

Interview with Aleah Anderson by Tyler Urness

Interviewee: Aleah Anderson

Interviewer: Tyler Urness

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Abstract:

Aleah Anderson was raised in Eau Claire WI and currently works for the Eau Claire health Department under the COVID-19 response force. In this interview, Aleah discusses how COVID-19 has affected her life, including her work, family life, and mental health. she shares what it has been like to work for the Eau Claire health Department under the cover 19 response force. Aleah also discuss is what it has been like as a member of the at risk community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aleah discusses the strain that the pandemic has placed on her family and her time locked up from the rest of the world. Aleah Also discuss is how others have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of a friend, family member, and health worker. The interviewer, Tyler Urness, and Aleah had never met before.

Tyler Urness 00:00

-cord on. Perfect, just double checking this recording. Alright, my name is Tyler Urness and I'm conducting an oral history interview as a part of an effort to archive the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for individuals and communities in the Midwest for both Western Wisconsin COVID-19 Archive, and the journal the Plague Year COVID-19 Archive. Today's date is May 6, 2021. As of now there're, in the United States, total cases of 32,356,034. The total deaths in the United States is 576,238. Of that total, Wisconsin's total cases are 601,603. And Wisconsin's total deaths are at 6,877. Today we will be speaking with Aleah, from the Eau Claire Wisconsin, Aleah, thanks for taking the time to speak with us today and for sharing your experiences for this pandemic. We appreciate your help and perspectives for this project. So, if you wouldn't mind, can you state your name and any demographic information for the study?

Aleah Anderson 01:08

Yeah, my name is Olivia Anderson. I have been working for the Eau Claire city county health department for the last couple months. I was hired back in December, and I graduated UWEC with a bachelor degree in public health. I'm 25, and yeah, excited to do this interview with you.

Tyler Urness 01:31

Primary things you do on a day to day basis for like example of what your job like you said an extra curricular activities?

Aleah Anderson 01:40

Yeah, so for my job, what I do is a call positive cases for COVID. And I go through their symptoms, we talk about their isolation dates, I give them an isolation order and then we go through contact tracing. So I ask them different questions: where have you been for the last few weeks, we go day by day, listing any close contact to them. And then I make cases for their close contacts, and they call their close contacts and quarantine them and we got throughout the quarantine information. And our biggest goal is just to document everything the best that we can and make sure that everyone has access to things that they might need, like food, groceries, different errands that might need to be run, that they can't do letters for work, different situations like that. We even have some social service people that can help them apply for unemployment benefits if they need it. So we're really just trying to provide resources for people going through COVID and being exposed to it as well. And then my personal life I been recently doing some walks now that the weather's been nice. I got my second dose almost three weeks ago now, so this last week, I've been fully vaccinated. So I've been starting to kind of see friends again, really small circles. And then, yeah, just staying home basically with my, my three pets. Yeah.

Tyler Urness 03:11

Perfect. Where do you live? And what is it like to live there?

Aleah Anderson 03:16

I live in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I've been here for almost five years. And I really enjoy it. We bought a house here almost five years ago. And we have about an acre of yard here and it's fenced in for our dog which is nice. And we live like right downtown, so we have walkable access to different things for right across the street from the beach, which is nice. So we go kayaking, and we just got a paddle board, so we're planning on doing some water trips. Um, yeah, it's been really enjoyable. Yeah, but, I really like living here.

Tyler Urness 03:57

Do the dogs like the water?

Aleah Anderson 04:00

My dog does not. He is, he's older so he spent most of his life not near water until, you know, until we moved to Eau Claire. He's 15 now so it's been in his later life getting used to the water but we do have a life jacket for him. So he's, we make him do it because it's a really good exercise for him, but yeah, he's one of the biggest fans we don't make him do it for very long.

Tyler Urness 04:27

When you first learned about COVID-19 What were your thoughts on it? And how have your thoughts changed since then?

