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LETTER FROM BC PULSE & MSU

Battle Creek Community Members,

Imagine you were asked to answer the following questions with your camera:

What are your dreams for yourself, your family and your community?

What are your employment goals? What could the community of Battle Creek do to support these goals?

This is the very challenge that ten local residents accepted this fall. These community members, selected because of their important experiences with unemployment and underemployment, were given cameras, some training in photography, and an assignment: Tell your story through photographs.

During a series of facilitated discussions, this group of resident photographers explored the messages and meanings behind their photographs and challenged each other and learned from each other. It is their hope that people viewing their photographs will do the same by taking time to listen, learn, and share their insights with others. We think you will be struck by how the photos and narratives richly illustrate the many differences and similarities between families in Battle Creek.

We appreciate the Photovoice photographers who whole-heartedly participated in this process. Their honesty, insightfulness, and commitment to the community has **increased our understanding** of what it means to be unemployed or underemployed in Battle Creek and **strengthened our resolve to learn more and do more.**

The Battle Creek community has voiced its commitment to addressing the challenges families face related to unemployment and underemployment. The United Way (ALICE* Report), and the Kellogg Company and WK Kellogg Foundation (BC Vision) are all working to explore and support changes that will create a thriving community. This Photovoice project is a complement to those efforts. It allows residents to paint a picture of their aspirations and the challenges they face in reaching those aspirations AND provide recommendations for improving the future for vulnerable families.

We have been inspired by the residents' pledge to take action and move some of their own recommendations forward. We hope you find inspiration as you explore their exhibit and answer the following questions as they relate to your life:

What are your dreams for yourself, your family and your community?

What can you, your family, and the community of Battle Creek do to make these dreams a reality?

Sincerely,

BC Pulse and The System exChange at Michigan State University

**ALICE = Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed*

THIS PROJECT WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY:

THE RESIDENT PHOTOGRAPHERS

MSU METHODS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE CLASS

GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM, CALHOUN AREA CAREER CENTER

INSTRUCTORS: HEIDI LAGROW AND WILLIAM WILSON

THE SYSTEM EXCHANGE AT MSU

BC PULSE

FUNDING FROM THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

WE HAVE DREAMS

▲ WE ARE READY AND WILLING TO WORK NOW!

We have many employment dreams.

"Someday I want to be a manager and help the company grow and succeed."

We are dedicated to working hard in our community.

"I'll prove that I can do something if I put my mind to it. I want to better myself."

We have much to offer the community.

"I would like to do something like mentor young girls."

▲ WE SEE BATTLE CREEK AS A COMMUNITY WITH POTENTIAL

A successful city is one with parks and recreation for safe youth development.

"Parks and recreation are important because they assist with youth development inside and outside our community's classrooms."

We don't just see abandoned buildings; we see the future site of community-owned businesses and resources.

"I see a lot of empty buildings that can be used for activities like after school programs, tutoring centers and homeless shelters."

Our community is making progress – but still has a way to go.

"I care about the city I grew up in, and a lot of change has to happen in this little town. We need a mission to help the community and the families."

▲ WE WANT NO LIMITS TO OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE

Our kids can be anything they want.

"Our children don't understand that they are more powerful than they could ever imagine but they're so scared to get out of the life they've lived so far."

OVERVIEW

This Photovoice Project provided an opportunity for local residents to share the many dreams they have for themselves, their families, and their community. They share the challenges they face in reaching these dreams and provide the audience insight into their ideas about how we can

create a more vibrant community for all. A few of their stories are highlighted below. To fully experience the wisdom, hope and concerns captured by the participants, please be sure to read the stories and view the photos included in this booklet.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHERS:

04 WE HAVE DREAMS

05 BUT WE FACE CHALLENGES...

07 ...SO WE RECOMMEND

...BUT WE FACE CHALLENGES

▲ BATTLE CREEK FEARS CHANGE

"People here don't react well to something different."

▲ STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS WITH FACTORIES

Factories seem to monopolize employment opportunities.

"There's nobody out there pushing for different jobs. They're all pushing for the same thing - factory work."

"What I'm used to doing is not available here in Battle Creek and now I have to find a new path"

We are more than temps!

"My thing is how the factories treat you because of the temp offices. It's easy for them to tell you to hit the door and then just call one of the temp agencies and ask them to send 6 more temps. You can be the best worker there but they'll still tell you "BYE" when you get to 56 or so days of that 60 day probationary period. That way they don't have to pay your insurance..."

Factory work is undesirable to many of us.

"Once you get in [to the factories], if you can get in, it goes from being a Monday through Friday 8 hour shift to 6 days a week, 7 days a week, 10 hours, 12 hours when they're behind...No family life because of those hours and those shifts."

▲ YOU HAVE TO HAVE A "LABEL" TO GET SUPPORT IN BATTLE CREEK

"Why does my child have to have this necessary [negative] label to get some kind of benefit when all I'm saying is hey, I need a little bit of help here? Help me to help my son. Help me to help myself."

