total of nine 24-hour supported HSE residences with, at the time of writing, 78 residents.

In order to plan for the needs of people currently living in the HSE Residences who wish to explore their community living options, the service needs to understand both the existing service provided in the HSE residences, and the support needs of the individuals who live there. The perspective of the people who both live and work in HSE residences is central to this.

The people living in HSE residences are part of a ‘seldom heard voices’ group
within the mental health services. In order to hear their voices and for them to be able to describe their experience of living in HSE residences, an accessible, creative and multi-method approach is required.

Participatory photography is one method that is being used in this project to capture their experiences. It is also being used as the starting point for the next phase of the project.

The ‘Storytelling with Photographs’ project involved 16 participants who worked with the PhotoVoice project team to create a visual and textual narrative which describes their thoughts, feelings and experiences of living in their current accommodation.

As part of the next phase of the project, these photos and stories will be used with other people living in CHO7 HSE accommodations, along with their staff and management, to support further reflection and learning.

PhotoVoice’s workshops have shown to be an effective way of supporting people to tell their story. As members of the working group, being involved with this project has been exciting, eye-opening and humbling.

The participants brought an openness to this method and their enthusiasm was sustained throughout an intensive ten days of work.

A salient theme that emerged through the week was the participants’ resignation to their living situations, but also their ability to find hope and things to look forward to.

Our hope is that people’s voices will be heard in a new way, and their pictures and stories are respected as a clear communication about the changes they would like to make in their lives.

Members of the Working Group:

- Susan Kehoe - Service Improvement Lead
- Stephanie O’Connor - Clinical Specialist SLT
- Sharon Byrne - Clinical Nurse Manager III
- Aisling Stapleton - Senior Occupational Therapist
- Darragh McMahon - Clinical Nurse Manager II
- Emer Whelan - Assistant Director of Nursing
- Sarah Donnelly - Creating Foundations Assistant Lead, Focus Ireland
- Brendan Sexton - Clinical Nurse Manager II
- Denise Casey - Clinical Nurse Specialist
SOMETHING I SEE EVERY DAY WHICH IS IMPORTANT TO ME
It represents what art is to me. It sets up an impression, creates an impression, and declares an impression.
I coloured this picture during Covid just before Christmas last year. I liked it so much I put it up on my wardrobe. I coloured each snowflake with different colours as if the presents from Santa Claus are falling down and they’ve landed at the bottom.

The staff didn’t take it down and it’s still up. Sometimes they take things down but it depends on where you put the picture.
Cigarettes are very important to me. They calm me down, I enjoy nicotine, I enjoy the flavour. I've been smoking 20 years, and I smoke JPS 100s. Most of my money goes on cigarettes - they cost €13 a packet. I get disability allowance, which I got because of my psychiatrist. It gets paid straight to the bank and to my ATM account. The nearest shop is the garage, and I walk out there whenever I want to get smokes.
The narrow windows are nice looking. There’s food on the other side. You can’t see through them.

The doors are kept locked as fellows kept taking the food. Biscuits are my favourite. You can ask the nurses if you want something like a packet of crisps.
It shows the whole courtyard and up the hill. The outside space is important to me with fresh air.
THE VIEW FROM MY WINDOW
The view outside my window is a quiet space. Trees in the grounds, some topical flowers further along. My room is chock block with toiletries, books and magazines, a chair I bought last summer and a dresser and coat hanger fill my room.
MY SENSE OF SELF PORTRAIT
The tree reminds me of being a wood machinist. When I left school in 1968 my father asked me what I wanted to do and I said woodwork - I went to an industrial machines exhibition - one was a carving machine - my father bought it and put it in our factory and set me up making chess sets.

In 1969 I went on my holidays - I had to show somebody else how to use the machine, so put the other chap on, but I used to do the masters first. In 1972 we got a call and the factory was on fire - the roof had caught fire. It was a two story building blazing away. All the machines had to be taken away to be repaired - but the belt kept falling off.
It’s beyond science - it’s Celtic mythology. I was working in architecture and was sent to Glasgow to study and first came across this symbol. I didn’t like Glasgow. It didn’t suit an Irish man with Irish eyes.
Something that cheers me up every day and I also have brought some spring bulbs which I will plant in mid March. I do some outside gardening too.
These are my runners. I went to buy them with a staff member but they didn’t have my size, though the 8.5 did fit me so I really wanted them. Staff tried to convince me otherwise. I am really happy with them.
I like books. I used to like going to town. I’d go to the bookshop. There was a book about Dublin I used to look at. There aren't books in my home.
WHAT I AM PROUD OF
I’m proud of these horses I made. I made the blue horse first in an art class. There were six or eight of us there. I went to the church next door to ask the priest for a candle. He gave me a tall candle which he said was a blessed candle, which he told me I wasn’t to light. It didn’t fit in the hole I’d made for it. I made the white horse in an art class in Kildare. We had a two-hour class each week for six weeks. I made a cup as well, but I used the wrong glaze so you couldn’t drink from it.