Aleah Anderson 04:33

Oh, yeah. So back Jan-January, or maybe even like December 2019, you know, it's starting to show up on the news BBC and stuff. My partner, Connor, he is really into reading the news constantly and he was like, like his ears perked up immediately like "Aleah like this is gonna be this is serious like this is gonna come to America, it's gonna be a really big deal." I was like, "No, don't wait. It's just like a couple of cases. It sounds like it's just like the flu like that. There's nothing like particularly alarming to me." And it's like, "Oh, no, that's sounds like it's gonna be a big deal." And then a couple of months ago or, yeah, like, I think it was January, maybe, maybe even February. He was talking about like, oh, like, the taking, like, almost like, not real bad, honestly, or obviously. But just like, "I bet I bet everything is gonna close down. Like beginning of March," I was like, "No, no, no, I don't think so at all, I really don't think that's gonna happen." And then March came, and we were still full time university students back then. It was like right before spring break, when everything shut down. And at first I was like, at first I was, you know, obviously, this is a really big deal. This is a really scary situation, everything has to be closed down for a reason. Obviously, not having the best faith in the government at the time, and how they're gonna handle it. The funding was really minimal back then as well. And then all the resistance to wearing face masks and social distancing. And all of that. I was really grateful because I was like, packed with schoolwork. It was right before spring break, and they extended spring break, right as I was having, like, a mental breakdown about how much classwork I had. So I was grateful for the break. I was like, okay, things are gonna bounce back to normal pretty soon after, after a couple of weeks here. And then, no, I after that, I really quickly realized this is this is here, this is serious, this is impactful. So that was kind of my beginning experience with it.

Tyler Urness 06:56

What issue have most concerned you about the COVID 19 pandemic?

Aleah Anderson 07:01

Oh, that's quite a big question. -obviously, you know, obviously, people's lives are being altered permanently from this. I think that's the, the biggest deal. Um, uh, yeah, I mean, I, I don't have a ton of like, really personal experiences with anyone being affected directly in my life, except for a, a little unrelated, but a really close friend of mine had a liver transplant before the pandemic, and then she died due to an infection. And I couldn't go to her funeral. I couldn't, or, you know, a huge reason why she didn't get the medical attention she needed was because hospitals were so booked, she lives in the cities. So, they had to wait until way too late to go to the hospital. And then she died, as soon as as soon as she got there. And she was 27, so that was really hard. That happened like end of March. Um, but yeah, it wasn't like directly due to COVID. But I'm sure that if COVID wasn't here, then maybe she could have gotten the attention that she needed faster. But yeah, uh, it's been, it's been trickling into every aspect of

our lives at this point. And now obviously working for the health department, working hands on on this issue. Like I'm talking to people every day, and they're telling me about their stresses, different things that are concerning them. You know, a huge, thing that I hear a lot is that people are really worried about losing pay, not getting sick leave, their work isn't allowing people to take off sick anymore, people are being forced to work when they have symptoms. So that's been like the biggest challenge is really getting like corporate America to be accessible for what we need to do to deal with this pandemic. So it's just been a huge, honestly fight for people to just get their basic needs met now, and then let alone if they get sick get seriously sick, I've talked to a few people that are in the hospital and doing contact tracing for them, which is definitely interesting. But yeah, I hope, I hope, it's just a really big question.

Tyler Urness 07:04

Yeah. What we just started talking about next section will be employment. How has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

Aleah Anderson 09:42

So yeah, that's like one of those really weird things that you know, as a college graduate, everyone worries what their, what their next job is going to be if they're going to get a job in their field. How soon they're going to get it. I got my job, actually, my job, position was emailed to me by my epidemiology professor. So I had classes that that was last fall semester. He emailed that to me and I applied and then like a month later, they like I almost forgotten that I applied to it. I was like, "No, they don't want me." And they called me and they're like, "Yes. Can you please start working? As soon as possible?" It's like, okay, so that was on the team. And then I graduated two weeks later, I was fully trained in, and then I've been working part time, technically, since then. So, yeah, so it's pretty, it's pretty interesting. Like I, you know, I have this job because of the pandemic. So I think that's where I fall into a weird category of like, I have employment now because of this. So it's a weird thing I'm grateful for. But obviously, the circumstances are really serious. And I definitely respect that.

