

# P2P PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

In 1992, Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris started the first Photovoice project. Today it is implemented worldwide. Photovoice is a participatory method, meaning it's a "process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique." This storytelling method combines photos with narratives to tell participants' stories.

The P2P Photovoice project was created by three students who participated in the University of Michigan's Peer-to-Peer Depression Awareness (P2P) program and were all members of its high school advisory board. The goals of the P2P program are to 1) educate middle and high school students about depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, and 2) support them in finding creative ways to convey this knowledge to their peers in order to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and encourage help-seeking when needed. The participants met five times over three months at the University of Michigan Depression Center.

During the first two sessions, the students discussed possible themes for their project. Ultimately, they decided to focus the project around mental health overall. By keeping the theme broad, the students were able to delve into topics ranging from stigma to experience with mental health, to the unique role peers play in help-seeking. Over the following three sessions, the students shared their photos and stories among each other. This process culminated in the exhibit on display today.

Each participant learned the power of Photovoice to spark discussions around mental health. We invite you to share in the discussion through this Photovoice exhibit and encourage you to continue the conversation in your life.

When viewing the exhibit, we suggest you look at the photo first to make your own interpretation and then read the narrative by the photographer.



PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: CAROLINE THOMAS, TESS CARICHNER & NAOMI ALVARADO

# MEET THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

## CAROLINE THOMAS

Caroline is a sophomore at Pioneer High School. She is a member of their Peer to Peer program and this will be her third year doing P2P. Caroline has enjoyed taking part in the Photovoice Project and showing mental health issues through photography. She also likes to sing, swim and read.

## TESS CARICHNER

Tess is a Saline High School junior. She co-founded and leads Minding Your Mind Matters, a mental health awareness club. Tess has been involved in U of M Peer 2 Peer Depression Awareness since her freshman year. Tess studies piano at U of M PPLP, runs cross country/track, and sings. She is excited to show a different perspective of mental health to the world through art.

## NAOMI ALVARADO

Naomi is currently a senior at Washtenaw International High School. She is very passionate about mental health awareness, as evident in her 3 years of participation in P2P. Some of her interests include: playing the saxophone, French, Spanish, and chemistry. Naomi plans to carry on her passion of mental health awareness in college.





# HOPE

The peonies are in the process of “dying.” The stark contrast of color is beautiful. The “alive” part of the flower is still drooping. Some white petals have already fallen to the ground. However, the leaves are still strong and green. One may think the white part of the flower is prettier and one may see the brown part as more beautiful. Defining the “good” and the “bad” is based on perspective. To me, the leaves represent the fact that, just because someone struggles, their whole life isn’t over. There is still good. There are still green, unturned leaves in life. The green leaves are a sign of hope, even for a struggling plant. Just like this plant, we too will rise and make our own comeback. There are people who love and care for you. There is hope.

TESS CARICHNER





# HUMAN

A bag of trash is laying on the curb across the street. While walking down the streets of a big city at night, it can be hard to tell if a lump on the other side of the street is a bag of trash ready for pickup or if it's a homeless person struggling to stay warm in an old sleeping bag. The mental health crisis in the homeless community is often ignored. The ideology of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" is all too often an excuse to not address the epidemic. Instead of helping this community and respecting their humanity, the homeless are treated like garbage. Although, many people with mental illness are left behind, the most forgotten are the homeless. On any given night, more than half a million people in the USA will experience homelessness. In places like New York City, Portland, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Boston, and Philadelphia homelessness has not decreased with a better economy. These cities range anywhere from 5,000-10,000 people who are homeless. Why is this considered normal?

TESS CARICHNER





# LOST TIME

Timeframes: childhood, adolescence, college years, old age. Some people with mental illnesses, who struggled during these pivotal periods in their lives, feel as though they have lost time. The lyrics, “I wonder what it was like to be 11,” in the song UNO by Rex Orange County describes this feeling. People do not take certain age groups seriously when it comes to mental health. Recognizing the intersectionality of age and health is integral to fixing this problem. Focusing on preserving the childhoods of kids with mental illnesses, while addressing them with respect, is crucial.

