

# ODE Storytelling Report (FY 16-17)

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The ODE storytelling program hosts a space in which people share their stories of recovery and wellness to make a meaningful impact on themselves and others. Participants engage in workshops that guide them in creating and sharing their stories in different forms. Beginning simply with a story circle or a framing question, participants continue developing their narrative as a digital story or a Photovoice project. Photovoice and Digital Storytelling are 4-day workshops in which participants share their stories of wellness and recovery. As final projects, Photovoice participants produce a single-page layout of a photo and short written piece and Digital Storytelling participants produce a 3 minute video.

ODE Storytelling strives to utilize Photovoice and Digital Storytelling to engage in community based participatory research (CBPR) for public health interventions.

For next year, FY 17-18, ODE Storytelling is planning to present stories and findings to nine groups of providers in San Mateo County (SMC). Specific topics and themes of stigma involve: mental health issues and recovery, substance abuse issues and recovery, immigration, racism, sexual violence, LGBTQ+ issues, housing and homelessness, suicide, and school to prison pipeline. Below are a number of case studies to show the effects of Photovoice on providers and clients/consumers in SMC.

## Stigma Reduction

ODE Storytelling aims to reduce stigma and broaden the definition of recovery. ODE Storytelling programs consider social factors such as racism, discrimination, and poverty in mental health and recovery. The stories shared have been both personal and powerful. For some, they have created a sense of connection; for others, they have been transformative.

ODE Storytelling shares stories at community events to challenge stigma on mental health and other issues. Having developing a large database of stories (51 Digital Stories, 107 Photovoices, 54 Pop-Up Photovoices), ODE challenges mental health and substance abuse stigma by sharing stories with communities that are challenged with behavioral health stigma.

*How has this [Digital Storytelling] program changed the way you view your story?*

**“I like the way my story can help others succeed through the anxiety and depression we go through. Storytelling helps.”**

**“There are more people out there who can relate and so many who would feel comfortable now because someone else [shared their story].”**

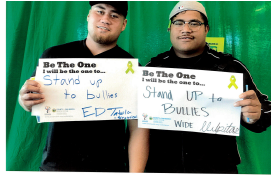
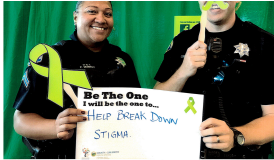
*What did you learn from these projects?*

**“That there is help & things can change.”**

**“Silence is a part of the problem”**

## Pop-Up Photovoice (PUP)

At community events, participants are invited to make a Photovoice at our “Pop-Up Photovoice” booth. Sometimes, PUP is the first space that people talk about mental health. At the booth, people share their stories of behavioral health, and learn about behavioral health by reading other peoples’ stories. PUP challenges stigma by engaging people to share their stories about mental health when they, otherwise, would not have. PUPs are displayed within Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. Further, testimonies show that PUP participants continue the conversation about mental health by sharing their PUPs with family and friends.



*In our PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY (as law enforcement) WE MEET AND WORK WITH PEOPLE OF ALL WALKS OF LIFE. WE FREQUENTLY SEE MANY PEOPLE DEALING WITH A VARIETY OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND ARE ALWAYS LEARNING FROM EACH INTERACTION. WE UNDERSTAND THAT HAVING MORE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE (AND EMPATHY) IN WORKING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CAN ONLY IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS AND HELP BREAK DOWN STIGMAS TOWARD THOSE IN NEED. WE APPRECIATE ALL THOSE WHO HELP BRING AWARENESS TO MENTAL HEALTH!*

*CHAZER BUCKE  
CORRECTOR  
CORRECTIONAL MURDER (SSFPD)*

Depression  
*I think that I didn't even know that I had depression I just heard about it and it matched to what I was feeling.*

### Depression

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### The Health System

*Please know that I'm trying my hardest, even though I may still fall short of your expectations, I need your compassion and understanding, not judgement. Physical + mental health are intertwined.*

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*Please know that I'm trying my hardest, enough though I may still fall short of your expectations. I need your compassion and understanding, not judgement. Physical + mental health are intertwined.*

