

# **Celebrate Recovery PhotoVoice project evaluation**

## **Miriam Bevis**

This project was held at Mt Druitt Indigenous Church over period of eight weeks from September–December 2008. The project worked with members of the Celebrate Recovery group that meets weekly at the church on Sunday evenings. Its group is made up of people seeking support with their recovery from various addictions as well as some members of the church.

Over the eight weeks the group looked at aspects of their lives using the Tree of Life framework from Narrative Therapy. Each week participants told stories from their own lives and shared these with each other. The topics of photography and the photographs were both used to help facilitate the story telling. Each session different aspects of photography were taught and during the week participants took photographs using these skills and along the different themes from the Tree of Life.

Twelve people participated in the program, consisting of five women and seven men. Ten of the participants were Indigenous. This total included the Indigenous leaders at the church. The group ranged in age from people in their early 20s to people in their late 40s. All the Indigenous participants were parents and some were also grandparents. All participants lived in the local area (Mt Druitt and surrounding suburbs) and some participants also indicated strong ties with other regional areas including Broken Hill, Yarrabah/Cairns, Beaudesert (Sth Qld), NSW South Coast. Themes of place came up in stories over the sessions – these stories of place were spoken of as being important in their health and healing.

The project arose out of conversations with the Indigenous leaders, following two previous projects: Women of the West and Willmot Primary School PhotoVoice project. They were keen to experience the process themselves, to use the Tree of Life with adult groups and to gain further experience with the PhotoVoice methodology. They were also keen to use the method with the Celebrate recovery group as they could see the potential in this setting. The project was supported by BRIDGES ([www.bridges.org.au](http://www.bridges.org.au)) through the use of their cameras, payment of facilitation fees for one of the facilitators and by the provision of one of the counsellors (Viviane Oliveira) who attended some of the sessions. The project was managed by Miriam Bevis and Steve Bevis from Media on the Margins.

## **Outcomes**

The Indigenous leaders expressed their happiness with the outcomes of the project for the individuals involved. They commented that some of the participants had found some of the weeks difficult as it brought up things they needed to deal with – one of the participants in particular had found this helpful and it motivated her to seek further assistance from a counsellor. Other members had sought time with the BRIDGES

counsellor in the session and afterwards to seek help with other issues that had arisen at the time.

The sessions provided the opportunity to tell positive stories that group listened to respectfully. The personal photographic tasks during the week gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their personal, family, community and cultural strengths and to share these with others. Group participants were always willing to share stories and participated freely in these sessions. The group were also interested in the photographic books and displays showcasing the work of prominent Aboriginal Photographers that were used regularly throughout the program.

Stories told during the sessions demonstrated the enormous contribution that group members make to the lives of their family and the broader community. They also indicated how important the church community is to their lives in providing connection and meaning. While many of the participants were dealing with difficult circumstances in some aspects of their lives the Celebrate Recovery group and the broader church was a place where they could contribute in a positive way. The story telling and photographs helped to celebrate this.

One of the final sessions encouraged each participant to think of a photographic project they would like to create if they had no time or resource constraints. The projects listed in this session give insight into aspirations of the group members.

- A set of beautiful photos depicting the beauty of the Mt Druitt area
- A photographic essay of Newpin Centres throughout the world and how these have helped parents
- A series of portraits of all the people at Mt Druitt Indigenous church showing them in their special role at the church (Eg drivers, kids club, Sunday School etc)
- Sunsets and the scenery around Broken Hill
- A portrait of my kids
- A day in the life of one/some of the children who come to the church
- My family
- How people live in India – depicting religious life and the struggles with poverty
- Wildlife
- Photographs of the Elders.

The church now owns a small set of cameras and it is planned that they will continue to use photographs to build a sense of ownership and celebration. The project was able to add variety to the wonderful program supporting the ongoing work of the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church in their Celebrate Recovery Program.

[This document was published at [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/celebrate-recovery-photovoice-project-evaluation.pdf](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/celebrate-recovery-photovoice-project-evaluation.pdf) and is © copyright 2010. To read more about how different people have used the Tree of Life methodology around the world, visit [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html)]