Tyler Urness 10:56

Yeah, like a reversal account scenario. What concerns you? What concerns do you have about the effects of COVID-19 on your employment and the economy more broadly?

Aleah Anderson 11:07

Hmm. Well, with my employment specifically, it's a little interesting, because, um, when I signed my contracts for my work, they said, temporary employment through May, like at least May, and now it's May so it's like, okay, it Do I still have a job, like, they recently came out with a statement of, we don't know how long your physician is gonna be, like, just really have to go with the flow of it. And that's just been like the whole, the whole time working for the health department is constantly adjusting to all the changes, there's new evidence, new information to learn about all the time, policies change constantly, we're just figuring this out as we're going and, and learning as we're going to, so it's been a really dynamic situation with my work, I do think that I'm gonna be applied for at least a couple more months,

the kind of went through a bit of a downsizing, so our team is a little smaller now. But then, for the economy as a whole, I think that it's going to bounce back pretty quickly. I think that, um, I feel like the biggest thing that this pandemic has really shown us as a country is that our systems are very flawed. I think we all knew that before. But it really does not have any give for people facing really real situations, especially financially, I think we really saw that with the kind of, honestly the failure, of the stimulus, stimulus checks coming in time. And I felt that too, because like that, there was supposed to be like a stimulus check in August, and I literally ran out of money. Right before that was supposed to happen. And I defaulted on my own bills. And now, that really severely affected my credit score, and I'm still working on fixing it even though like it was on my hand, I I especially back then I wasn't working back then I have damaged lungs, I'm a vulnerable person, and it's been a huge concern of me this whole past year, that if I was to get COVID, like I could be one of those people that end up seriously damaged for the rest of my life could even be or, yeah, so I decided not to work but then I ran out of money. Yeah, so that was that was interesting. But yeah, I think in the future, things are gonna evolve. I think that especially with the new administration, there's gonna be way more focus on helping people that are in a financially difficult situation. And now are really seeing companies having honestly a lot more compassion, a lot more leeway about different things, because it's a collective thing we're all going through now. It's not just like one group of people. It's everyone so I think it'll bounce back pretty quickly.

Tyler Urness 14:08

Perfect. Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employment of people you know? And in what ways?

Aleah Anderson 14:16

People I know? Um, I did have a friend that was laid off and she's still not working currently. She worked for like a tech company and she's in computer science field. I don't know a whole lot but her situation. A lot of my family members are retired, they're a lot older. And then I have a lot of universities to friends so yeah, not I haven't noticed a huge impact on my my personal friend circles. Appointment.

Tyler Urness 14:56

Next section will be family and household. How has COVID-19 effected you and or your families day to day activities?

Aleah Anderson 15:05

Oh, sorry.

Tyler Urness 15:06

It's no problem.

Aleah Anderson 15:08

Okay, sorry. My phone's dying. Um, our day to day activities? Um, well, I think that, at first, it wasn't a huge difference, it was just like, you know, being more careful wearing face masks, social distancing. But, you know, when the pandemic first hit here, it was a lot warmer, and it got warmer, like the springtime into summer. Summer was pretty casual, like it was pretty typical, except for I didn't see my more vulnerable, vulnerable family members. So I haven't seen them at all since, actually, the yeah, no, it was the Christmas before the pandemic. So I haven't seen a lot of my family members since then. But, but my friends, I've been seeing you know, people who aren't in vulnerable groups and then just wearing facemasks and social distancing. And then winter happened and I did not see anyone for like, two months, I didn't leave my house. I just worked from home. I got my groceries delivered. Cases were really intense, like, we didn't feel comfortable seeing anyone at that point. So we just we switched everything the virtual. Hang out with people online, all the games that came out, like Among Us stuff like that, and watching movies virtually. So we just kind of like pivoted everything online as best as we could. I called my family more often than I used to. But yeah, I guess it wasn't too terribly different. Except for we just didn't go out.