### Participant and Audience Responses to PUP:

**“When looking through the gallery, I feel a sense of empowerment and inspired by others sharing their stories and not being afraid. I think the gallery affected our community at Harbor by making it a safe space to talk about mental health/substance use.”**

**“I've seen many people at Harbor stop and read the stories as well as grab a ribbon. I'm certain that it brought increased awareness around mental health and substance use!”**

**“When I created my photovoice, the process was at first difficult trying to find the words. I didn't know what to write at first, but took Siavash's advice and wrote the first thing that came to mind. I wrote about being sensitive and afterwards I started to notice how I really am sensitive at times and I think that's just my ability to feel empathy and compassion more easily and read on others' vibes. I definitely do feel more empowered to share my story and very vulnerable and shy when I see others reading my photovoice. I feel like my creation will affect our community by being more open to discuss mental health and emotions in a positive light.”**

**“I loved the opportunity to create one and be able to share my story with others as well as with my BFF. We've talked about what a rollercoaster it's been for her with her battle with depression, but I've never summarized the journey in writing which she appreciated.”**

# Community Healing and Empowerment

Photovoice is healing for our participants as they reframe their experiences throughout the story-circle, scripting exercises, and photography process. Consequently, communities heal as they view and relate to stories shown at events. Participants are invited to programs with themes and framing questions most relevant to their experiences to foster a participant-centered approach.

## Heart & Soul Collaboration: The Power of Hope in Recovery

ODE Storytelling collaborated with Heart & Soul to host a Digital Storytelling program for five participants. Participants shared their stories of mental health and substance abuse recovery to broaden the definition of recovery. Inspiring hope, participants premiered their stories at Heart & Soul's open house event in May 2017. Following with a question and answer panel, the storytellers connected with an audience of others in recovery.

Viewer evaluations (shown below) exhibit that audience members internalized a broadened definition of recovery and were inspired to share their stories to help others.

*What did you learn from these Digital Stories?*

**"That everybody has [their] own outcome."**

**"We all have a unique journey. Do not judge."**

**"I am not alone."**

100% of audience members at Heart & Soul's Digital Storytelling showing, either, 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement: **"I learned something new after viewing these Digital Stories"**

*What will you do differently after viewing the Digital Stories?*

**"Share my story to help others."**

**"I plan to advocate wherever the lord leads me."**

**"Tell my story."**

## Black Lives Matter (BLM) Program Viewership

In January, ODE Storytelling collaborated with the African American Community (Mental Health) Initiative to host a Photovoice program with the theme "Black Lives Matter". Four participants came together to answer the question: "What does Black Lives Matter mean to you?" By the end of the workshop, participants completed a Photovoice project and co-wrote this accompanying call-to-action:

"The community needs to know that Black Lives Matter isn't just about senseless killings of unarmed African Americans, but it is about the systematic oppression and invisible killings of African Americans: physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and financially. Black Lives Matter means loving black, buying black, and being undeniably black. Black Lives Matter means knowing who our leaders are. Black Lives Matter is one of many attempts black people have made to get fair treatment in this country and it's a shame we are still asking."

Surveys and testimonies show that communities learn about mental health, in the context of their communal experience, from viewing photovoices.

95% of viewers who are community members, either, 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement: **"I learned something new after viewing these photovoices"**

*What will you do differently after viewing these projects?*

**"Engage in conversation that I had avoided."**

76% of viewers who are clients/consumers, either, 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement: **"I understand the connection between these photovoices and mental health."**

### Process Trauma in BLM Program and Showing

By empowering people with trauma to develop and share their stories, the process of creating Photovoice supports people with trauma to organize scattered traumatic memories into a cohesive personal narrative. Licensed mental health clinicians are present at all workshops to support clients through potential re-traumatization.

Audience members are, then, able to connect with and process their trauma by viewing final projects. In February, these BLM photovoice projects were shown at the African American Community Initiative organized health fair alongside a panel of the Photovoice participants. Throughout the BLM program, storytellers shared experiences of assault from police, discrimination, homelessness, and other ways that systemic oppression manifests itself.

