

# Background Research

For the seven weeks prior to arriving in Cape Town, our team conducted background research on topics that would be crucial to our project. The aim of this research was to provide our team with a strong foundation in the range of relevant topics we would encounter once beginning our project. We wanted to be prepared for the multiple directions this project could take once arriving in Cape Town.

Our team began our preparation by familiarizing ourselves with the structure and management of street papers. Then we researched interviewing tips and how to best gather information from people. Finally we explored empowering and participatory methods for sharing stories, which included Participatory Video and PhotoVoice. Follow the links above to read more about our research we conducted on each theme.

## Street Papers



### Introduction – What are Street Papers?

Street papers are newspapers or magazines that are published to be sold by homeless, unemployed, and/or socially marginalized individuals giving them employment opportunities that allow them to take charge of their own lives and advance their careers. The street paper model is self-help driven; vendors essentially become their own bosses by being micro-entrepreneurs who are responsible for their own successes. In this model, vendors buy the newspapers or magazines from their local street paper at half the cover price then sell the paper on the street at full price keeping anything they make. Street papers programs are popular among both developing and developed countries alike. The publications cover mainly topics surrounding homelessness and poverty in the local street papers respective area. Some street

papers even allow vendors to become writers to share their thoughts about issues in their communities.

## **The Modern Street Paper: Giving the Unemployed a Hand Up, Not a Handout**

The street paper movement began in the late 1980's when homeless and unemployed individuals started writing and selling newspapers for a profit. The movement began in some major cities in the United States. The newspaper frequently cited as the first modern street paper was established in 1989 in New York City and was called Street News. Street News published a magazine focused on poverty-related issues and allowed homeless adult vendors to sell the magazine to give them employment opportunities. Because of its success, Street News' methodology became the model for many street papers that exist today.

Many street papers began popping up all over the world in the mid-to-late 1990's. One of these included the world's most popular and well-known street paper, The Big Issue. John Bird and Gordon Roddick founded The Big Issue in 1991 in the United Kingdom in response to the increasing number of homeless people in London. Following the success of The Big Issue in the United Kingdom, the late 1990's and early 2000's saw the expansion of The Big Issue to countries around the world (Harman, 2003). The Big Issue can currently be found in nine countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, Namibia, Kenya, Taiwan, and Malawi.

The Big Issue is a part of an organization called The International Network of Street Papers (INSP). The INSP was founded in 1994 and supports over 120 street papers. These street papers are based in about 40 different countries. The INSP website outlines the purpose of street papers. "Street papers are independent newspapers and magazines that operate on a social enterprise and self-help model to provide an innovative solution to urban homelessness and unemployment." According to INSP, in order to make this model work the people who sell the papers, or vendors, buy the paper from the publisher at half the cover price. They sell it at cover price, so they get 50% of the profits. The profit that the publishers get goes to the publishing of the paper and various other programs the paper organization may offer. The publishers are often non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and are almost always not-for profit (<http://www.street-papers.org>).

Although there has been success with street papers, they have also received some criticism. Some charities and smaller street papers argue that the larger street papers, such as The Big Issue, aren't doing enough for their vendors. Many of the larger street paper organizations hire professional writers to write about pop-culture and big events in the world as opposed to homeless and unemployment issues in hopes that these topics will generate a wider audience, gaining larger sales for vendors and the organization. This has led many individuals, charities, and smaller street papers to argue that the larger papers aren't spreading the right information or

offering appropriate services for the vendors. Messman (1998) argues that this opposition from smaller street papers is an attempt to prevent the expansion of larger papers to their area.

## **Narrowing in: A Brief History of Our Sponsor**

The Big Issue South Africa was first launched in 1997 in response to bullying, illegal treatment of homeless and other vulnerable people on the streets of Cape Town by authorities, including police, traffic authorities, and private security companies. It is modeled after The Big Issue London, founded by John Bird. The dream of the Big Issue South Africa came to life thanks to a small group of people, including Debi Diamond who was well-known to in the homeless community because she ran a soup kitchen from her home in Wynberg.

When The Big Issue South Africa first started, editions came out every 3 months discussing topics of pop-culture and world events written by professional journalists. Today, the issues still cover similar topics, but are released every 3 weeks (21 days). The current total vendor force is roughly 300 individuals, although only about 150 vendors are considered active. A variety of workshops are provided to these vendors to help advance their career and life skills. Topics of these workshops often include strengthening entrepreneurial skills and parenting.

In a special edition of one of the paper, Issue 215 Volume 1, each editor described their view of The Big Issue. The editor from 2007 to 2009, Donald Paul, summarized the essence of the initial mission of The Big Issue: “The Big Issue wanted to help to create awareness of how individuals can contribute to civil society and make a difference, even in a small way, at an urban level – such as buying a copy of a magazine. More of a challenge was to shift that buy from being a ‘grudge’ purchase – done simply to move the vendor away from car window – to a mindset that each one of us can contribute to change.”