Tyler Urness 16:49

Okay. What have been the biggest challenges that have you, that you have faced during the COVID 19 outbreak?

Aleah Anderson 16:57

Um, I think probably the I just really missing my family has been the hardest part. I haven't. I saw my mom a couple of times really briefly. My mom is in her later 60s. So she's in a more vulnerable population as well, and she doesn't have health insurance, so it was really extra concerning that, you know, we don't see each other and, um, and I get to see my mom next week we're both fully vaccinated so, or not next week, this weekend for Mother's Day. And I'm gonna hugger for the first time, in what? I think I have there in the summer, we did like blanket hugs, like put blankets in between us and hugged but, you know, probably wasn't still the safest thing to do. But that was when cases for a lot less concerning. It was summer so, but yeah, that's been the thing I've missed the most was just getting to see my family and be with them in person and hug them and yeah,

Tyler Urness 18:06

Sure you're looking forward to that. What have you, family, and friends done for recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Aleah Anderson 18:16

Yeah, like a like I said before is that, um, y'know playing games online, I got a new laptop that could play games better. And watching movies virtually, actually, actually helped kind of reconnect with some of my more long distance friendships. I have friends that live in Germany, so we've been playing virtual games as well. And that's been the biggest thing is just trying to do everything virtually. But in person

back before winter happened, we would do like social distanced hikes, or we have fires in our yard, but we'd all be like six feet apart, like have the chairs spaced out, we'd all wear face masks and we're outside. We're always outside if we did stuff and then kept their distance.

Tyler Urness 19:06

Okay. The next section would be community. How is the COVID-19 outbreak affected your community that you may be a part of, or any communities that you may be a part of? So like school clubs, or church and jobs.

Aleah Anderson 19:21

I feel like if anything is honestly strengthened my relationships with my, well, my communities. Like, well, obviously I graduated college, and that definitely was restricted because I went completely online for my last year of college. So I definitely felt like I missed a little bit of that, but I've been in college for like six years. So it's like a really sad thing for me. But, yeah, I think it's really brought us a lot closer together because we you know, we were really determined to get through this together be strong together. and checking in constantly with each other made so many different like, like Snapchat groups and stuff kept in communication. My mom and I talked every single day, that was our goal, we would always call each other and talk every single day, which we normally like only saw each other like, like once a month or like every other week, that kind of thing. We didn't talk on the phone too often. So from that to every single day, it was just really important for us to all stay connected. And I think that we really bonded a lot through this pandemic, and kind of going through like a collective crisis. It brings people together, but to so yeah.

Tyler Urness 20:41

Perfect. How are people around you responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in your community?

Aleah Anderson 20:50

I feel like they're responding pretty well. I feel like most of the people in my life are taking this really seriously. Everyone's either on their way to get fully vaccinated or are fully vaccinated already. And everyone was doing their best to be as cautious as possible. I only had like, I think like three friends, of all my friends, that even got COVID. So I thought that was kind of impressive. And like they were going in an age range that was a little less worrisome, in their 20s to 30s, so and they were fine. So that was really relieving. So yeah, I feel like everyone just took it really seriously. And now everyone's just really excited about the benefits of being fully vaccinated.

Tyler Urness 21:43

Okay, perfect. "Self isolation" and "flattening the curve" have been two key ideas that have emerged during the pandemic, how have you, family, friends and community responded to request to self isolate and flatten the curve?