▲ WE HAVE GONE AS FAR AS WE CAN GO IN BATTLE CREEK

"When you're unemployed in Battle Creek you feel like you're by yourself. It's just a disconnect from everything and everyone."

▲ WE ARE JUDGED BY OUR WAGES OR DEGREES

Just because I'm not paid enough doesn't mean I'm not making a contribution to the community.

"I might make minimum wage or just over minimum wage but I love my job. I love what I can do. I can make a change in my community, so what if I'm not making \$20 an hour?"

Don't judge us so quickly: we actually have a lot to offer.

"You are judged so quickly. If you don't have a bachelor's or master's degree, you're overlooked regardless of your life experiences."

...NOT OUR CONTRIBUTIONS

▲ THERE ARE FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO BE HEARD BY THOSE WITH POWER

"The people within the community that can make change interpret my voice in their own ways. They hear me but they are not listening to me. My voice doesn't count."

▲ THERE ARE LOW EXPECTATIONS FOR KIDS AND PARENTS

Schools are too quick to label kids as problems.

"My son's teacher kept calling...telling me "Your son's acting up in class." She wouldn't take the time to listen and understand that he struggles with reading... That goes right along with getting to know the kids."

Schools treat students as criminals.

"In our schools, the metal detector is sitting there saying, You don't want to go to school. They are treating kids like criminals They should not have to be putting up with that type of setting. When you produce negativity and show negativity, negativity is going to happen."

Our community doesn't support the diverse potential in our children.

Teachers sometimes forget that parents could be powerful allies

...WE ARE AT A DEAD-END ROAD

SO WE RECOMMEND...

EMPLOYMENT

▲ EXPAND NON-FACTORY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Turn abandoned buildings into community owned businesses and resources.

Embrace diversity in the job market for individuals who have a diverse or unique skill set so they can contribute to the workforce.

▲ RESTRUCTURE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES TO MEET RESIDENT NEEDS

Shift how factories work with local temp agencies and create more opportunities for permanent employment.

Hire residents for the experience they have. Even without an advanced degree they have a lot to offer the workforce.

"You are judged so quickly. If you don't have a bachelor's or master's degree, you're overlooked regardless of your life experiences."

Address the low pay levels in some sectors like childcare and child development positions

EDUCATION

▲ UNDERSTAND/SUPPORT THE INTERSECTION OF SCHOOL & HOME

Support young minds by understanding and addressing the influence of the child's home life on their school performance.

Encourage parents to participate in their children's education at home by asking what tools they need to support learning at home.

Build a structure so teachers begin working with parents to plan for student success.

"Don't label my child. If you need more resources, you talk to the parent. Don't give up on the child, don't get offensive with the parent. We need to be working together."

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

▲ USE SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBCASTS ON TV TO KEEP RESIDENTS INFORMED OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN OUR COMMUNITY

▲ NURTURE & LEVERAGE POTENTIAL IN ALL YOUTH AND ADULTS

Treat all children with the expectation that they can succeed.

Create a community where ALL adults can see their potential and feel valued as community members.

"If you see more, you want more, you will get more and you will keep more. But if you don't have anything to see, if you don't have anything to look forward to, how can you want it?"

Support the positive potential of young people by boosting their self-worth.

▲ EXPAND RECREATIONAL SPACES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

"I just think there should be more playground areas because it helps keep you off the street and gives you somewhere to go."

▲ SHIFT HOW LOCAL LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGE RESIDENTS TO ENSURE THAT RESIDENT VOICE IS ACTUALLY HEARD

▲ CREATE AN EMPOWERING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Schools need to address students' special or unique needs in a supportive manner.

Schools also need to challenge students to succeed, not just push them through the system.

...SO KIDS ARE EQUIPPED FOR THE JOB MARKET AND A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE!



RESIDENT PHOTOGRAPHS & STORIES

Aaron



“ Every child should have the opportunity to experience being in a **safe recreational setting.** ”

▲ AARON'S STORY

This is a photo of Claude Evans Park where I grew up playing basketball. When I would go play basketball there I didn't think about anything else. You're not thinking about your problems, not thinking about whether you're hungry - not until you go home and you're through.

This park helped me enhance my skills on the basketball court which eventually led to several college scholarship offers. They've since built a new baseball stadium in that park with scoreboards, bleachers, and there's a huge playground for kids with 10 basketball courts in full length and they're all fenced in. So it's safe down there.

However, there are times at this park that the courts are pretty much locked down because Battle Creek Central runs a summer league down there. You can't just go on that court. I just think there should be more playground areas because it helps keep you off the street and gives you somewhere to go. I know it allowed me to stay out of trouble and have a lot of fun. You meet other kids and build friendships.

Parks and recreation are important because they assist with youth development inside and outside our community's classrooms. I believe every child should have the opportunity to experience being a child at a safe recreational setting.

