

Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project
Participant 199: Kevin
Interview conducted by Yannai Kranzler, September 2020
Transcribed by War Talley on June 1, 2021

00:00-02:15

Interviewer: So it sounds Kevin, sorta like, you know, you would hope that as a result of this project folks are able to reach out and provide you guys with some support. So like, what—what is—what does support look like from—from your perspective?

P: Well, uhh, when I speak about support, ya know, somebody that's (sic) have a heart, ya know, that'll hear the story that we're talking about, ya know and reach out. Ya know, and come hear our story, ya know, and help us find some place to stay, ya know. Help us get off the streets. Ya know, be able to come out, and ya know to bring all the necessary things that we need, ya know to be able to take care of ourself much better. Ya know, right now we're in need of a stable home. Ya know, somewhere to stay. Ya know, if it's in a hotel or—or apartment building, rooming house, ya know wherever somebody can find somewhere for us to stay. I mean financially-wise, ya know, we're—we're there, but then again we're not there. Ya know umm, every time I get paid, ya know, it—money has to go to other places. We gotta pay our cellphone bill, ya know we gotta do our laundry, (inaudible 01:03) and money, ya know it runs out. Before we can even save up—ya know—to get us a—a room, ya know, or a place to stay, ya know it's just that we're looking for someone at the end of the day, ya know, to put a hand out to help us. We need all the help that we could possibly get.

I: All the help you can possibly get—

P: And I know there's somebody out there, ya know, that will have a heart, ya know, and reach out and ya know, come see us. Ya know, we're always out here in the Journal Square area. Ya know, this is where we stay at basically so we're not hard to be found, ya know. And like, when I finish over here I goes (sic) over to 7/11 right there on the corner and I do what they call 'panhandling.' Begging for money. Ya know, just to uhh, be able to buy my wife and I something to eat. Ya know, we get a cup of coffee or something like that, ya know. And umm, sometime it can be embarrassing, ya know, people will laugh at us, ya know, they make fun of us, 'Look at this guy out here beggin' for money.' But it—it touches me, ya know, and sometime I pay it no mind, ya know. It—it can be heartbreaking sometimes, ya know. And umm, other than that, ya know, we're just looking for some support. All the help that we could possibly get.

I: Yeah, yeah and—when—when you're kinda by 7/11 do folk—do folks kinda—like do they share and—do they kinda help out?

02:15-03:27

P: Yeah, uhh they—they give out, ya know, whatever change they have, like they'll give a dollar and here and there. At the average, (inaudible 2:22) stay out there for like a couple hours, ya know, I'd bring like maybe fifteen or twenty dollars. Ya know, it's not enough that it get us but it's enough that it get us a sandwich or something.

I: Maybe it's gets you a sandwich. But it's not—it's not gonna solve housing.

P: Yes. It's not—definitely not gonna solve housing.

I: Can—can I ask when—when—when was the last time you kinda had like stable housing? Like can you remember the last time you had—

P: Umm the last time I had a—umm I had a apartment, ya know, in New York with my wife and unfortunately my wife had died.

I: I'm sorry.

P: And umm, that's how I became homeless. Because I lost everything I had.

I: When'd she die?

P: Umm, she died last year.

I: Last year, okay.

P: Yup. [pause] That's when I went to the program.

I: Yup.

P: Ya know, to get help. And that's where I had met shorty at. In the program. And from that day on, ya know, we kinda hooked up in the program and ever since then, ya know, it's been three years now we been together.

I: Three years you been together.

P: And umm, we try—well we gonna—try to make this thing happen. It's been a struggle ever since then.

I: It's been a struggle ever since. How—how are you guys kinda able to—just like take care of each other amidst all of this?

03:27-5:08

P: Uhh we—we utilize the showers here and like I said I do my little panhandling at 7/11. Ya know, whatever little bit of money I can get. Ya know, we'll share that. Ya know, get us something to eat. Ya know, sometimes it's days where we went without food. Ya know, where we was (sic) hungry. And umm, people over in the Square, ya know they'll come over like on a Saturday or Sunday, ya know, and they bring food. Ya know, and umm, it's not the best! But ya know, they bring us food. Ya know, and we share that together.

I: You share it together. You're able to eat together.

P: Yeah, they bring us clothing. Ya know, and umm, like I said it—it—it can be heartbreaking, ya know, but that's—that's life. That's how life goes. You know, we're dealin' with it the best way we can.