### Participant Responses to the BLM Program:

All four participants 'strongly agree' with the statement: **"This workshop helped me process my hardships."**

*What did you enjoy most about this workshop?*

**"I loved hearing about everyone's Black experience and how they have overcome so much"**

Research shows that telling a story may help clean up the scattered nature of trauma.<sup>1</sup>

### Community Responses to the BLM Program:

*What did you learn from these projects?*

**"PTSD in an unjust society acts like a disease that is transmitted from generation to generation"**

*How has this program changed the way you view your story?*

**"That [I am] the same as anyone else."**

*What did you learn from these projects?*

**"Past experiences can evolve and cause heart ache"**

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<sup>1</sup> Kearney, R. (2007). Narrating pain: The power of catharsis. *Paragraph*, 30(1):51-66.

## Train-the-Trainer Trial

With the goal of expanding the capacity of Photovoice and empowering community members to capture and share stories, ODE Storytelling created a facilitator packet. The packet includes all the materials needed to facilitate a Photovoice program, alongside a curriculum and facilitation guide.

A trial program was run in collaboration with an ODE Cultural Stipend intern, who successfully supported five participants in completing Photovoice projects with the framing question, “What is your journey in behavioral health?”

Having completed the beta stage of train-the-trainer, the facilitator guide packet is finalized and available for the community to utilize.

## Provide Insight to Providers

ODE Storytelling hosts photovoice programs and strives to serve as community based participatory research (CBPR) to providers. Final projects are presented alongside themes and implications of the projects.

77% of viewers who are providers, either, ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement: **“I learned something new after viewing these photovoices”**

95% of viewers who are providers, either, ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement: **“I understand the connection between these photovoices and mental health.”**

74% of viewers who are providers, either, ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement: **“I understand the connection between these photovoices and substance abuse.”**

## Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA)

In collaboration with San Mateo County Office of Education and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA), ODE Storytelling showcased a series of photovoices to YMHFA students in May. The displayed Photovoices were created by youth in the county on mental health, substance abuse, and trauma. YMHFA students were invited to view the photovoice exhibit and reflect on the connection between the Photovoices and the lessons learned in their YMHFA training.

**“I will think about the person with mental health and how they perceive life. Their struggles they’re feeling helps me have more empathy”**

**“I will speak out.”**  
**“I will be more mindful. We need to stop criminalizing our youth and being afraid of them.”**

**“I will not judge what I see but take time to see why or understand what a person might be going through.”**

**“I will continue to support students without judgements.”**

**“I will be careful with my words & be more sensitive to youths’ struggles.”**

**“I will get help for young kids who can benefit from the help.”**

“I will make more effort in education people about mental health.”

“I will continue to notice & work with youth mindfully, slow down, without judgement. Continue learning.”

“I will continue my efforts to bring restorative and mindful practices to the schools and educating of staff about mental health and their role in addressing the mental health concerns of their students.”

“I will continue to support the students and accept them for who they are and where they are at in life.”

“I will keep in mind to not over- or under-estimate our youth.”

“I will be more accepting/ listen to others’ voices.”

## Research and Advocacy

Collective action begins as individuals connect on shared lived-experiences and collaboratively advocate with their stories. With solidarity, communities also utilize the bank of accumulated stories as tools to inform policy decisions.

### Youth Services Center

In collaboration with San Mateo County’s Youth Services Center (YSC), ODE Storytelling met with five youth to reduce stigma in the juvenile hall and to share the voices of the youth. The youth chose to create Photovoice projects to respond to the framing question: “How do you feel stigmatized at YSC?”. Throughout our 1-on-1 sessions, youth expressed unmet needs to have their strengths and values recognized, that they are often portrayed as ‘problem children’, that they enjoy mental health services, and that they have been affected by trauma. They worked hard to create the best Photovoices they could.