▲ I JUST CALL IT LONGEVITY

This little restaurant is Figg's Hamburgers. I frequent it - the burgers are great, it's been there for 26 years, and it's independently owned and operated. That almost says it all right there; it's a little on-the-corner hamburger shop that tons of people go to frequently to grab a burger or barbeque.

I find that a lot of things around here don't last if the community doesn't support them. Think back to the museum that they opened; that's now the Math and Science Center. What a waste of money. When it first opened, everybody was all over it and you got all the out-of-town people coming in. Well the community, the people here in your community of Battle Creek, didn't

really support it. When things like that close, we're talking a museum that was backed by Kellogg, it speaks to the longevity of a little bitty business like Figg's that has been there 26 years strong! He hasn't changed anything about that building in all those years. I mean there are no upgrades to the parking lot, paint or anything. Everything is still the same as it always has been and his patrons throughout the community continue to support him and spend their money there.

Figg's definitely inspires me and I support our community's small businesses. I have the desire to own my own photo studio or sports shop. I could also inspire others to own their own businesses. Instead of going out to the Fort or working for somebody else, start your own business.



“ I have the desire to own **my own photo studio or sports shop.** I could also **inspire others to own their own businesses.** ”

Anesha



▲ ANESHA'S STORY

Nothing is easy. Parenting doesn't come with a handbook. I want to instill in my kids something they can hold on to. Something they can say, "This is what my mom stood for." As a parent, you try to make a difference and try to be a better you for your children.

.....
“Parenting doesn't come with a handbook.”

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

I've got two younger sisters and a younger brother. I'd like to teach them to stay positive, and to stay in school because education gets you farther. Keep progressing for generations. I'm the only graduate in my family. It takes one person to make a change, that's it.

▲ WHEN YOU PRODUCE NEGATIVITY, NEGATIVITY IS GONNA HAPPEN

Everyone has the right to be treated fair. Don't hold anything over anybody's head. That's the only way you are not going to get stuck in the mind frame of negativity. We know there is a lot of violence in the world, but there's a way to go about everything where you don't have to make everybody feel like they're low standard. School should be a safe and secure environment for children. But the adults act like they're scared, so the children think, "Hey, we might as well tear up the school."

Lakeview and Harper Creek Schools don't have security. The kids there don't have to go through that. But in downtown Battle Creek schools, they are just making it seem as though we don't know how to act, that we are low class. They set it up like they feel like our kids are criminals.

.....
“Everyone has the right to be treated fair ... We know there is a lot of violence in the world, but there's a way to go about everything where you don't have to make everybody feel like they're low standard.”

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

In our schools, the metal detector is sitting there saying, "You don't want to go to school. It's not worth the trouble." It's like you're a criminal and you're not even arrested. It's robbing children of their childhood, of their education. They should not have to be putting up with that type of setting. When you produce negativity and show negativity, negativity is going to happen. For me, I already had that mindset when I walked up to the school and saw that metal detector. "Oh yeah, this is where I'm destined to be."

[It's not just the schools that treat us like criminals]. I've got friends that made mistakes when they were teenagers and they got a felony charge. Instead of trying them as a kid, they try them as an adult, throw this on them and ruin them for the rest of their lives. Now the local factory will not hire them, will not let them work.

Edward



“ Instead of tearing down empty buildings, we can **recycle** and **use** them. ”

▲ **ED'S STORY: EMPTY BUILDING TO AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM**

I see a lot of empty buildings that can be used for activities like after-school programs, tutoring centers, and homeless shelters for getting people off the streets during bad weather. That's something we need more of -- tutors and after-school programs to get help for the people who

need it, like people with disabilities. Teachers just push students through instead of actually working with them.

I want to see all empty buildings in Battle Creek filled with after school programs, soup kitchens, and arcades. Instead of tearing down empty buildings, we can recycle and use them.

In high school, there weren't supports for me to get a good education. At KCC, there are tutors and people willing to help you. I want to go to KCC, and I'm going to prove everyone wrong who says I can't do it because I have a learning disability. It's an obstacle, and I'm willing to face this obstacle. You learn from your

failures, and you keep on going. You don't just give up after one person or a group of people says you can't do it, especially when you have a learning disability. Nobody's going to tell me any different; I'll prove that I can do something if I put my mind to it. I want to better myself.

“ I'm going to **prove them wrong.** ”

PHOTOVOICE
Photographers' Insights



In the community, you don't want to be embarrassed or feel like your child is "less than" [because of a learning disability], so you don't talk about it and don't know your resources. I think some parents don't want to label their child as ADHD, so they go along with it; they just give him a stern talking-to or give him some medicine. Let's try to fix it now and lower that pride you have because you didn't birth a machine that's going to be perfect. Let's make them the best person they can be.

