

Finding their PhotoVoice

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Published: Thursday, August 27, 2009 9:42 AM EDT

To love art is to love its transcendental qualities. Anyone can create it, and anyone can be changed through experiencing it. That's why exhibits such as PhotoVoice are so intriguing.

The exhibit, part of a global photo essay project, is showing at the Rhodes State Office Tower (30 E. Broad St.) until Friday. A camera was given to nine participants journeying through mental health recovery. The goal is to help them show their lives, struggles and triumphs through the lens, while challenging social stigmas of mental illness.

PhotoVoice is sponsored by COVA, a Clintonville-based agency that provides rehabilitation services and career development for those struggling with mental illness and other disabilities. This is the first year for PhotoVoice in Columbus.

The artists attended nine weeks of classes, where they were introduced to photo techniques and talked about what they wanted their art to express.

Instructors Barb Schmitzer and Alysse Gafkjen also helped the artists select their final images and write narratives, which are part of the exhibit.

Gafkjen says that while the project has inspired her as a photographer, it's been just as rewarding to see how PhotoVoice changed the participants.

"They have become more outgoing through this process and more willing to open themselves up to others to raise the awareness of mental illness, which, to me, is amazing," she says.

And the art, Gafkjen adds, speaks for itself.

"After a few classes, I loosened them up and they started photographing from the heart, from the place with which no one can control the outcome. The results were beautiful.

They found peace within their own journey, as well as a clear view of their journey for the viewer to experience.”

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