The Big Issue’s Vision Statement, provided in every issue of the The Big Issue magazine, is as follows:

The Big Issue is a socially responsible organization that enables willing, unemployed and marginalized adults living in South Africa to take responsibility for their own lives through a developmental educational programme.

The set of the The Big Issue’s Mission Objectives printed in every magazine are outlined in the graphic below.

## Mission Statements



The Big Issue South Africa recently won the 2013 INSP award for an Outstanding Contribution to the International Street Paper Movement. The reasons for this were outlined by the INSP judges saying, “The Big Issue South Africa leads the way for sustainable street paper development on the continent, supports colleagues in other African countries and also supports the development of INSP as an organization” (<http://www.street-papers.org/>). They have been also recognized for their recruitment, retention, and support of their women vendors.

# Interviewing



## Interviewing – In Relation to our Project

In preparation for the interviews of The Big Issue Vendors, we had to research the best questions to ask. We had to overcome reserved vendors and a language barrier. Our questions had to be easily translatable and also very insightful in order to get useful information that helped portray who the vendors are. We did this by focusing on the high and low points of the vendors lives, asking them deeper questions without diving too deep, so that they remained comfortable with us. Luckily many of the vendors understood our project and wanted to get their stories heard. They provided us with many details and gave us guidance on what was acceptable to go online and what was off the record. “The Life Story Interview” written by Dan McAdams (2008) was a guide that helped us through this whole process.

## Interviewing Tips – Learning How to Interview

In the article “The Life Story Interview”, McAdams explains that when a person is talking about their life, it should be thought of as if it were a book. The focus should be on a key scene that occurred in an individual’s life. The scene should stand out for either a good or bad reason. It should be vivid, important, and memorable. The scene must be explained in grave detail, such as who was involved, and what was the storyteller thinking and feeling. A main point about this moment that needs to be explained is why it was important to their life.

Key scenes to focus on are high and low points in a person’s life. For the low point the interviewee should explain why this point was so bad. Sometimes a person may not want to share their lowest point; in these instances, they can be invited to share a bad experience. Whenever they do share any low point, they should also share a turning point in their life.

The interviewee should include memories, such as positive childhood memories, negative childhood memories, and vivid adult memories. When they finish talking about the memory they should discuss how this has affected them as a person. Challenges are also an important topic to bring up, including challenges related to health, loss, failure, or regret. The main outcome should show how the interviewee handled and grew from that challenge.

It is good to have the interviewee discuss where they see themselves in the future; their dreams, hopes and plans for the future. If the interviewee has goals, the interviewer must learn whether that is something they have been working to finish or just a challenge they want to overcome.

The interviewer is responsible for finding a theme between the stories the interviewee shares. This will help in the reflection of the interview. Reflection is good for the interviewee so that they can process all they have shared and leave the interview feeling empowered by the fact they let others into their life (McAdams, 2008).

## **Participatory Video**



### **Participatory Video – In Relation to our Project**

In our prep phase our team believed that participatory video would be a huge aspect in our project. We created a preliminary plan for how we could incorporate this process into our project and how we could use it with our vendors. Our original plan was to create a documentary to allow vendors to express themselves and to have the opportunity to tell their stories. Upon arriving at The Big Issue, however, it became evident that a documentary was not a sustainable way for vendors to continuously express themselves. Our sponsor expressed that she was interested in creating an online platform where vendors could upload content about themselves. This website platform would be a sustainable way for the vendors to express themselves. We determined that creating videos about all the vendors to put on the website would not be

practical, due to the limited resources at The Big Issue. These limited resources included the lack of personal to edit the videos and access to camera equipment.

Although participatory video was not used in the same way as we originally thought, we still wanted to use some of the aspects of this participatory progress in our project. We found that teaching the vendors how to use the cameras proved to be an excellent and fun ice-breaking activity. It allowed them to open up, become more comfortable with each other, ask each other questions, and be exposed to technology that they may have never been exposed to before. When we then sat down to interview them one-on-one in front of a camera to share their stories, we found that they easily opened up which was very exciting.

## **How Participatory Video Works**

In Nick and Chris Lunch's handbook "Insight into Participatory Video" (2006), participatory video is defined as a filming technique that uses a first person point of view. It is less focused on the quality and appearance of the video, but more on what a person is trying to say. Participatory video is a great technique to use to involve a group or community in the creation of their own film. The main focus of this process is to allow the community to take charge to explore and hopefully solve their own problems. Participants learn how to use video equipment and how to identify important issues in the community. They then take part in planning, filming, and compiling the video into a product that tells the message they want to get across. During this process, daily screenings are held to allow the participants to see their videography progress and gather feedback from others so they can become better and exchange ideas with each other. The final product is often shared with other communities to encourage them to try their own. Participatory video is a great tool to use because it gives communities the ability to document their experiences, needs and hopes through their own perspective. This personal insight would not be as easily captured or displayed by an outside team and empowers the communities to take charge in expressing themselves (Lunch and Lunch, 2006).

