Mapping Our Voices for Equality:
Stories for healthier policies, systems, and environments in King County, Washington

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Article Summary:
This article describes an innovative, grassroots approach to health equity through the use of mapping digital stories in King County, Washington.

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Screenshot of MOVE website, www.mappingvoices.org
INTRODUCTION:

“...the numbers are part of it, but without stories and without events like this ... you can’t make a decision that’s good for the individual, the community, or the city.”

Seattle City Councilor at the ID on the MOVE community forum, October 2011

The complexity of the causes of chronic disease requires solutions that are creative, flexible, and culturally appropriate. This manuscript explores the use of one potential tool to support policies, systems, and environmental changes to combat the factors influencing health disparities: digital stories - a new media tool that harnesses the power of personal narrative and uses it to promote civic action and health equity. Digital stories are short, autobiographical narratives where media novices weave together audio, photos, short video clips, and music in a participatory media production process. This research describes how residents in some of the neighborhoods hardest hit by chronic disease in King County, Washington, became engaged in their community and were able to change local policies using digital stories through an innovative strategy called Mapping Our Voices for Equality, or MOVE.

PARTICIPANTS:

Mapping Our Voices for Equality, or MOVE, received federal funding via Public Health – Seattle & King County’s Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) initiative. Original MOVE partners included four community-based agencies: Sea Mar and International Community Health Services, community health clinics; Entre Hermanos, a non-profit serving the Latino LGBTQ community; and Creative Narrations, a small multimedia training company. Additional partners later joined the MOVE team, including Seattle-King County Public Health’s Let’s Do This campaign and the MetroCenter YMCA. MOVE partners facilitated the production of over 100 digital stories in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Vietnamese. Storytellers ranged in age from high school students to senior citizens, and with very few exceptions, none of the storytellers had experience working with multimedia or video.

METHODOLOGY:

MOVE’s approach to digital story production was grounded in a dual purpose: the process of producing stories was a means to encourage civic participation and media literacy among King County residents most profoundly impacted by health disparities; and the digital stories as essential tools for local organizations to harness support to create change.

Initially, MOVE leadership trained staff at partner organizations with competency to work with Chinese, Vietnamese, Latino, LGBTQ, and Caucasian populations to be trainers in digital story production. MOVE’s staff took a flexible approach to story production, leading workshops for groups of community members or working one-on-one with storytellers.

As a component of the MOVE project, partner organizations worked with a web developer to create an interactive digital story map and library (www.mappingvoices.org). The map interface with digital stories, photographs, and other videos embedded at physical locations strengthened the story’s sense of place and allowed viewers to browse stories by neighborhood.

Central to MOVE’s dissemination strategy was a series of community forums. Each partner organization hosted at least one forum as a means to engage the story producers with key audiences: peers and decision-makers using the power of stories to foster policy, systems and environmental change.
RESULTS:

Audiences Reached

Between the launch of the [www.mappingvoices.org](http://www.mappingvoices.org) website on October 20th, 2011 and September 18th, 2012:

- [www.mappingvoices.org](http://www.mappingvoices.org) received 7,583 visits by 4,554 unique visitors.
- The digital stories have been viewed 6,147 times.
- An estimated 4,000 additional individuals have viewed the website and stories in group settings.
- 85 storytellers have taken part, of which 75 were linguistic or racial minorities.
- 51 organizations throughout King County have participated.
- Two health clinics in underserved King County neighborhoods have piloted kiosks with MOVE stories in clinic waiting rooms.

Policies, Systems, and Environmental Changes Achieved:

MOVE has also created a successful model for using stories in community forums to push for policy change. According to Group Health’s Center for Community Evaluation and a Master’s thesis from University of Washington’s School of Public Health, the collaborative has achieved multiple policy, systems and environmental changes within its first nine months (Group Health Cooperative’s Center for Community Evaluation, 2012; Benson, 2012):