Aleah Anderson 21:58

Um, yeah, I feel like, yeah, we did a pretty good job of being as careful as we could without also, it's kind of a weird balance between, like, you want to be as safe as possible, but also, like, you do need to see people still are very social creatures, humans are, and so finding like a good balance between what is safe, like, what risks are kind of more worth taking and then what aren't. A big no, no, for me, it was parties. So I thought that. Yeah, I had a friend that had a Halloween party. And that's when he got COVID. Like, no, and he invited me to I was like, I know I, I can't go I'm not going to go, you guys don't wear masks. You guys don't social distance. Like I know, you guys aren't a safe group to be around. But that was kind of it. I feel like everything, everyone else was really respectful of it. And just everyone just tried their best. I think that none of us were perfect 100% of the time. But isolate, yeah, isolating was definitely a key component to flattening the curve. And you can really see that in the trends when, um, it's a lot easier to be social distance outside the cases kind of go down or and then when you have to be indoors, but to still see people, see family members, then you're in closer, closer conditions that can spread disease easier. So yeah.

Tyler Urness 23:33

Next section would be health. You touched on it a little bit earlier, but have you or anybody, you know, gotten sick during the COVID-19 outbreak? And then, what has been your experience in responding to the sickness?

Aleah Anderson 23:46

Hmm. So I mean, fortunately, I've been really healthy this last year. My only illness was I think, due to a bad avocado. Sure, had a pretty intense food poisoning one night, but that's about it. And, yeah, same thing with my with my partner that lives with me. He's also been really healthy too. So, yeah, and kind of same thing with my closest family members. They've been, I haven't heard anything about them not feeling well. My sister broke her wrist ice skating this winter, so she had to go to the hospital to get that, get that bound. And I'm really laughing because she's kind of silly about it. She's never broken a bone before so it's just kind of a traumatic experience for her but she's okay now.

Tyler Urness 24:39

What a time.

Aleah Anderson 24:42

Sorry.

Tyler Urness 24:43

I said what a time to do to during.

Aleah Anderson 24:45

I know, no. Yeah. She lives. She lives in Chicago, so it's not exactl.

Tyler Urness 24:50

Okay.

Aleah Anderson 24:51

Yeah, the safest place to be. I, that was was really concerning to me also. It's like my sister lives alone, in Chicago, in a tiny studio apartment and I was really concerned that, of her mental well being and just being able to get through it but she's been doing really well. So I've been happy about that. But um, yeah, I feel like yeah, kind of a funny thing that everyone's been really healthy.

Tyler Urness 25:20

You kind of just touched on it, but: in what ways do you think that COVID-19 is affecting people's mental and/or physical health?

Aleah Anderson 25:28

Yeah, I think it was extra, an extra difficult year for everyone. You know, it wasn't just the pandemic, it's the pandemic's been elevating all these other systemic issues in our society, especially racism, and the big civil rights movement that's been going through lately. Well, always has been, but really has been heightened lately. And it's been, I think it's been really traumatic for everyone it's been, especially after a year of the pandemic, a lot of people are experiencing what we call crisis fatigue at the health department. And we've noticed that too, it's like working with people, there are a lot less amicable to us, they're a lot less friendly, everyone's just kind of over it, they want to be gone. Everyone's just sick and tired of it. And, you know, it doesn't really, it's not really conducive to being really cheerful with one another. So it's, it's been really stressful for everyone. And I think it's taught us a lot about how important it is to have resources for mental health. And that's one of the things we provide to at the health department, we have a bunch of mental health resources that we give people. So I think also, I don't know the numbers, but I do think that I've heard suicide rates have been increasing, as well. So it's, it's definitely been a really big challenge for everyone. And in many different ways.

Tyler Urness 27:04

Next topic would be the vaccine. Have you or anyone you know had questions or concerns about the vaccine?