Youth’s adverse experiences, such as abuse (psychological, physical, and sexual), substance use, parental separation/divorce, witnessing violence, and abandonment and neglect influence their behaviors. In our presentation with Youth Services Center staff, we came to an agreement that traumatic experiences shape the worldview of the youth, resulting in a series of behaviors. For example, what might be perceived as unmotivated and paranoid might be a result of youths’ belief that the world is not safe, of which they developed through adverse experiences. Ultimately, as a group, we reframed our view of the youth from ‘at-risk’ to ‘at-promise’ and agreed to be more understanding of youth’s traumatic experiences in their interactions from the staff.

“I will continue to find ways to work effectively w/ youth so they feel supported & that they’re treated w/ respect & dignity”

“I will help the youth I serve develop a plan that helps them find something positive in their life they care about to aspire to.”

“I will use more strengths-based approaches w/ my clients.”

“I will be mindful of the experiences of my clients and it’s impact, no matter how small.”

“I will see the promise in every youth I speak with.”

“I will continue to see the youth and their potential.”

“I will actively work to understand and support my clients needs in a trauma informed manner.”

“I will provide psycho education to PO’s, GS staff, teach them on stigma and the impact of trauma. I will identify techniques staff can use to begin a conversation about being trauma informed w/ staff so that it trickles down to the way staff work with and interact w/ youth.”

## Summary

- Developed framework, evaluation materials, facilitation guide, Pop-Up Photovoice approach
- Supported and facilitated a total of four Photovoice programs and one Digital Storytelling program
- Conducted a total of twelve presentations, panels, or gallery showings of Photovoices and Digital Stories

In FY 16-17, ODE Storytelling developed and published a storytelling framework that defines ODE’s approach and goals, 3 tenets of powerful storytelling, and theory behind the program. Once published, parts of the storytelling framework were adapted by the Lived Experience Academy. Still in development, evaluation tools were created and tested for accuracy. ODE Storytelling developed and published a facilitator packet, which includes all materials needed to facilitate a Photovoice program, alongside a curriculum and facilitation guide. Also developed, Pop-Up Photovoice booth empowered community members to create Photovoices in 5 minutes— Clients left feeling healed, and the stories were shown within BHRS and on Health System social media websites. ODE storytelling supported and facilitated a total of four Photovoice programs and one Digital Storytelling program. Presenting final projects at community events, such as the AACI hosted health fair, families and clients left having learned about mental health and inspired to have more conversations about mental health and substance abuse. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) students reported feeling more competent to work with their clients after relating lessons learned from MHFA to the Photovoice projects shown during their lunch break. Lastly, ODE Storytelling captured stories of youth at Youth Services Center (juvenile hall) and shared them with staff to improve services.

# Recommendations/Future Goals

- CBPR process with affordable housing in San Mateo County will make San Mateo County more accessible for clients/consumers as they will be involved and their voices will be shared within spaces they, otherwise, would not be involved in.
  - Host two “Housing Matters” Photovoice programs
  - Share stories with housing stakeholders (Property managers, board of supervisors, town halls, Boards and Commissions, etc.)
  - Share stories with organizations who advocate housing issues (On The Table, Home For All San Mateo, etc.)
- Improved digital storytelling and photovoice evaluations and stigma measures to provide more appropriate services to clients/consumers in the county.
  - Meet with former participants to learn about their experience, the programs impacts on them, and their thoughts on the evaluation tools
  - Collaborate with ODE to standardize program evaluation tools across ODE programs
- Train-the-trainer process and facilitator guide to expand capacity, support healing of more clients/consumers, challenge mental health and substance abuse stigma in more spaces, and to support adequate and appropriate care provided to members of San Mateo County.
  - Publish Facilitator Guide Packet
  - Host Photovoice, Pop-Up Photovoice, and Digital Storytelling train-the-trainer sessions
- Improved platform to share Digital Stories and Photovoices to be accessible to providers and community members through category and tag search features, download features, and accompanying learning/training materials.
  - Negotiate with communications team to improve website (model website: <http://juvietalk.com/play-builder>)