- **Restoration of ten open hours at the International District Community Center**: After attending MOVE’s launch forum in October, 2011 where digital stories were presented by community residents to advocate for access to physical activity, the Seattle City Council reversed its decision to cut twenty hours to the International District Community Center. This provides community members 40% more access than the original plan to reduce service hours. See the story that influenced the City Council at [http://www.mappingvoices.org/story/video/our-communitys-center](http://www.mappingvoices.org/story/video/our-communitys-center) and case study below for complete discussion.
- **New mobile Produce Stand to open in South Park**: A small business owner decided to open a mobile produce stand in South Park (locally known as a “food desert”) as a result of attending the MOVE forum there. According to Stockbox owner Carrie Ferrence, “Attending the MOVE forum in South Park was the tipping point for us in deciding to open up our first store in this neighborhood.” At the forum, community residents, parents, and local leaders gathered and viewed stories like Paulina’s, [We are What We Eat](http://mappingvoices.org/story/video/you-are-what-you-eat), to discuss ways to improve access to healthy food. See Paulina’s Story at [http://mappingvoices.org/story/video/you-are-what-you-eat](http://mappingvoices.org/story/video/you-are-what-you-eat)
- **Tobacco Related Policy Changes**: The 2012 WA State Legislature restored funding to the WA State Quitline, following devastating cuts that obliterated the entire program. Restoring the Quit line, particularly the Spanish-language line, was a specific target of the tobacco MOVE community mobilization. In additional, a low-income housing property manager is considering making the complex tobacco free as a result of MOVE’s work.
- **Change in School Nutrition Policies**: Following the MOVE forum at the Concord International Elementary School, parents and teachers came together to discuss strategies to ensure better nutrition and access to physical activity at the school. In the summer of 2012, the school adopted both a “healthy celebrations” and Recess Before Lunch policies, both of which have been demonstrated to result in less food waste and improved classroom performance.
The Chinatown/International District has the lowest green-space per capita of any neighborhood in Seattle. The ICHS MOVE team identified access to physical activity as a policy priority in 2010. When the 2011 proposed City budget slated a reduction from forty-five to twenty-five hours per week for the Chinatown-International District Community Center, MOVE staff sprang into action by identifying Center users with compelling stories. MOVE’s ICHS trainer worked with youth from Wilderness Inner-city Leadership Development (WILD) to interview a resident of the International District and active senior citizen member of the I.D./Chinatown Community Center and to help her create a digital story (view story here).

ICHS and the local community development authority jointly held the first MOVE forum on October, 2011 titled "ID (International District) on the MOVE." Over 100 community members attended as well as four City Council members and the Director of Recreation for Seattle’s Department of Parks and Recreation. The storyteller and local youth stood in front of the crowd to present their digital story, eloquently explaining the role of the Community Center in providing physical activity and a social space to the neighborhood’s seniors.

The forum provided a framework to view health in the broader community context and to see how policies and environments impact the health of communities. As a city council member commented, “Well, you know, there are numbers, and there are statistics when you start talking about a budget. But what is not told often, is how those numbers affect lives … What do the community centers actually do? And, when you hear about what people are going through and how community centers actually affect them, it puts the numbers to shame, because you realize these are good investments. That’s the power of the story.”

A month after the forum, the City Council announced their final, revised budget which reinstated ten of the hours slated to be cut, providing the storyteller and other community members with 40% more access than the original plan.

DISCUSSION:
In summary, we believe that the MOVE model can address health inequities at multiple levels. At the individual level, digital story producers engage with new technology and become community leaders, speaking out publicly in front of peers and local officials to reduce health disparities. At the institutional level, community based organizations increase their capacity to communicate through digital media, to organize community forums, and to advocate on their own behalf. At the neighborhood level, the entire community benefits through policy, systems and environment (PSE) changes and the knowledge that their collective efforts brought about change. This belief is confirmed by the evaluation of MOVE’s preliminary evaluation results, “While PSE change
is a longer-term outcome, MOVE has successfully demonstrated that increased organizational capacity, understanding of health inequities, and creating new leaders to get others involved, can start an important conversations in diverse communities.” (Center for Community Health, 2012)

As seen through efforts in Seattle’s International District, and supported by initial evaluation results, digital storytelling can be an effective strategy to educate and engage community members to create sustainable policy, system, and environmental change to reduce health inequities. More efforts need to incorporate this relatively new tool of digital stories to better understand the capabilities for education, civic engagement, and as a tool for health promotion.
REFERENCES


The Center for Community Health and Evaluation (2012) King County Communities Putting Prevention to Work: Grantee Evaluation Report, Seattle, WA, US.