Aleah Anderson 27:11

Well, I know that recently with the Johnson and Johnson vaccine thing, pull-will pause, because of there was a couple cases of blood clotting in a specific group of women. And that's definitely, I, we've talked about at the health department a bit that it does seem to provide some hesitancy for people. But another really good thing that is something that we talked about in some meetings is that it's a really great proof of a system that is working well, like we know, the system caught it quickly. These are, you know,

vaccines that are definitely being pushed for emergency use. But we have really great safeguarding systems in place to catch things like that. And they paused it, then more research about it and now they've continued again, but just withholding it from those specific groups that seem to have been affected. And, you know, there's still more research that needs to be done on it. So they're, and I've noticed that too, I was really, honestly disappointed, because with my with my job, I've been starting to transition into vaccine clinics. So because our disease investigative work was dwindling to the point where we had no work, which was wonderful. We're all like, this is so such a great thing. And then we have nothing to do. And so we were training and transitioning into clinic work helping, helping all the other parts except for like actually doing the vaccine. I'm not trained to do that. I'veve and doing that, but the clinics have like, no, no people there. We have capacity for 1,000 people, sometimes 1,200 people, and like 200 people show up. And we're like, like going, running around the university like, "Hey, does anyone want a vaccine, we have a couple doses left. We don't want to waste it" like, like pulling people off the street, basically, get them vaccinated. And it's to the point where they're actually closing the FEMA site clinic because there's so few people that are going. I genuinely thought it was gonna be like 1000 people a day, you know, seven days a week, all the way through the summer. I thought that was what was gonna happen, but they're going to be closing the clinic down soon. It was a really great resource for people, especially people that you know, it's free, right downtown, accessible, around the bus route. And, yeah, just nobody is getting vaccinated. So, yeah, definitely disappointing there.

Tyler Urness 29:56

Yeah. You said you receive the vaccine earlier, did you have any side effects?

Aleah Anderson 30:04

It wasn't too bad. My second dose was a bit worse than the first one. The first one, I was totally fine. That was a little sore. second dose, I did get really achy. And then the next day, I felt fine. And I was, you know, kind of a interesting thing about me. So growing up my my dad was very anti-modern medicine. I would consider him anti-vax, you know, that kind of mentality. So I had none of my vaccines until about two years ago, I got into BadgerCare. And then I, I organized with my doctor, I got all my my vaccines done in eight months, I got, I think, 12 different vaccines. The worst one was the pneumonia one and like, my partner was like, "Oh, Aleah, are you okay?" But when I got the second dose, like, "It's not as bad as the pneumonia vaccine, I'm fine." That one was hard, this one was not nearly as hard as that. So I had a couple of symptoms, but I was fine.

Tyler Urness 31:09

You said, also, so speaking about being vaccinated, what was your experience getting access to and for the vaccine? So making an appointment and understanding when it was available?

Aleah Anderson 31:21

Yeah, so, that was something also that I thought was a little disappointing about how the system went with prioritizing people, because I would you know, I'm an immunocompromised person with damaged lungs, COVID's very dangerous for me, we had disabilities with my lungs specifically. And you would think that would be the reason why I got vaccinated so early. But no it's because I'm a non-frontline worker for health department, that's why I was able to get the vaccine when I did. And then for availability, I wanted the one as as fast as possible. And it was actually a three hour drive for me. So it wasn't like, super accessible for me, necessarily, but I was able to do it just to get vaccinated when I did. But obviously, I mean, I think it was like a week later, the vaccine clinics are opening up, so. But I was like, I want it as soon as possible. So I did have to drive a bit. But yep.

Tyler Urness 32:24

Okay. Next section is information. What have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

Aleah Anderson 32:31

Well, fortunately, I get a lot of my news from the health department directly, they've been really good at keeping us updated. Other than that, I mean, I watch I don't have like, like cable, but watch like news on YouTube. Always live videos and stuff about that. I can't like handle too much depressing news, I have to like watch really short snippets, like, just get to the key informational points, and then pull away like, it gets really sad really quickly. And kinda like important for that mental health balance to not take on too much. But yeah, I would say like, those are kind of like my biggest. I watch a lot of YouTube videos and then BBC is a really good source of news as well. But I've actually been kind of pulling away from, from news sources the last couple months. So yeah.

