

Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project

Participant 97: Monserat Mendoza

Interviewed by Luis Rivera, October 2020

Translated and transcribed by Cecilia Villacres Jijon, November 2020

Interviewer: Since March, when COVID-19 started, how much has your life changed?

Monserat: A lot.

I: Could you elaborate a little bit on that please?

M: Well, basically we were inside until recently when we started to go out a bit. It was stressful because the kids could not go outside, to the park or anywhere, because of the pandemic that was happening. And also, my husband was out of work for a long time. And well you know, here we have to pay rent, bills, food, all that – diapers. I have three kids and the youngest one is two, so she still uses diapers. And well, in that sense it has changed my life a lot, my family's life and the life of everyone else I imagine. It's something really difficult compared to what we were accustomed to. Well, before this I usually did stay inside but it's not the same as being told that you have to stay inside, that you can't leave. And we did stay locked up inside from the last day that my kids were in class. It was about three months stuck at home without going anywhere else except for my husband who went food shopping but yeah no one else. He didn't work for some time.

I: Did he go back?

M: Yes, but still he is not getting the same hours as before. Sometimes he works three days, sometimes four. The week he works five days is rare, for the same reason that the boss mentions. He takes them to places to work sometimes and, well, they stopped working because of the hotels. Sometimes hotels would close and sometimes they wouldn't let many people in, that's why. Yeah.

I: Please share an act of kindness that someone has done for you or share an act of kindness that you have seen someone else do for another person during the pandemic.

M: Well, you, because you brought food to me and to my friends who I referred.

I: [Laughs] I don't count.

M: Well, your agency.

I: That is true. We offered food to your friend as well.

M: Yeah, I shared your number with her, and you were able to help her.

I: Thank you so much for that Monserat.

M: No, thank you!

I: The next question, what brought you happiness or how did you find happiness during COVID-19?

M: Well, unity. Family unity, which is the thing to value the most. Thank God nothing happened to us, and we were all healthy. We were home, but we were good. That is the most important thing, health, and none of my kids got sick.

I: And on the flip side, when did you confront the saddest time during this pandemic?

M: Well, an aunt of mine got sick. She lives about half an hour to an hour away from me. I have two aunts and she is one that got sick, but thankfully they are both okay now.

I: Two more questions. In what ways did you, your husband, and your kids confront the issues of COVID-19?

M: For them, more than anything, being stuck inside. Well, you know, kids want to go outside and be free, so that was the hardest part. They, because of how young they are, don't understand the magnitude of the problem. And even though you try explaining it to them, they aren't able to understand too well. They are who they are, and they want to go outside to play and jump.

I: The last question is, what problems are you expecting once COVID-19 slows down? COVID-19 has affected you already, how do you think it will continue to affect you?

M: Well, people are saying that wearing masks and social distancing is not something that will go away. Those things will continue to be necessary. And well, sometimes since we aren't used to it, we go to the store and run back because we've forgotten our masks. Yeah, that's something that people say is going to stay, but I'm not sure if that will be permanent.

I: Incredible, truly.

M: Thank you – for all your help and to the agency too.

I: That is my saving grace. That agency saved me, and now we all help one another.

M: Thank you so much.