

Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project

Participant 200: David

Interview conducted by Yannai Kranzler, November 2020

Transcribed by War Talley on June 2, 2021

0:00-01:49

Interviewer: Alright, so, yeah, how's it going this morning?

P: Umm, this morning it's—it's, ya know it's going excellent. Before—this morning we woke up—we always pray in the morning. Every morning we listen to Joel Osteen when I wake up. We—you know Joel Osteen right?

I: Yeah!

P: We listen to Joel Osteen and you know we talk about it and we pray, ya know, and—and—and we thank God for—for the day and ya know for people and people—even the—even the people who hurt us we pray for them, ya know, and—and—and—and—and to bless us and those less fortunate than us. Ya know, we—we not holier than thou but—without God you got nothin', you know what I'm sayin? People always sayin, 'aww you always put God—" you gotta put God in everything! 'Cause that's what—(inaudible 0:34) crazy as the world is today if you don't got God to me you don't really have too much, ya know? And he works! Ya know, regardless of what we goin' through he—he—he brings us out. It might not look like everything is—ya know—it look (sic) like sometime everything fallin' apart and he—you talk to him and—and you just be patient and he come through. You go through it. Ya know, you still gone have your problem but you—he bring (sic) you through it, ya know? So—I, I just love the Lord, ya know, with all my heart. I really—I try to—you know—that's the only thing keep us together. And we don't argue—people be like, 'why y'all never argue?'—we do argue but not like, you know, every day and all day and all like you see people—we don't get into that. We talk. We ask God to—you know—to—to—you know, to uhh, bring us together as one and—and—and, you know, to make the problems disappear and we try to help other people more than, you know, us. Wherever we go we try to help others, you know. I get a blessing by, you know—you get a blessing by what you doin'—helpin' others! You know what I'm s—I get more joy outta just walkin' and helpin' people to—ya know, people don't have—I'm homeless too! But I still help the homeless, you know? I still—

I: Yeah! What—what are some ways that you're able to help?

P: Umm, whatever! I go like—whenever they give out free stuff I go and gets (sic) extra stuff to give out, ya know, people I know that can't walk, or got one leg, or, ya know, can't hear—whatever, I know they in a place where they can't get to the—to the clothes, I'll get it and I'll go give it to them. Ya know—

I: Uh-huh.

01:49-03:17

P: And I—they really appreciate that.

I: Yeah, I'm sure they do.

P: And I got people always asking me for stuff like I got clothes—they think I got—that's not new. Everything I—Bridges give us so much out there it's—ya know--Bridges gave me my boots, coats I got, I got some much stuff from Bridges every—I be signing, umm, a form and they'll give you clothes and everything and—and—and it's like—I—I gets more than I'm supposed to have because I give out and—and ya know, but Bridges, they really be helpin' with a lot, ya know.

I: Yeah.

P: They umm, before I—before I (inaudible 02:15) living on the streets we took showers there every mo—every day we was takin' shower there, going there. Ya know, at certain time they give you a shower, they give you food—that's before you could sit in, you would eat, sleep in there. Ya know, for a while. Get rest. (inaudible 02:28) be tired. Before corona came out. Ya know you can't do that now. But before corona came out that was like every day thing (sic). Now we look forward to going to Bridges, ya know, to take a shower and—and get to get a meal and—and some rest. You know so, I really miss doin' that.

I: You miss doing that.

P: They got us in a shelter. They got me in a shelter now, so, ya know, blessed to be in a shelter—even though the shelter's crazy but it's—it's still a blessin' to be off the ground.

I: Yeah, ca—

P: We stayed in the train station three years—well not in the train sta—ya know, underground, outside under the tunnel. We stayed (inaudible 02:59) me and her. And she didn't wanna go and I wanted to go and I had to talk (sic) her to goin' in!

I: [laughing]

P: 'Cause the shelter so bad, she didn't wanna, you know, she didn't wanna go in and I was ready, I was like, 'come on, let's go in, please. I don't wanna be out here.' 'I ain't goin in there!' so I stayed out for a little longer but she got tired one day and said, 'Imma try it' and—it worked. It worked out.

I: It worked. It worked out.

