

Distress and Hope:

A Collection of Words and Images by
St. Louis Healthy Start Participants

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to the **Healthy Start participants** who shared their insights through the photographs and quotes featured in this report.

St. Louis has the tragic distinction

of holding one of the highest infant mortality rates in the United States. Of every one thousand babies born in the city of St. Louis, **12 will not live to see their first birthday.** **12.5%** of babies in St. Louis are born at a low birth weight, which is a major risk factor for their health and survival.

The St. Louis Healthy Start Project seeks to reduce these high infant mortality rates, educating and empowering parents to give their children a healthy start in life. Through a partnership of the Maternal Child and Family Health Coalition and the Nurses for Newborns Foundation, the Healthy Start Project uses a federal grant to provide comprehensive case

management to at least 100 families. Services focus on three urban zip codes - **63113**, **63120**, and **63136** – with particularly high health risks.

The Healthy Start Project focuses on getting women into prenatal care early in the pregnancy and promotes positive prenatal health. Early entrance into prenatal care is the single most critical factor in improving birth outcomes. Healthy Start also works to meet families' basic needs in other areas of their lives, such as nutrition, housing, and psychosocial support. A unique part of the Healthy Start Project is the mentoring provided by women in the community who serve as outreach workers and home visitors, some of

them former Healthy Start clients themselves. This approach works because mothers respond to other women who have “walked in their shoes.”

The PhotoVoice Empowerment Initiative was developed as part of the Healthy Start Project’s mentoring efforts. PhotoVoice teaches Healthy Start clients to use photography to express their neighborhoods’ needs in a compelling and powerful way that community leaders can better understand and address. Thanks to funding from the St. Louis Boeing Employees Community Fund, the PhotoVoice Empowerment Initiative was able to supply clients with disposable cameras and photography tutorials, enabling them to tangibly show how health

and prosperity are out of reach in their communities.

The images that resulted from the PhotoVoice Empowerment Project provide a window into the daily challenges that Healthy Start clients face. Their concerns center on safety in their surroundings, and how this issue precludes optimal health for themselves and their families. Too often, their neighborhoods lack access to existing resources. If poverty policies change or new programs are introduced, these barriers to health and safety could be eliminated. PhotoVoice results reveal the impact of economic development on families, and the stark contrast between impoverished areas and neighboring communities.

IMAGES OF NEIGHBORHOOD RISKS:

What needs changing

Through these photographs of their neighborhoods, Healthy Start participants show the health risks and physical dangers they face every day. A major concern is difficulty accessing transportation or local resources. Living in these circumstances often makes participants feel depressed or frustrated.



“...people walk by with their kids... kids like to run up and down the street. They don't even have to do anything. Now, what if they are running by, and they just get hit with a brick, or a big rat comes out...?” – Carolyn



“That’s my old elementary school, and this just shows how they changed the front of it, but the school is really torn down. The windows are messed up, and to see an old school like that makes you feel like ‘Man!’ you wish they would do something about it.”

– Kendra



“The neighborhood... this house is just saying ‘help me!’... It’s dangerous, and when you are walking by at night... you don’t know who’s gonna come outta that gangway... you don’t know who’s gonna come out a grab you. You could kill somebody and put them in there and wouldn’t nobody know...” – Kendra



“Trash. People just don’t care. Nasty. Unsanitary. Unhealthy...
Makes you feel disgusting... think about things before
you do them, don’t be so impulsive.”

– Lisa



“That was where you would go get you a tripe from there... You can't go there and get food no more, tripe, nothing. It closed down, I guess, because they just couldn't keep the business open... Then somebody else came in, and they couldn't keep it open, so I guess nobody else wanted to try to take it over because they kept getting broken into... There's not anyplace for anyone to walk to to get something to eat...” – Kendra



“Everyday movement... rushing to go places, to go to work, or a doctor’s appointment... People be so busy everyday... and a busy worker don’t even realize the significance of what that secretary does for them... people working two three jobs at a time don’t even realize their kids are there...” – Carolyn



“They stole my mom’s car. The door is messed-up where they stole it and they messed-up the transmission. It made me upset, more upset. Because that’s the only transportation that we had.”

—Kendra



“This is an African American woman...with a guitar, sitting at the bus stop. This is Chesterfield... I sense peace...tired...want to get home. People are just passing her by, looking at her. I know, because they be looking at me...It takes me about 3 hours just to get to work. I gotta catch 3 busses, or 2 busses and a train just to get to work...You can get a lot from body language...”

– Carolyn

IMAGES OF PEACE:

What the neighborhood could be

Through these photos, Healthy Start participants voice how they wish their neighborhoods looked. Being in nature, with animals, or just in a clean, safe environment makes participants feel at peace.