My father had a furniture shop in 1957, which he thought looked a bit bare, so he started making little statues to put on the tables. People started to ask about buying them, so he realised that there was money to be made that way.
The sense of focus is a reality not dissimilar to ‘The Scream’ painting. I’m proud of my achievement of starting to come out of depression - I’m inside the mental health service but starting to come out of it. They've looked after me big time. For years I didn't take on the ideas of unwellness - I never really thought about it - just fought and tried to get beyond it every day. I've only recently talked to doctors about it, and it’s helped me. I don’t find it easy, but I need to stop spoofing about stuff.
This is the relaxation room. We put the tree up and decorated it in 2020 when we first came here - about four or five months into our stay here. We put the tree up and made the room dark and relaxing. I don’t use the room so much. I use my bedroom for relaxation. I feel proud of the decoration - it’s a very comfortable room. I’ve not really used it too much this year.
My mantlepiece with my paintings and family photographs. Art classes at Mountain View may come back at a later stage. I might do art at a different place.
Proud to re-open the doors of Brú day support centre post Covid lockdown in September 2020, after 6 months of being closed.
All hands together - our lockdown project - created proudly over a few cups of tea between residents and staff.
What vision can I see out?

Reminds me how difficult it is to get to the destination we need to go to, with so many barriers to overcome. I can see it but can’t reach it.
I was smoking for 20 years. I have been a year and a half off them.
I enjoyed school, my favourite subjects were geography and art. I am proud of myself for passing my junior certificate examinations.
Proud for life-changing Wi-Fi opening the world up. Can now see Joe Dolan and Elvis without having to just listen to them.
Happy client, happy manager - tending planters bought with manager’s consent and planted under my guidance by client.
WHAT I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO
I’m looking forward to moving, to going back where I was living before. I’ve got this yellow coat which I’ve not worn since I got here, and it makes me think of being in a different place where they don’t have full time nursing, so you get a little bit more freedom. The reason I moved here is because I became quite unwell, but I feel like I’m recovering a bit more. The coat is hanging on an easel. I like painting - sometimes it works for me and sometimes it doesn’t.
The summer and outdoor activities. Taking my sandals off, feeling the sand and paddling. I used to go on holidays to Spain, Turkey, Greece, Portugal and also short breaks in London, the Isle of Man and Blackpool.
A new start. New growth.
What I am looking forward to - 39

Looking forward to developing this area in Brú into a new internet café style space for everyone’s use.
Summer times here we come - looking forward to BBQ evenings in the garden.
Is the barrel half empty or half full? Looking forward to keeping it topped up.
My own space. I was in a bedsit before here, sharing with people taking stuff. It was a nightmare. Being more independent, being able to get a cup of tea when I want; too many rules.
I am moving to Allenview in Newbridge during the summer to return to independent living. I am looking forward to starting new hobbies, including watching different TV, reading books and cooking.
Our brand new minibus, and to new adventures that await.
Looking forward to moving into newly renovated premises and installing green house and raised vegetable beds.
WHAT HAS CHANGED RECENTLY FOR ME
This is an important door. Since I came here they've replaced the windows, put in new toilets, showers, new kitchen, dishwasher, barbecue. It’s improved things. I arrived in November 2010 and a lot has happened over the years. I’m happy here at the moment. I haven’t been offered anything better.
I took this because of the scenery. I've been looking at the scenery for the last two years - in blue skies, dark skies, black clouds, white clouds, leaves on the trees, no leaves on the trees. We weren't supposed to be here for two years. It was supposed to be three months, then six months, then another six months, and another six months, then finally we were told end of March and now May or June. I felt at home after the first few months. It was a lot bigger than the house I was living in. I don't know Athy [where I am going to live] from the back of my hand, so it's all up in the air for me really.
Shopping again post Covid. I can hopefully go into town for entertainment. Watching a film, theatre or a meal in Eddie Rockets or McDonalds.