03:17-04:56

P: First we went to Bridges and Bridges helped her out, ya know. We went to [location name]—you know [location name] umm, umm on William Street? We went to [location name] that's over there and then, you know, they got a lot of connections—resources. Bridges has a lot of resources. And umm, they sent us to a place and they helped us get in a shelter. Ya know, and—and—and—and food and everything. And umm, overnight they just—they just do—they do a lot for the community. Everybody talks about Bridges. Everybody, you know, knows about Bridges. I ain't know about 'em for a couple of years. And they was (sic) helpin' me with housin'—but she got her housin' before me. I don't know how. I been filled out for housin', but you know, God works in his own mysterious ways. So she got hers and I'm still waitin' for mine though.

I: Sure.

P: You know, with Bridges, they—you know, I filled out everything and I'm just waitin'.

I: You're just waiting. How—how'd you—how'd you guys meet?

P: Uhh [pause] in the train station.

I: In the train station.

P: We was homeless! She—I was homeless and she was homeless. Ya know, we aint start talkin—I startin' sayin' 'come on with me to McDonald's, you know I only had a few dollars—

I: Uh-huh.

P: (inaudible 04:14) a burger and we started talkin'. Every day we kept going to McDonald's for a burger and you know, we was friends first before we, you know, started dating--goin' together. We just—you know (inaudible 04:24). She was homeless—I—I don't know how she got homeless, 'cause I was homeless from just life itself. So many bad breaks. So many things happen. I never came up with my mother and father, they had passed when I was younger, but I never used that as an excuse to—for my downfall, you know. I just—I just keep goin', you know? I been to prison before, ya know. Jail, ya know, but [pause] I—I overcame it. I came up. I overcame it. I just, ya know.

I: You overcame it.

P: I kept goin'. Kept goin'. Just kept goin'. I ain't—everything ain't perfect, but man it's gettin' better and better. Look it, she just got a blessing—

04:56-06:33

I: Yeah.

P: That only God could've done. We prayed on that today! We pray every day on that! (inaudible 05:02) It's like—it's like everything is happening so—so fast—and she got—I ain't gone say it. God blessed her with like—she didn't even know it. Went to [location redacted] one day and they gave her seventeen thousand dollars. Seventeen thousand.

I: Wow.

P: So—'cause she got her back-money from social security

I: Uh-huh, uh-huh, oh, it's back-money from social security, okay.

P: Yeah, she still got money. She still got thirteen thousand—let's keep that down—but she still got thirteen left.

I: Yup!

P: You know, so when she get (sic) the apartment she can put her furniture and stuff in there and everything. You know! God is good! That's what I'm sayin', that's a blessing! She didn't even know it was comin'! She just went there and got mail one day and like—I thought she was lyin'. She called me 'I got a check for seven-seventeen thousand.' I'm like, 'You got the numbers wrong! You ain't got no seventeen thousand dollars!'

I: [laughing]

P: 'That's probably one thousand, maybe—ain't no seventeen thousand dollars!' Man, she said, 'that's what it say.' I looked at it, I said, 'Man, bae they sent the wrong check.' We both kept saying—

I: [laughing]

P: We kept sayin, 'Man you gotta cash this check. They sent you the wrong check!' and she called and them and everything and they said, 'Yeah, that's her back-money,' she—back-money that she didn't even knew she had. But that's how God is. You know, we like, 'oh, what? God blessed you like that with seventeen thousand dollars.' I'm like, 'Out of nowhere!' You know, I was like, [exhaling] Man.' And—and she still got the money put up. You know, she got fourteen thousand, still put up. We was waitin' for her to get a apartment to get furniture and things we need. You know, grandsons, ya know, bless them and family, we all family, but he's good, ya know? And all that came through Bridges 'cause her mail come to Bridges. My mail goes there too. We don't really have a place for it to go, but you know, it's safe there. That's one thing good too about Bridges. It's safe. The mail is safe. Everything is safe there.

06:33-07:50

You know, you don't have to worry about nothin'. I got my birth certificate. They did my umm—it took me like six months to get it, but they got my birth certificate for me. My umm, social security card, everything! It's all there! All my—I have a new ID. They got it. If I want it, I go there and get it. You know, they know who I am and everything and they safe. I don't have to worry about losing it—they stole it before, from the train station, but, Bridges got it all back for me, ya know. And they got us a free ID from Motor Vehicle. Ya know, they—they good. They help you out. They gave us some type of paper, we went there, and they gave both of us a free ID for uhh, Motor Vehicle—you know you gotta have that ID, right?

