

## Hope

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A growing number of aging homeless women are looking for shelter and struggling to construct a sense of valued life and self (Gonyea and Melekis, 2016). The design process for the “Hope” garment engages underprivileged women in a co-creative design experience. The goal of this collaborative involvement was to inspire and positively impact the self-confidence of these women through use of their creativity in a designed garment. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997) enhancing creativity through exploration and discovery may consequently improve well-being. Specifically, Prescott et al. (2008) found a strong correlation between art making activities and life achievements of the homeless. The participants in this co-creative design experience imagined design ideas through a series of accessible creative activities. This process also builds on design research such as “The Peoples’ Print” by Melanie Bowles and Emma Neuberg in which textile design utilizes participatory design to empower consumers through direct involvement in the design and making process.

After IRB approval, three women participating in a social enterprise job-training program at a local shelter were invited to participate in this collaboration. The goal of this program is to instill self-confidence and hope for women in poverty aspiring to improve their economic condition. Therefore, inspiration for the design in this project came from exploring the word “Hope” as part of the main mission for the participants in this program. Collectively the group started by creating a word map that would help drive the silhouette, color, print and detailing. The participants created unique color palettes with paint chips and hand drawn symbols to represent the word hope. Common themes were light colors, flowers and hearts. The participants’ floral sketches were combined together to create an original print for the textile design of the garment. On a later date, the participants were provided with a half scale dress form and basic heart shapes to experiment with draping. A series of illustrated ideas in a variety of colors were created based on the participants’ collaborative draping and print design. Collectively the group examined the ideas and all agreed on the best design to represent the word “Hope”. During the discussion one participant commented about the design selection, “It was amazing that we all agreed on one pattern and color. We put in a lot of our own ideas.”

The design consists of a digitally printed wrap skirt on silk crepe de chine with a silk top created from 2 heart shaped pattern pieces and layered with a silk heart shaped wrap shawl. The three heart shaped pattern pieces were used to represent the three women participating. A floral motif from the participants’ sketches was cut out in silk organza and layered as an open applique on the top. The design process was documented through a series of photos. One participant positively responded about the uniqueness of this process by saying, “I have never been a part of

this kind of experience before!” Upon completion of the design, the simple pattern pieces were given to the women to further explore and modify to create new items for their training program shop at a local marketplace. A visual poster that illustrates the design process and final garment will be displayed at the shelter for a short time as continued inspiration for the participants. One participant had this to say about the “Hope” garment, “This lifted my spirit to a whole new level. I would tell all my friends about this experience.”

Findings from this design process contribute to the growing research of positive co-creative experiences. Furthermore, this design process identifies opportunities to use creative design experiences to positively impact populations that have had to overcome significant struggles. While this collaboration was limited to three participants, each participant responded with optimism and felt valued in the process. This could have implications for shelters to add art-making activities that aim to raise the spirits of their occupants by valuing their creativity and cultivating their imagination in ways that bring meaning to their lives.

#### References

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