My sister Cora bought me a shopping trolley, which is handy for going to the local shops. Sometimes my family bring me shopping in their car. I have two sisters and a brother and they all have cars so there is no excuse to not bring me out for the day. It’s two years since I had a holiday, since the Covid began.
New garden furniture delivered to Brú day support, just in time for spring; lots of tea and chat to be had in the garden this summer.
Ashdale House High Support Hostel has recently been renovated - we look forward to welcoming you.
Reflections on how short life is, make the best of it each day as if it was your last. What do I see? Reflection.
I came from a nightmare to here. I am delighted to be here. It was noisy, fights outside and traffic. It was really central, it was terrible.
I have started going home more often. I was in St Loman hospital throughout the Covid 19 lockdown for one year.
Back cycling as a form of low impact physio for my torn meniscus - my knee banjaxed by overworking during Covid.
Looking forward to opening the door and being able to travel again post Covid.
MY FAVOURITE ACTIVITY
The exploration of my easel is not working at the moment. I haven’t really thought hard enough about the ideas of my attempts at art; what i’m trying to achieve. I used to paint a lot. It was a great therapy for me. It made me feel quite well, but I haven’t practiced in years. It’s something I want to get back to big time.
Family holidays and gardening. The flowers on the right are artificial but value for money in the long run, as they will last for years. The lilies only last for two weeks. Though only €2.49, the African Breeze will last for longer.
At the moment the PhotoVoice ‘Day in the Life’ project and the day centre in Mayoll Lasire, those are my favourite activities.
Looking forward to sitting in the garden in the summer with a good book and a cup of tea.
Welcome on the mat to the great outdoors - enjoying nature and getting dirty.
Exercise and listening to music. Lifting my homemade drum [made from the bottle] is exercise for the arms.
Looking forward to planting up these babies.
WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO BE DIFFERENT
The Corridors of my Cell

I have a good friend - he's in the world of wellness and I'm here - he looks after me. He has lots of money - we meet at matches and football and he buys me drinks. He's forever looking after me financially with drinks. I've known him since schools. I'm forever saying stop buying me things so I worry I overdo it, and overdo the chit chat. It would be huge to get a job - anything that avoids me talking too much. I can talk a lot about my interiors externally. I don't think there's anything wrong with that but some people might. I'd like a job like a deli chef, or a groundsman in a rugby club.
Routine cleaning in a hostel: keeping up appearances. A clash between home and institution.
It will be five years this summer in my present residence, and my family home is now being rented out. My brother wanted to keep the house in the family. Hopefully someday I will get to move in with my sister Cora and her husband Allen; they have two spare bedrooms and they don’t have any children, while my brother and sister Ann have three children each and have a full house.
It would be great to have more staff to increase the activities and sessions on offer in the day support at Brú.
Because of a dearth of staff I’m looking forward to seeing more staff members on the time returns. HSE needs you.
Stop and think: I can change. Being aware that changes are good, feel great with effort. New you. Ask yourself what do I do different?
Have my own space. I am delighted to be here but I am ready for the next place.
My main goal at the minute is starting a job, returning back to education or an apprenticeship in carpentry or electrics.
It’s a rainy day. I used to like going into town. I haven’t been able to go into town because of Covid.
If I could choose, I would like another sitting room for residents to take visitors to when they call, so they can have privacy.
Shorter commute – it’s €130 to fill up with unleaded.
OTHER STORIES
I was walking along a quiet road one day and on the side of the road was a little box with something in it. I opened it up and Finn popped out. I took him home, he was clean and brand new, and had him up on the shelf, and decided that there should be a story about him. He’s either from Meathe or Westmeathe.
I don’t know what it is about this - it just stood out for me. I picked up on the scenery. Maybe it had a small story for me about the person who died, and who the plaque was for. It made me feel sad.
I like fruit. You can help yourself to it. Oranges and pears are my favourite. There are no pears here. The pears go quickly - everybody eats them. I don’t take them all.
You look like my old boss Jim. I worked with him crushing paper. He was an alright boss. I liked the job, but I got very sick.
I don’t play piano. Fionnuala plays the piano and I like to listen to it.
I like flowers. They make me feel happy. Purple is my favourite colour.
KEY FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS
Key Findings

Following the workshops, the following key findings were discussed.