Participatory videos have also been used to provide therapy for the mentally ill or disempowered. It gives the disempowered a way to have their voices heard and gives them the confidence boost many so greatly need. Participatory video is a powerful tool in the fact that it can capture people's experiences, needs and hopes from their own perspectives. It advocates for creativity within and beyond a community. This method of storytelling provides the participant with a face when it is not normally heard or seen.

Participatory video is a way for a community to take action and advance itself in innovation. ([www.insightshare.org](http://www.insightshare.org)).

## Breaking Down Participatory Video

The following is an explanation of a 12-day participatory project that was developed by “Insightshare.org” with farmers from six sub-Saharan African countries. The project was broken into basic stages. A visual graphic of the process is also provided below, along with basic descriptions of each stage. Read a full participatory video manual and case study.



Graphic adapted from [www.insightshare.org](http://www.insightshare.org) report “Participatory Video with Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

### Skills Development

In this stage, the participants learn basic video skills and it typically lasts for about four (4) days. This helps them gain confidence when using a camera and when being in front of a camera. This stage also emphasizes effective teamwork and discusses how to plan a project.

### Analyzing/ prioritizing/ planning

This stage focuses on supporting participants so that they are prepared to investigate and analyze issues in their community. The facilitator defines the space for the group to brainstorm topics worth discussing, deepen their understanding of varying opinions, and find focus on the aim for



the video. A storyboard or map is also created with the participants. This stage typically lasts between one (1) and two (2) days.

## **Video production**

Using the storyboard and plan, the team gathers the desired footage they need to complete the video in this stage. This footage can include interviews, dramas and statements, even demonstrations of local practices and images of the environment. Between each recording session the team re-watches the footage and review plans for the next day while incorporating suggestions which is an important learning process. This stage typically lasts between three (3) and four (4) days.

## **Post-production**

In this two (2) day stage, the participants and facilitators watched all footage obtained. The desired edits are either drawn or written on note cards and then those cards are ordered the way the participants want the story to be told. The facilitators edit using computers connected to projectors to allow the group to follow along and be the directors.

## **Local screenings & Dissemination**

Once the video is finished, a screening is organized and the community is invited to watch and discuss it. After this screening additional material can be added to the video and an evaluation of the project will be given to the participants. If this project is to be sustained, next steps should be discussed. This may even include creating a new participatory video or inspiring another community to create one ([www.insightshare.org](http://www.insightshare.org)).

# PhotoVoice



## PhotoVoice – In Relation to our Project

PhotoVoice is a participatory program that allows participants to take photos and relay information through voice recordings that are embedded in the photo. Through the development of the vendor website platform, PhotoVoice continued to become a larger aspect to our project. Our liaison, Trudy Vlok, was extremely interested in having vendors upload pictures onto the website instead of videos because it would be more feasible for them to get pictures. The goal for each vendor would be to have weekly submissions of photos with voice recordings embedded into each photo. The recordings would be to inform potential buyers of the events the vendor has experienced in the past week. After the vendors uploaded their pictures for that submission they would do a voice-over explaining either why they took that picture or an event that happened in their life that week. It is the job of the vendor to bring in pictures when it is time and find a way to take those pictures. We wrestled with the idea of buying disposable cameras; but that was too much of an expense for The Big Issue and our project budget could not cover it. We started practicing PhotoVoice with a small mentor group in closed meetings to introduce the idea and begin teaching the concepts to the vendors. The mentors are then going to teach other vendors about PhotoVoice.

## How PhotoVoice Works

PhotoVoice is described as a technique used in capturing data for research and other interview type projects by Viv Brunsden and Jeff Goatcher in *Reconfiguring Photovoice for Psychological Research* (2007). The participants are supplied with a camera and are free to take pictures of anything that has meaning to them. These photos allow the participants to document their life experiences and feelings better than words are able to express. The participants have control over how their lives are documented and represented, and these photos become expressions of their life experiences. These photos aid in creating an open discussion between the participants and the

researchers, because they encourage free talk and allow the participant to have control of the interview direction. The joining of photos and text offers great insight into understanding the world of the participant. PhotoVoice is a useful tool because the photos act as data that will lead to verbal exchange through discussions of the photos taken.

## **Benefits of PhotoVoice**

PhotoVoice aids greatly in expressing the emotions of the participant. It is sometimes difficult to express emotions through words, because people can be guarded and leave out important topics when discussing their lives. It is sometimes difficult to have a person be completely comfortable sharing experiences that are painful. However, through photographs, one can observe how emotions are expressed externally, making it possible to engage in the emotional world of others. PhotoVoice is also helpful in aiding the ease of anxiety for participants. Having to hold a camera and decide what to take a picture of helps to capture the full attention of participants who might struggle in a normal interview setting. The use of photography also makes participating in research fun and engaging because it has a creative, hands-on aspect to it (Brunsden and Goatcher, 2007).

## **PhotoVoice Example**

There is an example available on the website.