

## ***Making the Invisible Visible:***

### **A Black Elders Photovoice Project**

This Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) project features stories of older Black adults through photography and video, highlighting their contributions to Maine's economic, political, cultural, and educational life. By raising their voices and images of resilience, the project fosters community, strengthens intergenerational connections, and encourages change.

Participants share their own and others' histories, visions of hope passed down through generations, and meaningful connections as they describe their experiences of "aging while Black" in Maine.

Project Leaders were Bates College Professor Emerita and convener of the Black Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) Elders Group Leslie Hill; Kathy Vezina, MCOA's Equity & Healthy Aging Initiative manager; and Genius Black, videographer and project facilitator.

The Photovoice Project took place over a span of more than six months. We started by recruiting interested participants. At the group's initial meeting we offered details about the process; sought input on the project goals; discussed the obligations and benefits of participation; engaged in more community-building activities; reviewed ethical and safety issues; and shared tips for skillful photo-taking. The participants then embarked into the world to take their pictures.

These questions served as a framework for creative inspiration:

- ❖ **What does it mean to you to be black and aging in Maine?**
- ❖ **In what ways do you feel invisible in your day-to-day life?**
- ❖ **In what ways do you feel your community is unseen?**
- ❖ **What can be done to make Black Elders (more) visible in Maine?**

After a few weeks, the group came together again to share their photos and stories about what those images meant to them. They reviewed all the photos and decided which to include in the storyboard presentation. Participants discussed the themes

highlighted in the photos and some of the commonalities in their reflections on aging as Black Elders.

Finally, we held the Inaugural Sharing Event on January 28, 2025, at the Portland Media Center to bring together family, friends, and funders for a celebration and sharing of participants' photos stories, and a short video documenting the process. One audience member reflected: "I am so thankful and inspired. The food was amazing, the stories were impactful, and the connectivity and heartfulness in the room/ project was palpable. I am so thankful I got to be here tonight. I'm moved to pieces."

In a final meeting with participants we sought feedback, collected evaluation data, heard input on their experiences of the project, and received recommendations for future Photovoice projects with older adults in other marginalized communities.

The BIPoC Elders group, supported by the Maine Council on Aging, offered the inspiration for engaging Black older adults to produce this photo-storytelling display. The BIPoC Elders Group is ongoing and open to BIPoC Elders, and other BIPoC community members interested in connecting with Elders. The group is led by Leslie Hill and meets monthly, alternating between online and in-person gatherings at various locations in Portland, Brunswick, and Lewiston. For more information, contact Leslie, [lhill@bates.edu](mailto:lhill@bates.edu), or MCOA Equity & Healthy Aging Manager, Kathy Vezina [kvezina@mainecouncilonaging.org](mailto:kvezina@mainecouncilonaging.org).