**Girl Power: A Photovoice Project - 2012**

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Description: Adolescence is a complex period in human development – a time of considerable emotional and psychological growth and physical change. This developmental phase is marked by self-discovery, emerging independence, and psychological maturation (OK State Dept. of Health, 2004). However, in addition to the normal turbulence of adolescent development, the specific health challenges facing Oklahoma’s adolescent girls are daunting. Oklahoma ranks fifth in the nation in births to teens (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009) first in the incarceration of women (Sharp, 2008) and almost last in the percentage of women in the state legislature (Center for American Women and Politics, 2010). Finally, Oklahoma is expected to have the highest obesity rate in the nation by 2018 (United Health Foundation’s America’s Health Rankings, 2009).

In order to elucidate the ways in which adolescent girls’ health can be encouraged in the face of these disturbing statistics, the investigation utilized an innovative participatory methodology called Photovoice to explore low-income adolescent girls’ perceptions of their own physical, social, and emotional health as well as the health promoting and inhibiting elements of their communities and schools. Photovoice is a qualitative methodology that uses “photographic images taken by persons with little money, power, or status to enhance community needs assessments, empower participants, and induce change by informing policy makers of community assets and deficits” (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Photovoice methodology grew out of public health and is rooted in participatory action research that is participant led. The research participants will be empowered to turn their discoveries into positive change within their community.

The investigation was conducted in partnership with the Center for Children and Families, Inc. (CCFI), and findings will be used to inform programming at the CCFI as well as for the development of a pilot intervention aimed at encouraging positive health behaviors in low-income teenage girls living in Oklahoma. The photographic exhibits that resulted from the investigation will be shared with policy makers in order to encourage larger scale social change. Finally, the investigation has laid the foundation for further external funding intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the resulting pilot at ameliorating the impact of negative life events upon low-income girls while simultaneously encouraging them to develop health habits that will promote their future well-being.

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Link to additional Girl Power: A Photovoice Project information on Center for Children and Families, Inc. (CCFI) website: http://www.ccfinorman.org/photovoice