

## Community Conversations: NJ's COVID-19 Storytelling Project

Participant Number 196: Greg

Interviewed by Y.K., November 2020

Transcribed by J.K.H. on January 7, 2021

[0:00 – 1:35]

Interviewer: Alright. So, great. Thanks--thanks so much for just agreeing to chat a bit. Um, so my name is Yannai Kranzler--yeah, yeah, exactly, from New Jersey Department of Health, and we're just gathering kind of stories of just what these last seven to eight months have been like for you, just kind of out here. Yeah, so first question I have is like, how are you? How are you doing? You doing OK?

*P: Alright. I'm making it.*

I: You're making it. Like what is--what is making it look like? How are you feeling?

*P: Making it, like it's rough but I'm making it. I'm doing what I got to do but it's rough.*

I: Yeah, can I ask like what's rough?

*P: I ain't have no place to stay.*

I: Yeah.

*P: But then I had a job working at the garbage truck. But it was so strenuous. I ain't have the--I was doing it for like three, four months, and then I ran out of bus tickets, I ran out place where I was staying. Friends would let me stay over but then they started getting funny so I had to leave the job. You can't do a job when you up all night outside trying to find a place to stay.*

I: Yup. No, I hear it.

*P: So that killed the job.*

I: Yeah, so the job kind of it was just really strenuous and you didn't have a place.

*P: I didn't mess up but I'm trying to get back in that. So I'm trying to find a place to get in. A shelter or whatever. Get my ID back. Lost my ID that really hurt. So that's what hurt.*

I: Yup. I can imagine. I can imagine. Um I mean where have you been able to stay? You're just kinda [sic] bouncing from place to place.

*P: Yeah, place to place.*

[1:36 – 2:48]

I: Like shelter, outside, friends?

*P: Friends, shelters, everywhere.*

I: How's that been?

*P: Hard.*

I: Hard. I hear you. I hear you. Alright um what kind of just like these last six seven eight months been like for you just kind of amidst COVID coronavirus the pandemic has anything like changed?

*P: Change for everybody.*

I: Change for everybody.

*P: This is a different look.*

I: This is a different look. That's right. [Laughs]

*P: This is a different look.*

I: The mask is a different look.

*P: It keeps people kind of scared. You don't want to take it down.*

I: Yup.

*P: Of course, it's different.*

I: What about kind of just like your day to day? Things like working, place to stay.

*P: I've been gone too because we so used to we so used to coming out hard we learn to adapt.*

I: You learned to adapt.

*P: Yeah. This is what we gotta [sic] do. We gonna [sic] adapt.*

I: In your case what does adapting look like? What have you been able to do?

*P: Adapting meaning if this who we gotta [sic] wear if this who we gotta [sic] do this who we gonna [sic] do. We learn to adapt.*

[2:49 – 3:59]

I: I hear it. I hear it.

*P: In the hood you learn to adapt to whatever ya [sic] situation.*

I: Have you ever been through anything like this before?

*P: All my life.*

I: All your life.

*P: All my life.*

I: I hear it. I hear it. Did you grow up here in Newark?

*P: It's been up, and it's been down. But, basically, I always been in the hood and around this area.*

I: Here in Newark?

*P: Yeah, you know, Elizabeth everywhere.*

I: Yeah, no I hear ya. I hear ya. Um, and, kind of--at Bridges, how are things over here?

*P: Beautiful. They help me everywhere I come over here. They feed you, they help you get your ID, they help you get your bus card. They help you do everything.*

I: That's incredible. So you feel like you have –

*P: If it wasn't for them, we'd be in big trouble.*

I: I hear you. I totally hear you. Do you know anybody who's gotten sick, who's had COVID or coronavirus?

*P: Not really. I know people that died but I didn't know them like when they were sick. I just heard about it.*

I: You just heard about them dying. Yeah. Do you know how they died? Like were they in the hospital? Were they kinda just –

*P: Yeah, they were in the hospital and then that was it.*

I: And then that was it.

*P: Yeah. Some of them went in the hospital for other things and came out with it.*

[4:00 – 5:19]

I: They came out with it. Yeah.

*P: They were in there from catching that.*

I: Yeah that's real harsh. Like people who were kind friends or family of yours?

*P: Yeah, friends.*

I: Yeah, I'm sorry about that. I hear you. Kind of what would you say just like amidst all of this is kinda [sic] the hardest thing to kind of deal with?

*P: Yeah. This.*

I: Just having to wear the mask all the time?

*P: Na, just the pandemic.*

I: The pandemic.

*P: What it's doing to everybody.*

I: What it's doing to everybody.