I: Yup!

P: From New Jersey—

I: Absolutely.

P: The New Jersey, umm, ID. Not just a regular ID, New Jersey they give you the real one that, you know, you go to the bank and get a—open a bank account and all that. Not one of them phony ID's, but uhh—they do—aww man Bridges so good, I'm tellin' you.

I: Uhh, that's incredible. Hey!

P: Yeah.

I: I have a—I have a question for ya!

P: Uh-huh, I'm listenin'.

I: So we're—we're doing this project, like we're trying to gather just kinda, like stories from these last, ya know, six-seven-eight months.

P: Uh-huh.

I: Is there any like, ya know, I don't know, like one night from the last seven-eight months either that was especially hard—

P: Uh-huh

I: Or that something just kinda, extraordinary happened, umm, something that just kinda sticks out in your mind from this last period, that you'd wanna—that you'd wanna share? Story you'd wanna tell?

07:50-08:43

P: Yeah, umm what sticks out is that umm [pause] I just told you that we went to Bridges and got seventeen thousand dollars! (inaudible 07:58) more than that!

I: [laughing] Yeah, yeah, yeah!

P: That was amazing! We walked in there—just walked in there and umm, you know, and it was a check waitin' for us.

I: It was a check waiting for you.

P: And we just couldn't believe it!

I: I can imagine.

P: I mean, you know, it—it—it might not sound like that but that's—that's good money boss!

I: It sure does.

P: We're homeless and we still homeless! We didn't—we didn't go try to go find a apartment or nothin' we waited because we was waitin' on Bridges to do that for that! Why spend that money on a apartment when they gone help you get—

I: Yeah, yeah!

P: Ya know, your section 8 and everything. We—and we still wouldn't've had nothin' after we would've got the apartment it would've been like, 'Now what we gone do after that money run out?' Right?

I: Mmhmm.

P: 'Now they helped you with, you know, with uhh, section 8 and you—they only pay a certain-a-money, you pay a certain-a-money. So, we—we did that. That's—that's about the most thing—I mean—

I: I hear ya!

P: Unless you wanna hear somethin' bad happen now! If you wanna hear something bad we got plenty of bad stories!

I: [laughing]

08:44-09:59

P: You know, we out in the cold, in the snow, we slept—man, we—we—we slept in a box but like under the—under the—under the bridge. We just got off the ground recently though! We ain't been off the ground but maybe like two months. We just got (inaudible 08:55) maybe like three, but ninety days we just got off the ground after three years.

I: Uh-huh. You just got off—

P: Just getting' off the ground. Yeah, we just—we just gettin' on our feet. Not gettin'—yeah we can say gettin' on our feet. We just gettin' on our feet after—ninety—after three years out there, ninety days, we—we just got—we just got back in the shelter.

I: And what's—what's it like to be able to be together through all of this?

P: Aww, man it's beautiful. It's like, ya know, people—'cause people always bettin'—ya know, me and her been out here in the streets, so people bettin' that we, ya know, we fall apart. You know how people do, [snicker] Man, they not gone be together!" We been together three years, so we all—everybody in the same circle. Goin' (inaudible 09:28) and [location redacted], got the train station and downtown. So everybody see each other so they bettin' that, "Man, they ain't gone be together, they just somethin', ya know, just a fling or (inaudible 09:38)' it's been like four years, almost.

I: [laughing] Yeah. What's—what's your secret?

P: And people still seriously—they never see us argue—we don't argue! We—me and you talk, we talk just like the same way!

I: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

P: You know—I don't, you know—I'm me and we talk, we give each other freedom, ya know.

I: You give each other freedom.

P: And space! You gotta have space!

I: And space.

P: 'Cause you can't try to—ya, know, I don't try to tell her what she can do and she can't do. You gotta be free!

I: Uh-huh.