My son was in a public school with a failing system and no matter how hard I fought, I didn't get the support of the school, education-wise. He had learning disabilities within the parameters but the school has the deciding factor of whether or not they want to give that support to the child. So if they don't want to allocate those dollars for that child for that program, they don't have to because it's their decision. So I gave up the fight and put him in a charter school. With that school, anybody who deals with him they will pull into a meeting—even the guy that directs traffic in the parking lot, because he is a supportive person in that school to him.

There was this mother who was begging the public school for help to diagnose her child. Finally, she was able to

call the Social Security Administration to get a checkup for her daughter. They diagnosed her and now she gets more income. Why should she have to go that far to get a diagnosis? Now she has to move out of her neighborhood because she makes too much money and doesn't qualify for low-income housing. All to get her daughter diagnosed.

My friend's daughter's teacher sat her down and said "You know, she doesn't listen. I told her to put two beads in my hand and she put four. Sweet as gold, heart beautiful, but smart, I just don't know." Excuse me? What kind of teachers do we have that she would even think that, let alone say it to this mother? These teachers are supposed to be more educated with the tools and technology of today; but I feel like a lot of it is just plain whether or not they care.

The charter schools, they don't want these guys to be held back and passed over. They're placing the teachers where they fit best with the students. They put all these guys together and bring them up together. When you're placed amongst your peers with the same issues, you're more understanding and you're pulling each other up.

Flip



▲ FLIP'S STORY: IT'S ABOUT DEDICATION

I want to make a career distributing fine quality and healthy products in my community. Someday I want to be a manager and help the company grow and succeed. Right now, I'm just stocking boxes, I am a temp, but it could change, instead of just flopping around from job to job. At the car part factory, there's so much stuff in their air, it's hard to breathe, and you're doing the same thing over and over. Where I'm at right now they have me switching around and doing different things.

We distribute to different schools, package up those little milk cartons, sour cream, cream cheese. And you know, you have to make sure that the stuff is good quality

because it's for the well-being of everybody that's going to get it. Children in the schools are going to drink it. So you can't be doing foolish things, you have to make sure the stuff is good quality.

You see, I want to be at work, I want to help. Like my brother. He works the same shift. And since I've been there, that's all everyone talks about. "You look so much like your brother, you work hard just like your brother." So to me, it's about dedication.

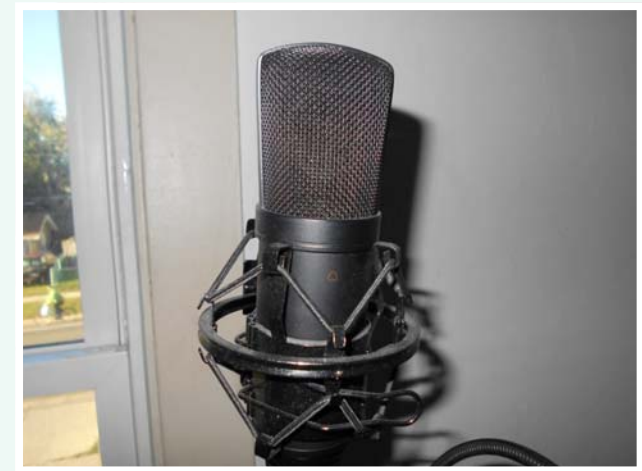
“ I want to make a career distributing fine quality and healthy products in my community. ”

▲ WE NEED A VOICE

This microphone symbolizes a voice for the community, a voice for my family, and a voice for my dreams. We need a voice. We need help. You don't get what you want if you just keep your mouth closed. Closed mouths don't get fed. Voice is what we don't have in this community.

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

There needs to be more encouragement from higher up people for us to have a voice. We need voice. Martin Luther King, Jr. made change with a mic. Presidents start off with a mic; music with a mic. Parents can step up too, but they don't get a mic. We need a mic if we want people to listen.



“ Without a voice what can we do to make this community better? How can we make our schools better? ”

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

We definitely need voice in the school with our children to get them a higher education and not this dumbed down education. To get the kids' brains working and to have them on target you need to give them something worth wanting to learn.

These schools are shutting down parents. As soon as the parents walk in, you get a battle. In my child's education, I have a voice and I let the teachers know that - this what I expect and this is what I will do if we have issues. If you have issues with my child, you're not going to tell me he needs medication. Don't label my child. If you need more resources, you talk to the parent. Don't give up on the child; don't get offensive with the parent. We need to be working together.

Jamie



▲ JAMIE'S STORY

This picture makes me sad because I feel like I'm supposed to be doing something with children. I really feel like God put me on this earth to be helping girls. I feel like there should be more programs that teach them self-help and self-worth; exercises to help them feel worthy, not just of society but worthy of themselves. I would like to do something like that but where would I even begin to get the funding from? I don't have but a handful of peanuts myself but I have a lot of stories and a lot of words of wisdom to give to these girls. What could somebody who has been through the wringer and is still shining like a diamond - what could she tell them?