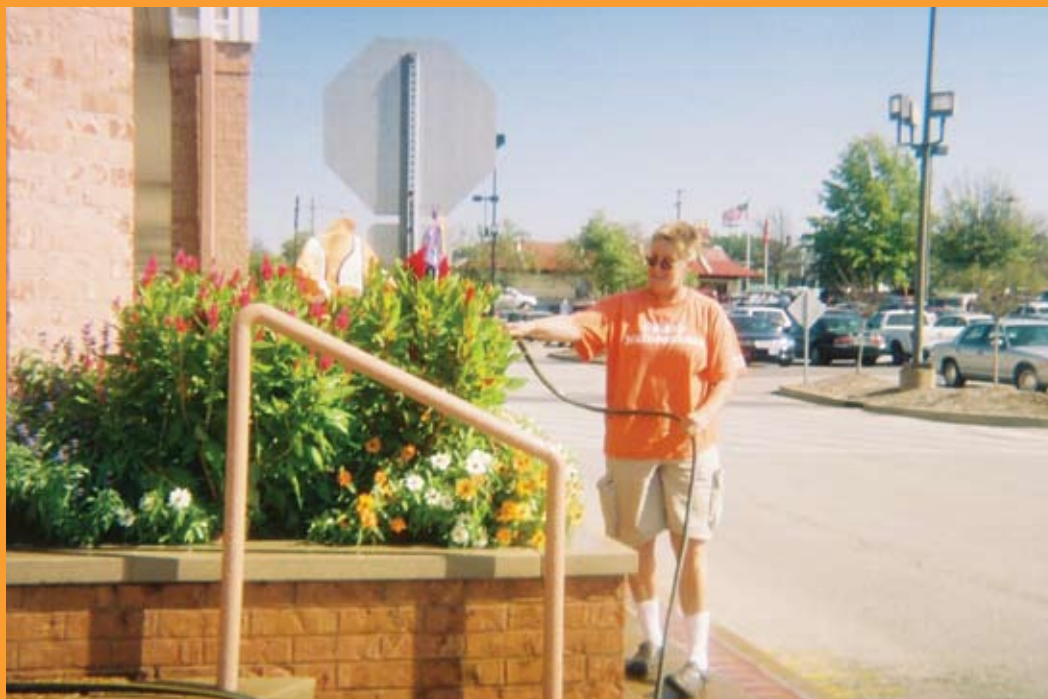
“...no trash!...the comfort of your home, the safety of your home...
This is the scene I would like to see in my neighborhood instead of trash;
bars on my windows and doors to feel safe.”

-Carolyn

“Horses, animals,
building relationships
with animals, that
can make the bonds
stronger with humans.
This represents
freedom. Just look
at him!”

– Lisa





“ This is Clarkson Square Plaza...This signifies peace...She loves flowers...
she enjoys her job...she gave [my son] a pumpkin! ”

– Carolyn



“Peace and happiness. If you pay attention to this picture, it’s like the sky and the ocean. The sun is shining right on me. Peace love and happiness. Content. Cool, calm and collected. You been at work all day, then you’re at home by yourself, and see this...”

– Carolyn

IMAGES OF LOVE:

Sources of comfort and strength

Despite their discouraging surroundings, Healthy Start participants find many sources of joy and courage, especially from the little things in life.

Family, friendships, and strong self-esteem are invaluable.

“Companionship.
Protective, and she’s
there. It’s like she
knows. She’s there
when no one else
is there.”

– Lisa





“In this picture, Terrell’s wife is talking to people in the community about St. Louis Healthy Start and is trying to see if anyone wants to participate. She is helping build a better future for their community by bringing the members of the community together. This photo makes Terrell proud because his wife is trying to help others and is representing their family in a great way with her wonderful work.”



“This photo was taken at a baby shower shortly before the birth of Terrell’s first biological son. For Terrell, this cake signifies the pride of being the father of a son. Many different people from different communities came together to celebrate the birth of a new human, capturing all of the potential and joy that the birth of this little baby has.”



“Taking your children places, and having fun, enjoying the moments you won’t get back. The memories, because when... you get old, that’s all you have is your memories.”

– Lisa



“This is the joy of a baby’s artwork. Peace. You, know art can be anything, it can be a million things, no matter who does it. No matter if it’s scribble-scrabble. It’s still creative... This is in MY room! It’s important for people to see that mothers take pride in the children... This let’s you know that he’s learning...” – Carolyn



“My mother loves me and my children no matter what may happen. I could kill somebody and go to jail, but regardless, I know my mother would still take care of my children. Loving support.”

– Lisa



“Queen. Natural. Just natural beauty. No makeup.
Hair natural. No guns allowed.”

– Lisa

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