09:59-11:45

P: You know, to be who you are in a couple, you have to be free. I'm tryin' to like, be like, 'Yo! Be who you are! You don't have to like, you know, we gone respect each other, ya know. But you still got to be free.' You gotta have space. I might be like, 'Bae, yeah gone head do your own thing. I'm just goin' out here, now you gone enjoy yourself and think, ya know, go to the park'—whatever! You just need that day for yourself, know what I'm sayin'?

I: Yup!

P: Everybody needs that. And it's not that I don't care or nothin', ya know, I'm just lettin' you do what you do. Just breathe, ya know? We don't have to be down each other throat all the time. (inaudible 10:27) It's just life has been good, I'm just praying that this corona thing is like—I just want to live for a little more longer and enjoy grandkids and stuff before anything happen. 'Cause it just seem like with this corona thing—it's kind of scary but we not really scared 'cause when it's time to go, it's time to go.

I: When it's time to go, it's time to go.

P: You know God gone take you whether, you know, you good or bad. Everybody, the same. The just and the unjust. So, we just wanna enjoy a little bit of life and that's about it, you know. Before—before somethin' happen. Before somethin' bad happens, 'cause (inaudible 10:59).

I: Sure. Absolutely. I mean it sounds—sounds like you've—you've got a lot to live for.

P: Right now we do 'cause God been blessin' us! I'm not been doin' anything special, but he's just been, ya know—praying! I been prayin' a lot though. People always say 'you talk about God a lot,' but I have to. It's just that, he gets the glory, ya know? And without him we wouldn't be—we wouldn't be able to be together. Nobody respect (sic) anybody or know anything. Know what I mean?

I: Yup!

P: God has the highest form of knowledge. I mean, people don't believe it, but it's like the highest form of knowledge and I get all my knowledge from the bible, we use the bible a lot and to me that's the highest form of knowledge. It give (sic) you discipline, it gives you, uhh, you know—you—you—you learn to be patient. You learn a lot, you know, so.

I: I hear ya. Learn to be patient. Mmhmm.

11:45-13:45

P: And without that, ya know? But Bridges helped us lot and everything—everything—I they stay open—nothin' ever happen (sic) where they ever have to like shut down, ya know, for the community—they do a lot for the community. They really does (sic) a lot for the community. I mean a lot! Everybody goes to Bridges. Everybody out here goes to Bridges!

I: Everybody out here goes to [location redacted].

P: You ask about Bridges—'Oh yeah, Bridges help me'—everybody.

I: Yup!

P: You never get nobody say anything bad about Bridges. And they go out on the weekends, they got the big white truck, you can go up there by the church on umm, I forgot what streets is that up there, but they out every weekend, they at the train station, they there givin' clothes, food, ya know, they helped the—I mean, (inaudible 12:23)—even people that's not homeless, they'll help, ya know, 'cause they out there grabbin', you know. And uhh, it's actually a beautiful thing that you got a organization like that out here to help people, you know? 'Cause it ain't t too many out here that—and they're really concerned. They really got—they're genuine (sic) concerned about people and helpin'. You see what she did—nobody could've did (sic) that for us. They took time out to make sure that she got a place and they did it for other people, not just her. But I've seen other people they kept sayin, 'Aww when we gone—when you gonna?'—we gone—we gone—we gotta wait! They just can't do it just like that! It's gonna happen! And now it's happenin'! You know what I'm sayin'? It's comin'! It's right there! 'Cause we had to be patient! Ya know, and let the people work, not sweatin' them and botherin' them cussin' them out when things don't go—'Aww y'all made—ain't doin'! No. Be patient and wait 'til it happen (sic) and it happens. Now I'm gonna—I am gonna let people know, 'You know what? Look what Bridges did for us.' They not gonna believe it, but it's about to happen. 'Aww y'all ain't gettin' no place!' The people seen us pushin' the cart. We used to push a cart! Both of us had a cart out here for years! Pushin' a cart! They know us! "Look at two carts. They never nothin'—never nothin' gonna happen!"

I: [laughing]

P: We had a cart out here—two carts, we pushin'! Cold! Everybody know (sic) us. She had two carts at one time! I had a cart! We had a baby stroller! Man, all through here for years! Everybody know us! 'Aye, look at them two. They ain't never gone be nothin', they bums!' But God raisin' us. Now—now they gonna see us with a apartment.