I would like to talk to the girls and show them what they can do, where they can go before they get in a negative

situation. Let's do this together. But people don't put these girls ahead of the messed up streets and the closed down buildings. It's like they are of lesser importance so they are not going to take them into consideration right now. It's like, after our 16,000 problems we'll fix this one. Just looking from my point of view, all I see are these little girls crying and we could change it.

You know, 2 years ago was the first time I ever saw the ocean, ever. My mom never flew on an airplane. My mom never went a thousand miles out of Michigan. My dad doesn't even have a certificate of completion for junior high, let alone a high school diploma. There are so many people like that here but what do you do about it? Do you just reach out for help? If you do, who will help you?

“ My community is supposed to be outstanding. Well, where are they standing? I don't see them. ”

I felt like this plug because I came from Section 8 vouchers and welfare. My grandmother and also my mother, too. If a woman comes from generations and generations of poverty, low income housing, Section 8 vouchers, and welfare then that is what she knows and that is how she knows how to survive. When you take her out of that, what do you get? Insecurities and fear. It's human nature to fear the unknown. When you get out of your comfort zone, you don't know what to do so you run back.

But then I got out of that shell and I started doing something I thought I was supposed to do: Be in child-care and help other kids. There I could help kids see that they can succeed. You just have to be shown that

you can be the best plug that you can be. But how are you going to know it if you are in a broken down building? If you can't see that you can be a better plug than who else is going to see it?

We need to show young people, old people, children, whoever that they can be great! Start by first fixing yourself, then the community. If you see more, you want more, you will get more and you will keep more. But if you don't have anything to see, if you don't have anything to look forward to, how can you want it?

Let's do what we can do for this plug to put it to the best use. With a little knowledge, and fixing up, there can be more old outlets turned into perfect plugs.

“ Be the Best Plug You Can Be. ”

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights



In Battle Creek there isn't a lot of opportunity as far as employment is concerned. The biggest [opportunity] to do is those factories out there in the Fort. Once you get in, if you can get in, it goes from being a Monday through Friday 8 hour shift to 6 days a week, 7 days a week, 10 hours, 12 hours when they're behind...No family life because of those hours and those shifts. There's going to be no higher up positions unless you're really, really skilled like an electrician.

My thing is how they treat you because of the temp offices. It's easy for them to tell you to hit the door and then just call the [local temp agency], or whoever and ask them to send 6 more temps. You can be the best worker there every day but they'll still tell you "Bye" when you

get to 56 or so days of that 60 day probationary period. That way they don't have to pay your insurance. And then they will call in another 15 or so people and start all over again. It's saving the company money. But I call it slave labor because that's what it is. We'll use you as long as we need you.

I might make minimum wage or just over minimum wage but I love my job. I love what I can do; I can make a change in my community, so what if I'm not making \$20 an hour? Maybe I don't have the best benefits but I love to get up and go to work every morning... I did work out in the factories for 8 years. I've seen the chaos ...and I would never, ever work out there again. And I don't want my kid to do it.



Ginger

community through this Photovoice process that I would have had no idea what they've been through. So many people are so fast to judge you based on one story with one picture and not ask the questions. That infuriates me. We're all grouped together and kind of overlooked. We're not being seen on an individual basis. It's like this picture; it's a face without a face. That's how I feel in my community.

“ The people within the community that can make change interpret my voice in their own ways. They ask for our input, but they are not listening to me! My voice doesn't count. ”

I feel like this picture because I'm active, give my input, and care to take the time to make a change. But I feel I am not listened to, looked at or regarded to have power in my community, to have the ability to make change. I am therefore faceless, voiceless, and powerless in a community that asks for my participation.

“ Turn the knob and open the door of possibilities ”



PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

But people here don't react well to something different. For the most part everyone is satisfied with going to the factories and working. "That's what my father did and his father before him." Why don't we want our kids to go out in the world and see things? You don't have to do what I did: Please don't! Go be your own person. Why are we teaching our kids that they can't express themselves?

pushing for the same thing.; factory work. I cannot do factory work; I won't do factory work. If I'm not heading down those avenues they don't have resources or job leads that could get me a sustainable living wage income job.

We've got buildings downtown that could be used for all sorts of businesses, but their taxes and their rental rates are so high that they've chased out the little man. When you go to a City Commission meeting, the first ones to get tax breaks are the factories. "We're going to give them a tax break because they're going to give more people jobs." But they are only giving more people jobs who now have to work two jobs to equal what they would be paid at a successful \$20-an-hour job.

Great art sculptures welcoming you to our city, leading to an amazing town painted by great imaginations, showing the artistic abilities of our residents. Cereal factories welcoming visitors to learn and explore the possibilities of sparking the imagination. Supporting the creative spark - whether it's to make cereal, be your own boss, have your own bakery. Support the spark of imagination. Embrace and build a better Battle Creek.