What worked well

- Delivering the staff training the week before was useful to give an overall impression of the service, and to get the support from some of the staff in supporting residents the following week.
- Providing all participants with their own cameras gave an increased sense of ownership over their stories and contributing to the outcomes of the project.
- Being flexible with the curriculum enabled additional breaks for participants, without negatively affecting the delivery of the curriculum.
- Choosing a space outside their living environment and not an HSE building for the workshops seemed to be important to - and appreciated - by the participants.
- Visiting each resident at their home enabled participants to feel more comfortable creating their images and captions.
- Having lunch and tea and coffee available was appreciated by the participants.
- The participants worked well together in the group format and supported each other.
- The facilitators' were able to positively engage all the participants, who had a broad range of needs and abilities.
- Residents spoke about setting up a photography group after the sessions, although they had not all met before and came from different residences.

What could be improved

- The cameras were a bit small and fiddly for some of the residents, particularly those with mobility issues. This was addressed by adapting the cameras to their individual needs, using add-ons.
- The transport to and from residential settings wasn't always reliable.
- It was logistically challenging to organise attendance to a centralised location from five different residences.
- There was nothing immediate planned as a follow up for the group participants after the project finished, and all expressed the wish to continue meeting and taking photos. Some staff in the residences were supportive of developing ongoing activities,
and encouraged to pursue them. However, some share the view that it would be for others to organise such activities, which means there’s a potential for enthusiasm for the idea of ongoing engagement, but nobody leading on actioning it.

Other findings

- Participants felt there was agency in their choices, by limiting which of their images could be used beyond the workshops. This was encouraged, and formed a large part of PhotoVoice’s consent process. For some, it gave them control in decision making which may not be common.
- One participant felt he had to leave halfway through the first day of the workshop. However, they wanted to participate again on day three in a 1:1 setting. By providing this additional support, the participant was able to deliver a series of images and also participate in the exhibition.
- As a number of HSE residence staff had taken part in PhotoVoice training, it enabled them to engage with a wider group of residents in discussing the project, or using photographic activities.
- Participants engaged throughout the duration of the course, with some staff highlighting that they displayed unprecedented levels of concentration.
- Some participants felt uncomfortable sharing insights, questioning why they were being asked questions about their experiences, with one stating that they were concerned it would ‘come back to bite them’.
- Some participants were concerned about ‘getting into trouble’ or upsetting staff by sharing their insights.
- All of participants were living in 24 hour supported residences, and it became clear that their abilities and their needs varied significantly in terms of the support they required to participate in the project. This suggested that while their circumstances were considered the same (in terms of their living arrangements and the category of care they received), their individual situations were considerably more diverse.

Next steps

- The HSE working group will support the participants to meet up as a group and continue taking photos.
- The HSE working group will engage with the service users who took part in this project, and explore the possibility of them becoming consultants to the next phase of the project or members of the next phase working group.
Evaluation Data

Staff

The workshops met my expectations
- Strongly agree: 4 (80%)
- Agree: 1 (20%)

I enjoyed the workshops
- Strongly agree: 5 (80%)
- Agree: 1 (20%)

I feel confident in my ability to take photographs which tell my story
- Strongly agree: 2 (40%)
- Agree: 3 (60%)

I feel confident in my ability to write captions which tell my story
- Strongly agree: 2 (40%)
- Agree: 3 (60%)

I have learnt things which will be useful in my future work
- Strongly agree: 2 (40%)
- Agree: 2 (40%)
- No response: 1 (20%)

Participants

The sessions in the Wisdom Centre helped me to learn
- 100% responded: Yes

I enjoyed the sessions in the wisdom centre
- 100% responded: Yes

I can take photographs to help me tell my story
- 100% responded: Yes

I can write captions to help me tell my story
- 100% responded: Yes

I have learnt new things that I can use in the future
- 100% responded: Yes

Selected Participant Feedback

“I just loved everything about it! It was amazing!!”

“Just a special thanks to Tom and Natasha for kind and understanding help in teaching and designing the photo groups”

“Wished it could have gone on longer.”
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STORYTELLING WITH PHOTOGRAPHS

The experiences of residents in high support mental health services.

Dublin, Ireland
2022