I: Yup

13:45-15:37

P: They gone be like 'Y'all got an apartment?' Like, yeah, Bridges got us an apartment. 'You mean them two that was kept pushin' the carriage all up through (inaudible 13:51)?' We used to park it right here every day. We parked our carriage there. And—and nobody never steal it 'cause they know it wasn't nothin' but junk. They don't—aww them—man, we'd leave our carriage anywhere even though we had good stuff in there, but nobody wouldn't take it 'cause they thinkin', 'Aww it's just some junk!' You know, we had our personal stuff. To us it was good stuff, to them it might've been junk but that's all we had and we parked it right there every day. Nobody never bothered it. But they know us from pushin' the carriage. And now, next year, look at us. God is raising us! He's like, givin' us an apartment now, ya know? And she got it, but, ya know, I'm sayin' us. We—we say us, you know.

I: Aww, sounds like you guys are there for each other.

P: Yeah, we are. We are. You know four years we been together. Out here on the streets. Slept on the ground—we just got off the ground after four years out here sleepin'. We been sat right there and begged every day. Right here and sat, you know—

I: This is your spot.

P: I hold this door a lot of days. This [location redacted], 'Can you help me out with some change?' Right here (inaudible 14:41). You know I been—man, all up through here, you know? Beggin' and (inaudible 14:47). I was just like him. But you see this guy right here? (inaudible 14:50) I was like that.

I: Mmhmm—you guys crossin' here?

P: Yeah, we goin' right over to catch the bus here—God, ya know, he—he does that. He just kept us strong. Ya know, and Bridges helped us a lot. We kept goin' there every day. I'm out here on the streets. We still homeless and we still goin' to Bridges right now—you see we still goin'. We haven't stopped! Ya know, the still (inaudible 15:08) started a application for some clothes. They gone get us a coat and some boots and stuff, ya know. Honestly, this shit, it been good, ya know? Real good.

I: I hear you. I hear you.

P: It's like a come up now. Ya know, you only can be down for so long and—and—and if you keep tryin', you gonna come up. But you gotta keep—you can't give up, you know? No matter how bad it look and sometime it look like we never was gone come—we didn't know what we was gone do. Every way we wake up, 'What we gone do?'

I: Yeah.

15:37-17:42

P: Ya know, but we stayed together and we—and we kept pushin’—kept pushin’ the carriage and kept goin’ to Bridges and kept tryin’ to use the resources that’s—that’s out here and, you know, and it—and it happened.

I: Yeah. Yup! No, I hear ya! I mean sounds like you’ve got [pause] just like a lot of—

P: Yeah, all these people out here know us! They know us from pushin’ the carriage—

I: Everybody knows you guys from pushing the carriage.

P: Pushin’ our carriage. She pushin’ the cart and I’m pushin’ the carriage and we got a lot of clothes in it for years! And we parked it right here on this corner.

I: You parked it right here on this corner.

P: Right here, over there across the street because the spot where—you know the police was right there too so they ain’t gone, you know, they didn’t say nothin’ ‘cause we had it neatly there, sittin’ there though, but—‘cause we had—couldn’t push that everywhere. He really had to go try to get welfare, go get stamps and stuff—you know, we had to take care of business too! They never took that stuff so we left it right there in the open. Everybody knew it was junk, so they don’t mess with it but, we did it. God is good and there’s—there’s still a lot more to go. Ya know, Bridges (inaudible 16:33) they been helpin’ me. You know what I’m sayin’? God is good and, you know, I thank him for that grace man. I hope nothin’ never go wrong where they have to shut down because they are very, very helpful, ya know? In all ways they helpful. Any way you, ya know. If I’m tellin; you from my book they helpful. Everybody out here know about [location redacted], you know, but—

I: No, I mean, they—they do sound pretty incredible, but I mean you guys too—just like these years just kinda stickin—stickin it out together and—

P: Yeah, we had—we had to. Nobody else out here (inaudible 17:05), Everybody want something, ya know?

I: Yeah, I hear you.