Yes Battle Creek is the Cereal Capital of the world, let's embrace and build upon that and make it a place that people want to visit. Kellogg and Post were created from imagination, so let's build from that spark and be innovative, not only in business, but in tourism.

▲ GINGER'S STORY

You look at this picture and there's a story behind this picture and it's for every person. Yet, nobody will stop and take the time to ask about your story. You are judged so quickly. I have learned a lot about others in the

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

I personally have talked to people about the city's issues like the transportation system – it doesn't run late enough to accommodate us. And roads - if you were to walk to work, Raymond Road has no sidewalks. It's a 4 lane, 40 mile-per-hour road where most people drive 60. There have been many fatalities in the last 4 or 5 years on that road.

A simple suggestion: Create a job running a van, making money, getting those people back and forth to work. It could be somebody opening up a small taxi service for

those nighttime shifts. But this option didn't even come to the table. The people in power don't even get the affected group involved in creating the solutions to fix the problems.

Our city, state, and federal officials ask for our voice, but don't listen to us. People running for office make all these promises - but they are never met. They don't make themselves available to us, unless it's beneficial to them. Make it relevant to us, because we care about it, because it's home. We are the people who live here every single day and we have to deal with it.

Laura



“ I want to push my kids, and other kids, to make it in life and go far. ”

▲ LAURA'S STORY: ON THE ROAD

This is a picture from driving down the road as a passenger in a semi. One day, it's going to be me, full-time in a semi. You're moving constantly and you get to see a whole bunch of different sites. It's like being with the kids in the school because when I'm in the school, I'm always moving. I don't sit in one spot very long. With a truck, I'm traveling to cities, I move from state to state.

But right now, I have two children, one in elementary, one in middle school. I want to stay nearby and stay on them with their education. My daughter, she's a straight A student. My son, he's a straight A student, but he has mental problems. He's different. He needs more support than my daughter.

So, it's a toss-up between the two because I love kids, but I also love being on the road. I want to push my kids, and other kids, to make it in life and go far.

▲ KEEP AT IT AND PROGRESS WILL COME

This photo is of my daughter who loves being active and on the go. It represents the dreams and the goals you can achieve if you're going to work for it. You can set a goal, you can set a dream. No dreams or goals are too big to go after.

However, people give up. They don't want to keep pushing forward. Kids nowadays are not looking at the future; they're looking at what they can't do. They're putting themselves down without even trying. Instead, we must support each other in the things that we do, just like when all the family, friends, community come to cheer my daughter on to keep her moving forward.

“ No dreams or goals are too big to go after. ”



PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

People have lost that ground -- just the normal ground rules of life -- whether it is due to poverty, a lack of understanding about where to get help or how to get it, awareness, self-belonging, or just having these kinds of meetings for the sake of collaboration. We need to remember to keep at it and progress will come.

I believe a role model is someone you look up to, someone who inspires you to do what you want to do. If we don't have role models, we either go down our own path or we follow somebody else who we think is a role model. People need to empower each other and children more. It takes a foundation to raise a child.

Monzel



“ I’m trying to make that money and I’m helping out with the community by keeping people safe. ”

▲ MONZEL'S STORY: STOP THE NEGATIVITY

I think people should stop doing negative things, like anything that gets you locked up or killed. People need to perform more to reach their goals. Stop the negativity, you know.

This stop sign reflects a job I got today. I'll finally get to be a man of construction work, working as a traffic man. I'm trying to make that money and I'm helping out with the community by keeping people safe.

▲ A MISSION TO HELP THE COMMUNITY

I care about the city I grew up in, and a lot of change has to happen in this little town. We need a mission to help the community and the families. Negativity can be in the community and the family and really mess up people's lives. A dad could be selling drugs, a kid could be gangbanging because he doesn't have a good mom or dad. This picture really shows how people can come

together, even when people don't really have family. Some people have to go to friends, but friends can be family too. Family can be anybody that's close or that shows help.

I'm a construction worker and help with the roads and stuff, and I see them as family, I'm basically keeping them safe.

“ People can come together ”



PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

If we want to make this community and world better, it all goes back to money and power. They could webcast it in some kind of way on TV and help people know where to go to get the extra help that they're looking for; to point

them in the right direction. People with power have the ability to do things with money. Spend it on the people that need help.

Randy



“ This represents a **community** ready to **put out fires.** ”

▲ RANDY'S STORY: LI'L RED

This represents a community ready to put out fires. For me, working at the school and coaching football is how I put out fires. It may not be my job because I don't get paid for it, but I like doing it.

One thing I've dealt with being a coach is parental support. With kids, parental support is a chain reaction. They may be a great athlete, but if their parents are not sup-

porting them, they're going to do poor in school. A person could go far if they have parental support.

Congress would be something I would be interested in to help put out a lot of fires; you would have a lot of input on things and you would be a step closer to helping a problem. Even within Congress, something has to be done to catch these parents' eyes, because with young folks, when you know where you want to go with your life, you will need support. That support is real big on those people who are there in your life.

