

Using creative methods to engage 'marginalized' groups in food/nutrition activities: A Plymouth pilot study.

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Aim: The 'Food as a Lifestyle Motivator' (FLM) project employed creative qualitative methods to investigate the role of food to enhance wellbeing and life skills in a homeless centre in Plymouth.

Background: Plymouth has high levels of deprivation with local evidence showing certain communities suffering disproportionately from poor nutrition and multiple vulnerabilities, which leads to compromised health. Finding ways to engage with marginalized communities is essential to consider strategies to optimise health, wellbeing and life skills.

Methodology: 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR), beneficial for engaging participants (Minkler and Wallestein, 2003) was used, consisting of surveys with support staff; 'photo elicitation' (Wang et al 2000) with service users and general observations of the food environment. This paper presents 'photo elicitation' methods. A purposive sample of n=12 service users were given cameras to record 10 days of food activities, after which most participated in focus groups using their images to discuss their food experiences.

Findings: Focus group discussions (n=9) illustrated the varied role food plays in the participants' lives with five key themes emerging from multi-disciplinary thematic analysis:

- i. Meaning of food;
- ii. Power and empowerment;
- iii. Space and place;
- iv. Occupation;
- v. Emotion

These themes will be presented with associated images to illustrate powerful auto-biographical narratives, explaining the meaning and importance of food and the process of engagement.

Conclusions: Homeless service users were given a 'voice' to express their food insights - a key strength of this participatory method. Given its under-representation in the food literature, recommendations are made to further explore the use of photo elicitation (and other creative) methods, across a range of 'marginalized groups', to evaluate how they can maximise engagement in food/nutrition activities to enhance life skills (e.g. employability) and tackle social justice. This evidence informs food/nutrition policy and social sustainability debates, to ensure 'optimal fit' with local health and wellbeing strategies.

References

Minkler M and Wallestein N (2003) Community based participatory research for health, San Fransisco, CA Jossey-Bass.

Wang C, Cash J L and Powers L S (2000) Who Knows the Streets as Well as the Homeless? Promoting Personal and Community Action through Photo-Voice *Health Promotion Practice* 1: 81