I: Yeah, I mean it's—yeah, it sounds like you guys are kinda close with [name] and the team here.

P: Yes. Yes.

I: Yeah.

P: I just wish they would reach out and help us also. You know, they keep telling us they gone look for a place for us and it seems like it's going in one ear and out the other. Like it's like the State is not really putting it out, ya know, to help us find places. Ya know 'cause, I been working for these people for uhh—almost a year.

I: Almost a year.

P: And it's been the same situation, ya know. I would think that by being here, ya know, they would have been done found us somewhere to stay. Being that I work for them.

I: Yup!

P: I don't know. It's—like I said—it's—it's a tough situation.

I: It's a tough situation.

P: (inaudible 04:48) Nobody wanna really hear your story. Don't nobody really wanna reach out and touch. Like I said, I [pause] I don't know how to put it in words but, I—I was looking forward to these people helping us. Ya know. Umm—

I: Yeah.

P: I don't know how else to say it (inaudible 05:07)

05:08-06:41

I: No, I—I—I mean it's not—you know and there's maybe like some disappointment that's it's not translating into—

P: Yes. Yes. Yes, very disappointing, yeah. But uhh, God is good. You know, my faith is in him, ya know. One day, ya know, we'll wake up (inaudible 05:21) and find some place that God will bless us with, ya know. And umm that's—that's the end of my story. Whoever hear this, ya know—just, come see us! Ya know, we're easy to reach out here in Jersey City. Out here in the Square. That's where we umm, stay at. Ya know it's hectic over there sometimes! Ya know 'cause it's a lot of fighting, and the chaos that go on—but we're—we're surviving.

I: You're surviving.

P: You know, we're—we're doing the best that we can.

I: You're doing the best that you can. And what's umm [pause] maybe just one final question is what—what's like one—what's one—like key to your being able to survive out here? I mean it sounds like you're surviving amidst some pretty [pause] it's hard.

P: Being able to maintain our—our sanity.

I: Being able to maintain your sanity. And how—how do you maintain your sanity?

P: By not feeding into negative bullshit.

I: By not feeding into the negative bullshit.

P: Yeah. 'Cause it be a lot—like I said it be a lot of situations that goes on over there, ya know, uhh—where—uhh people will try to start shit with you, you know, pick fights, but we're strong enough to avoid that.

I: You're strong enough to avoid that.

P: My wife, ya know, she's a very strong individual. Like I said, she's [pause] kinda familiar with the streets. She know (sic) the streets. Like I said, she not really, uhh, school smart, but streets, she'll tell you in a minute (inaudible 06:36) but she—she's been there.

I: Yeah.

P: Ya know, uhh, when I met her, she was homeless.

I: Yeah.

06:41-07:29

P: And uhh, we, fell in love with each other. Ya know, shared our story, ya know, we (inaudible 06:46), kinda cliqued up together and we been like that ever since then for the last three years.

I: That's awesome.

P: Since then we—like I said, we're still struggling'.

I: You're still struggling. I hear it. I hear it.

P: Still strugglin'.

I: I mean it's incredible though that you guys can kinda just be there for each other.

P: Yeah.

I: And—and I [pause] I mean I do kinda just wish you all the best and that people do hear your story and just kinda give you guys the—the help and support that you deserve. You're—you're out here every—ever day helping folks have—

P: I'm out here seven days a week. I'm out here.

I: Seven days a week.

P: Seven days a week.

I: You're at the shower.

P: Yes.

I: That's awesome. I mean, I—I just—I see how kind of built-in it is for folk's day, so—

P: It's going on, going on a year now.

I: Going on a year now that you're here every day seven days a week.

P: Seven days a week.

I: [name redacted] that's awesome.

P: Yup.

I: That's awesome.

07:29-08:02

P: Hoping that these people will reach out and like I said, wake up one day and call our station and come and tell us, ya know, they have somewhere for us to go.

I: I hear ya.

P: Other than we're—we're just here.

I: Other than that you're just here.

P: Just here. Two bumps on a log. Just here.

I: Kevin, I thank you and—

P: Thank you.

I: I'm gonna come out and—and visit, ya know, hopefully we can just kinda, keep the conversation going.

P: Aight, God bless you.

I: God bless you too.

P: God bless you and that is my story!

I: Oh my gosh, thank you!

P: May God be with us. Aight, thank you!