P: We stayed humble and—and—and ya know, we stayed out of trouble. We never stolen, robbed, or none of that stuff. We just waited. Ya know, we knew it was gone come we just kept bein’, ya know, humble. We asked God to help us and he—he—he he took a while but it’s happenin’. Every day it’s happenin’. Better and better. (inaudible 17:28) better. Truly better! And we thank Bridges for that, ya know? (inaudible 17:31) talk to ‘em and stuff like that, you know? God is good. Yeah, umm, we getting’ ready to get on this bus right. See our bus at right here?

17:42-18:55

I: Yup, no here's your stop.

P: We get on the twenty-four to go up to the—to the—to the umm, we go up to program up on umm Elizabeth Avenue, we go up there.

I: Yeah. Yeah. How's—how's the program over there? How's the (inaudible 17:50) program?

P: It's—it's alright, yeah, it's alright.

I: Good (inaudible 17:51)?

P: Yeah, it's good, it's good.

I: You have to go there every day?

P: Yeah, we gotta go there every day, yeah. We on the MAT, you know, MAT program.

I: Uh-huh.

P: So, you know, we on drugs, you know. We gotta try to get off that, you know. So we still strugglin' with that—well, not the drugs but getting' off it. But the program, you know, it keeps you where you don't have to (inaudible 18:09) keep buyin' drugs and stuff. But you know, we went through the whole thing—when you homeless you go through all that, you know. You get caught out here and everything. So, you know, we strugglin' with that (inaudible 18:18) get off that and everything. But God is good, you know. (inaudible 18:22) goin' out to the meth program, and get a little drink and—and pray that, you know, we about to be off that. You know, so that's another struggle. We still in the struggle!

I: Still in the struggle.

P: Yeah, we still in the struggle.

I: You guys are in it together.

P: Right, after four years it's been good. We don't argue and all that stuff—we do but not, you know you would believe. Not every day not all like that but we good. God is good.

I: Oh, I hear you my friend. I mean it's—it's really, really generous of you just to kind of spend some time

P: Oh it's gettin' better! We be happy! Man, we so happy today, it's like, push me! We got the apartment, we got—

18:55-20:46

I: [laughing] Yeah!

P: You gotta say you got it, you know! We only got the voucher but you gone turn it into a apartment. Turn the voucher into an apartment.

I: That's the—that's the next step.

P: And—and—and—and see we believe that we have to say that we are done. If we don't say that we're done—we don't force the word out there in the air—God says, say you got it, you know? Walk—walk like you got it. Act like you got it and you'll have it. If you walk like I don't have nothin', 'Aww man we ain't got nothin'. It ain't gone happen. Nothin's gone happen.' So we have to like, put out there like, 'Oh, it's done and it's there!' You know, 'We got our apartment!' even though we don't have nothin' we have to say we got it. We have to like, you know, put the spirit out there! Good spirit! You know? We can't 'Aww nah, man, ain't nothin' gone happen'—that's what's gone happen! We gotta even—we just gotta stay strong when it—when it look bad. We try to stay motivated, you know, and keep it goin'. God is good. Just like you came and blessed us with that—it's not about that but it's about [pause] life but it's still a blessin. It's still a blessin'. Blessin's come—I wasn't looking forward to this—this is a blessin' (inaudible 19:54), you know? God is good. And I thank you for taking your time out and—and you know, listenin' and it feels good just talk about, you know? Bein' here to talk about it 'cause I seen a lot of people go out here too. A lot of people died. Don't make it through the winter, you know, don't want to go inside—they stay outside—you know, they freeze up, man. During the winter time you at least got to stay (inaudible 20:15) to get a lot of blankets and, you know, cardboard (inaudible 20:18) so it won't freeze up into the cardboard. Cardboard, umm, sheets, blankets and (inaudible 20:24). And we make it through. God bring us through it. Ya know (inaudible 20:28) like now, winter comin'. But we inside now, we in the umm, we in the shelter and that's it. [pause] Ok, we gone go.

I: Yeah!

P: I'm great though.

I: Here you go my friend.

P: Thank you. God bless, bruh. I appreciate you comin' down. I genuinely thank you.

I: Aww, you too! Sir, I really appreciate it. Both of you guys!

P: Alright, thank you! God bless!

I: Thank you so much! Bye-bye!

P: Alright, no doubt! Alright, thank you!