TESS CARICHNER





# ON DISPLAY

Something is being exploited and put on display so that others can examine and form their own opinion without in-depth information. Patients, particularly those whose existence and sanity are constantly questioned, may feel just like these jars, recognized by only a name, date, and number. This name could be their diagnosis. The date could be a date of relapse, a date that a person began or ended therapy, or a date that they were admitted to inpatient care. Hospitals stress that patients are people, not numbers. However, due to the flawed healthcare system, many people feel identified only by their “number.” People living with or without formal diagnoses may feel certain aspects of their personality or being (such as gender, race, sexuality, dis/ability, class, religion, or mental health status) are the only aspects that others consider when identifying them. Surface characteristics can be taken out of context, misunderstood, and thus create a blurred or obstructed view of someone. Instead of society recognizing their whole being, society often only recognizes their mental illness. Dig deeper than the surface. Challenge social stigmas surrounding mental health.

TESS CARICHNER





# HALLWAY

I come from a big family, and with this comes a lot of competition. This picture was taken in the hallway of my house where all of my siblings' awards are placed. Previously, I would always look at these awards and compare myself to my other siblings, and I have always compared myself to others in life as well. I would always believe that my life was not as good as another person because 'I am not doing as good as them.' Yet, when we start to question these thoughts that enter our brains, and realize that no one can be compared to one another, our mental health can dramatically improve. I wanted this photo to look sad at first, but have sunlight peeking in to show that we can always change our outlook on life, even if it seems impossible.

NAOMI ALVARADO





# BIKE OUTSIDE

One big symptom of depression is losing interest in things that were once important to you. This bike in the picture has not been used for awhile, as you can see from the many vines wrapped around it. I wanted the picture to capture how something that can easily go unnoticed in your backyard, may actually be a warning sign for an individual who is suffering with depression. I believe as a family member, a friend, a sister, a brother, it is our job to check up on those around us. Make sure your loved ones are in a good mental space, and if they are not, be their support system.

NAOMI ALVARADO





# TREES IN THE FOREST

After my freshman year in high school I decided to go to a band camp. Every day when we would go to class I would always walk by these trees in the morning. I decided on the last day to take a picture of this scenery since looking at it always reminds me of the good memories of this camp. One thing that I love about this place is it pushed me outside of my comfort zone. Previous to this experience I was a lot more shy and did not open up well to others due to my anxiety. However, when leaving this camp I learned that there are always treatments to mental illnesses even if at first it seems impossible. I believe everyone should be pushed outside of their comfort zones, as it is the only way to grow as a person.