“ **Congress** would be something I would be interested in to help **put out a lot of fires.** ”

PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

Sometimes you add to the fire because you let things build and people feed off of negativity. So you have to make sure you're going that right way and not just at a dead-end. It could be you, or the people around you.

The biggest fire is all the violence between children. They want to fight, they want to push. And we need to teach them the right from the wrong. The kids need to be respectful and get along with each other. I think it's got to do with their home lives. They have no parent there

raising them anymore. Sometimes these parents don't come to support their kids for anything. It's like the kids are the parents. So when they come to school, they think they have to fight for themselves, and they don't see the support that they actually have in that setting. It's hard to find people willing to come to work or volunteer at this school, because when you tell them what school you're at or even what city you're in, they're like "No. I know how they are at home, and I'm pretty sure they take all of that to school."

Simone

▲ OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL OUR CHILDREN

This is a picture of my son and his dog, Roco. I just enjoy seeing him outside playing. It's so important for me to experience this; to see kids outside doing something. I want to see more of this, not only for my son, but for my community. I want to see a place where our kids can go outside and play in the yard with the dog and be safe. Not a lot of kids get to do that.

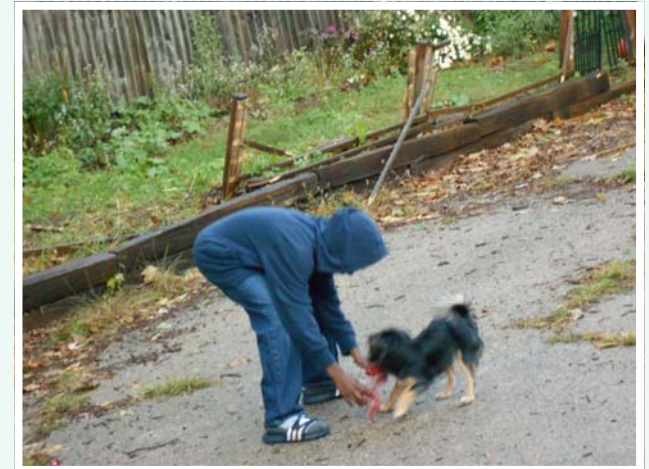
Unfortunately, this is his daily after school activity because the stuff that he's into is not offered in Battle Creek. My son doesn't like basketball, he doesn't like

football, he wants to play chess. Not every Black kid wants to play football or basketball. So as a parent I'm stuck because there's no after school activity that offers that. So I have to proactively try to create it myself in some way because I just want him to have all the opportunities that every child should have.

I just want our kids to have more outlets so they can become whatever they want. I think we stick kids in little boxes. But they have to learn to do different things. As parents or adults we need to ask what they want, not what we think they want. I just want my son to be whatever he can be.

“As parents or adults we need to ask **what they want**, not **what we think they want**. ”

“I'm just trying to **empower myself**. ”



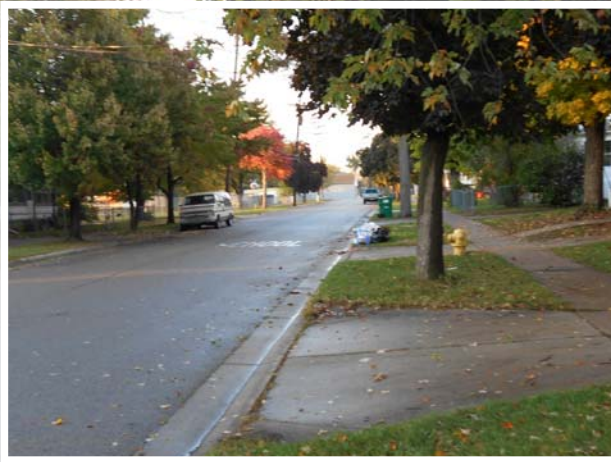
PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

I see a lot of what the schools have been doing. They've been cutting art, they've taken out music. They don't have those outlets for kids anymore and then they wonder why the kids can't sit down in the classroom and focus. There are schools that are doing experimental teaching and the kids are getting more geared up to learn - it is active based learning. Those kids aren't sitting in those seats doing that learning, they're actually up and active and learning. I asked the school here if they could do this - if I got the funding. Could they even do something like use stability balls for the kids to sit at versus regular chairs? But the school said "No". Everybody in the schools here

are closed-minded. They don't want to think outside that box.

It's like when I coach basketball. As a coach, I go towards being a teacher and to me a good teacher has to individually know each one of those students sitting in that classroom, what their weaknesses and strengths are.

My son's teacher kept calling me every day, telling me "Your son's acting up in class." She wouldn't take the time to listen and understand that he struggles with reading. That goes right along with getting to know the kids.