*P: Like the mental game.*

I: Yeah, can you tell me a little bit about that? Like what's that mental game?

*P: I mean you're losing people. You can lose your life. You never know if the next person near you got it. So, it's a lot of stress.*

I: It's a lot of stress.

*P: Always, you walking down the street somebody cough on you.*

I: I hear it. I hear it.

*P: It's a lot of pain, man. This is driving me up the wall.*

I: How do you deal with that?

*P: Every day I just step and keep it moving. I hope and I pray to God if it's my time it's my time. But I don't want to go yet. I have more years to live. I don't want to go yet. Don't get me.*

[5:20 – 7:55]

I: I hear you.

*P: I try to stay away from. I don't wanna drink [sic] other people. I don't wanna smoke [sic] other people. I don't want to do certain things. I never wear nobody's mask and stuff like that. Gotta keep it fresh mask. I got about nine of these. I wash them out every day.*

I: Is there like either like a specific night or a specific day that sticks out in your mind that's been especially difficult?

*P: No. Every day is the same.*

I: Every day is the same. Yeah. I hear it. Have you been able like how have you been able to find amidst all this to find joy or comfort or even basic rest?

*P: Yeah, rest, I've been able to find rest. When I get in the house, I feel more relaxed. If I stay with somebody, I know a friend, I feel more relaxed.*

I: Yeah, I hear that. You mentioned friends, you mentioned bridges. Who are folks that you feel like you can rely on when you're in a pinch?

*P: Friends that they came up from here. I go over their house. I know they don't have it. I can lay back without my mask on. And stay the night or whatever. I feel better.*

I: You do. These are friends that you've known since you were kids?

*P: Since three years old.*

I: Since three years old. Can you think of one act of kindness that somebody's been able to do for you over these last couple months?

*P: People have given me things, giving me money, giving me extra masks, giving out food, giving out food, I mean it's a lot of things people doing.*

I: What about an act of kindness you've been able to do for others?

*P: Me? I do the same. Feed people, if I have money, I give it to them, if I got extra mask, I give it to them, if I have words to tell them something, I give it to them. That's more important.*

I: Words. Like what?

*P: I try to explain to them. The situation about this. That what I know about it.*

[7:56 – 10:07]

I: Like what?

*P: Tell people to stay but don't smoke from nobody. Don't do this. See somebody with a fever, stay back. Stuff like that. I give people kind words, whatever I know.*

I: That's a gift. Have you ever taken a COVID test?

*P: I went to take one now. They want my ID.*

I: Okay.

*P: They want my ID. They want paperwork. That's why I'm trying to get to this now. If you can kind of speed it up I gotta [sic] go get my ID.*

I: I totally hear you. I mean like need your ID becomes like a harrier to getting tested.

*P: Yeah. That's crazy. I had to come back. I had three papers. They wanted a notarized. I got three papers now you want four. I mean it's crazy.*

I: Yeah, we're lucky that you're diligently trying to do that so that you can get tested.

*P: So I'm really trying to get there. You got more questions?*

I: Real quick. When there's a COVID vaccine, when it's available, will you take it?

*P: Hell yeah. If I know it helps the next person, I'm gonna take it.*

I: If you know it helps the next person, you're gonna take it. That's good to know.

*P: If I don't got it, I'm not gonna take it. If I don't need it, it better be my lungs, my lungs better be feeling funny. I been through this whole pandemic. I ain't feel nothing in my lungs cause I keep these on. I never had a temperature when they did it so I'm good.*

I: I really appreciate your taking the time. Anything else that you just kinda wanna share--words of wisdom, guidance, recommendations for the State?

*P: Where can you send me to help? For help? Help, help, help.*

I: Help, help, help. So just kind of like there needs to be more kinds of help.

*P: Any job, anything that can bring money, anything that can get me inside apartment, anything, all that.*

[10:08 – 11:25]

I: It sounds like at bridges they do a pretty good job.

*P: But you might know some people higher. Who you know?*

I: I mean, I'm definitely kind of learning from you guys out here some of the spaces where we need to be more responsive.

*P: A phone, I need a phone. The people they be out on welfare giving out the free phones.*

I: Why did they stop giving them out?

*P: Because of the pandemic. They're scared.*

I: They're scared. Ok, yeah.

*P: I got one, but I need \$30.*

I: But you need to be able to utilize it. No good having the machine without the card.  
(background third person speaking) Besides the phone what are the most critical supports you mentioned? Housing? Job? Like the most critical supports, like the ones you need today?

*P: Employment.*

I: Employment, that's the one. Ok. I really appreciate it. I'm gonna let you move on. I'm gonna stop this. I really appreciate it. Thank you my friend.