NAOMI ALVARADO



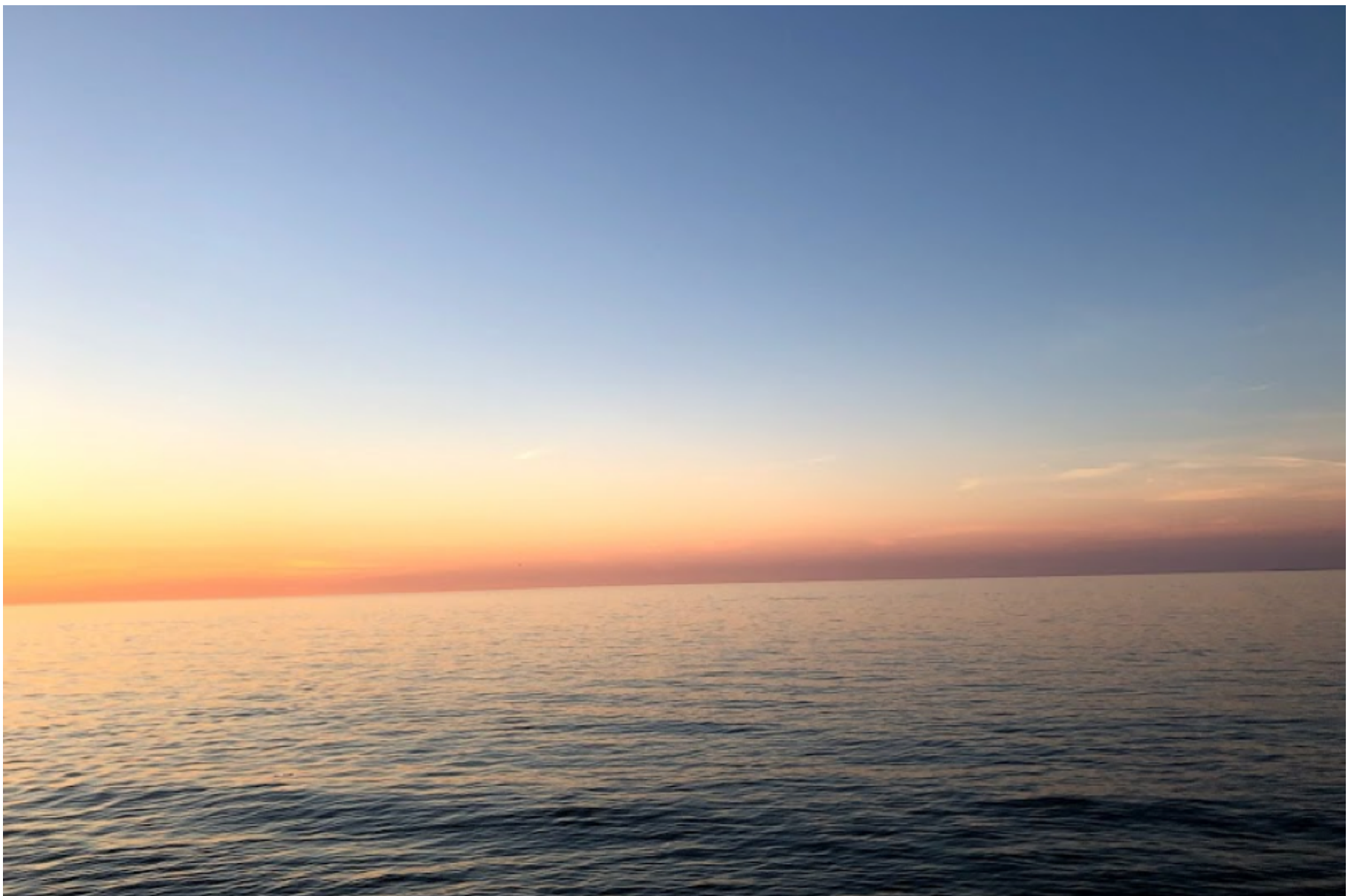


# LIGHT HITTING BOOKS

A major thing that helps me cope with mental illness is knowing I am not alone. I think a big way I realized this was through reading books in which characters were facing similar problems to my own life. This picture represents how the media portrays mental illnesses, and how it is important we do not abuse this platform. When those with mental health issues are exposed to others that struggle through similar problems, they are more likely to reach out for help. I think everyone should know that they are not alone with mental health issues they have.

NAOMI ALVARADO





# SUNSET ON THE LAKE

I have been swimming since I was very young. I love going to a lake and hanging out with my friends and swimming, which is when I feel very peaceful and content. Swimming helps me clear my mind and I always feel good afterwards mentally and physically. This lake represents how I feel when I am relaxed or in my happy place (any body of water). I feel calm and at peace with myself and the world. I feel that a big part of having good mental health is taking care of yourself and doing things that make you happy, which for me is swimming. Taking care of not just our physical health, but also our mental health is very important and having this calm feeling as portrayed by the lake is something that all of us need to take the time to get.

CAROLINE THOMAS



# PARTLY CLOUDY

One of the hardest parts of mental illness is getting help and reaching out. Like the clouds in this photo, recovering has many layers. It is a long journey with the end goal of feeling happier and better about yourself and others, like the sun peeking out of the clouds. The sun represents the end goal of recovery, but also that there is always light at the end of the tunnel, or light in the darkness. Even when it seems like nothing is going right in your life, there is always someone that cares about you or something that helps you feel better. Recovery with mental illnesses is a long and hard journey, and there will be obstacles, but there are people that are there to help you find the light in your life throughout the darkness.

CAROLINE THOMAS





# FROSTED WINDOW

Depression and anxiety can make someone feel disconnected from the world, as though they can't see or think clearly. It feels like you are looking through a blurred lens and your mind is somewhat foggy. Even though you may be somewhere physically, it is hard to feel that you are there mentally. Doing things like going to school and talking to friends seems nearly impossible and getting through the day is very difficult. Having this feeling can make doing simple tasks seem very hard, which is something important to remember when helping others.

CAROLINE THOMAS





# GRUMPY CAT

One aspect of depression that some people tend to forget about is irritation. Having people constantly coming up to you and asking if you are feeling better or if you need anything can get annoying. Some days all you want is to be left alone and for people to stop hovering over you thinking that they can instantly make things better. Understanding that people want to be left alone is an important concept to grasp. Telling someone that you are there for them if they need something or just being there as a supportive friend is much more powerful than trying to fix their problems. We all need our downtime and everyone deserves a break when they need it, so respecting that is very important and helpful.

CAROLINE THOMAS