▲ SIMONE'S STORY: THE STREET NO ONE IS ON

I feel like this street a lot of mornings, alone. Being unemployed is not only something that affects me physically, it affects me emotionally. When you're unemployed in Battle Creek you feel like you're by yourself. It's just a disconnect from everything and everyone.

Yeah, we are all in the same situation with unemployment, and someone may be in the same boat with you, but we

all don't have the same struggles. For me, what I'm used to doing is not available here in Battle Creek and now I have to find a new path. I feel like that path is this street - no one is on it and no one is out there to help. So I'm just trying to empower myself and challenge myself to do something different. I have to challenge myself to talk to people, face my fears, and branch out so I don't get stuck in this situation. Even as someone from a big city, it's still scary. No one is out there, I'm just alone.

Toni

▲ WE STAND TOGETHER AS ONE

I volunteer at a school Monday through Friday. I help the teachers make copies of school work, cut out box tops, and other things they need done. I have learned a lot about these students at school. There is a lot that makes them all different, not just your child but all children. I love helping them out.

My friend told me about the job at the school so I went and checked it out. At first, I wasn't sure about it but after talking about the job I said "Yeah, I can help." At first I didn't talk to many people, but with my friend working at the school too, she helped me open up to

everyone. I got to know everybody and started communicating better with the teachers. I started babysitting when I was 9 years old; I love working with children. I have also learned a lot from the children at school.

The teachers are wonderful there. My son attends the same school I work at and they have helped him out a lot. I know I can talk to his teachers and they listen and help if I need it. The staff is there to help and are always greeting you when they see you.



▲ TONI'S STORY: KIDS AT THE PARK

I took this photo because on this day we got to hang out with friends that are like family. The kids love playing at the park. On this day we got to hang out at the park and have fun. We had a great time at the park away from the house. We don't get to hang out with our friends/family

that much anymore. Our friend that we got to hang out with moved to the country so we don't see her or her children that much. So on this day we had an awesome time.

“ On this day, we had an awesome time. ”

“ I LOVE working with children. ”



PHOTOVOICE Photographers' Insights

When I first started working at this same school as a football coach, I didn't know anybody. The staff helped me adjust by just simple things like greeting me every day in the hallway. Now a lot of teachers come to me to help them with students. They feel with me being a Black male, I'm an example, a role model. I try to get the students to open up, and then I find out what's wrong, what's going on. A lot of these kids just want to be heard, they just want their side of the story to be told.

Everybody talks at this school, they communicate with each other, showing that even though we're not teachers,

we're still one of them. It's important to have social support because with support, you carry yourself higher and you want to go further, you don't stop. You start believing in yourself and seeing what you can really do and what you can accomplish. When you don't have that support, you look down on yourself, you don't see the true person you can be. You doubt yourself, you don't believe in yourself at all. So we stand behind one another. We all work at the school, and we stand together as one to be supportive.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

CONTEMPLATE & REFLECT

What photos are particularly meaningful to you because they...



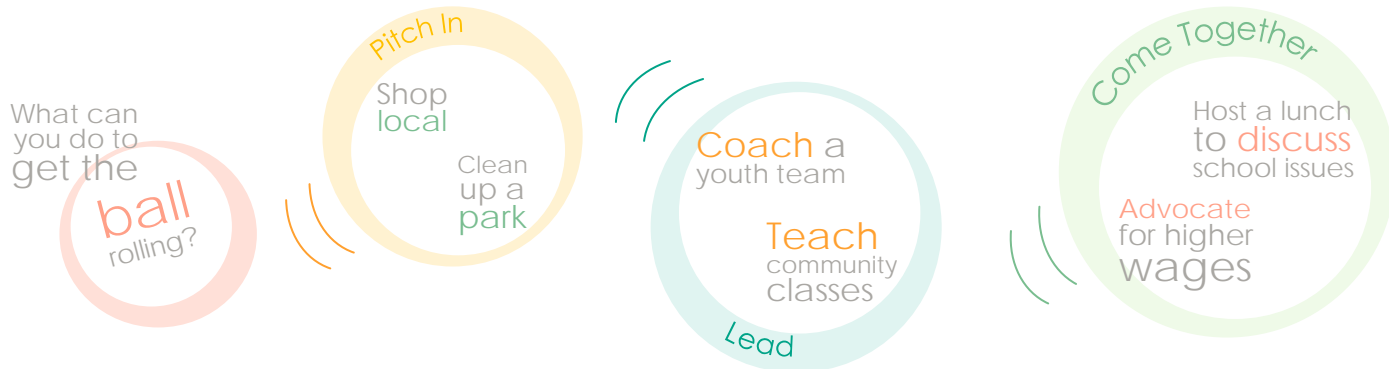
CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Share the photos, stories, and recommendations made by community photographers and included in this booklet. Use these questions as conversation starters with friends, family, community members, clients, and co-workers.



ACT

What are some actions that could be pursued by you as an individual, your organization, and the community?





NOTES