Tyler Urness 33:22

Okay. How have your news sources changed during the course of this pandemic?

Aleah Anderson 33:29

Uh, I guess the biggest change for me is working for the health department. So I guess that would be the change.

Tyler Urness 33:36

Okay. What do you think are important issues that the media may or may not be covering?

Aleah Anderson 33:48

I don't know. I feel like there's just, there's more information than you could ever possibly need.

Tyler Urness 33:55

Yeah

Aleah Anderson 33:56

It really, you know, any question you have, you can Google it. Like, I mean, go through, like all the information documents for the health department, like there's every single question you could ask, and then you can find it, click on it, there's the answer right there. So, I don't know. I'm not the right person for that question.

Tyler Urness 34:15

That's fine. The next section will be government. How have municipal leaders and government officials in your community specifically responded to the outbreak?

Aleah Anderson 34:26

Oh, yeah, I think that that's been a really interesting thing saying from the health department. So yeah, I mean, I am funded through grants are funded, I'm being paid for my job through grants that they got approved through the state. So but you know, it's kind of an interesting contrast, because right when the pandemic happened, Oh, okay. I should really get a phone charger. I guess. Um, here. Sorry. One second. I have an iPhone six, and it drains really quickly. I'm just gonna go. I work downstairs, my phone chargers down here. Um, but yeah, so absolutely has been, really highlighted how underfunded a lot of these programs are especially, well, this is really pulling out all the information I know, but the Trump administration defunded, or completely disband the, there's specific pandemic units, you know, groups of people designed to handle a crisis like this. And they pulled all the funding. Opps, sorry. I know that's annoying. Technology. Um, they pulled a lot of funding for public health positions, specifically. And I know that, you know, that was like another concern. I had, I didn't really know when I was graduating before the pandemic, but I'm just like, my big concern of like, "Oh my gosh, like these jobs are not very well funded at all." And like, "Where, where can I go with work in the public health field?" Now, there's a lot, there's a lot more to it, funding has gotten a lot better. The Biden administration has been pouring a lot of money into funding public health jobs, specifically with COVID. And, you know, like, how I got my job, like, you know, is funded through programs. So it's been an interesting mixture of like, I feel like the government's have been really scrambling to get get these teams together, when it used to be something that was already in place. So it's been an uphill battle for sure. For a lot of the government organizations.

Tyler Urness 35:48

It's no problem.

Aleah Anderson 35:54

And we kind of just talked, touched on it. Do you have any thoughts on how local state or federal leaders are responding to the crisis differently? So I like to different levels, kind of. Oh, yeah. Well, okay, so I guess the biggest thing I've noticed is how, how different it is from like, county to county, even, like every, every health department has, like, basically, what they prioritize, but their needs are what like what they need to do first. For example, the Eau Claire health department is really like, it's really shining like a golden light, from the state's perspective, because we have been able to get a lot of

people to fill out symptoms surveys during their isolation and while, well not quarantine, but during their isolation, filling out the symptoms surveys of how they're feeling and then that's like how we determine, basically, if they're free to go back to the, to the community, and go back to work and all of that. So but for other health departments, it's not as big of a priority, because their, their issues are different. So it's really, it's really what any, any local place needs, how to fulfill those needs, especially the more rural counties like, and like people who don't have email addresses for the symptoms surveys or, or even like getting emailed about being eligible for a vaccine, you know, all these different I guess, access complications that people have, and then you go up higher, go to the state level. And that's something too for our job. We, when we have too much work, we send it to state, kind of ambiguous term from my perspective, but like, "I really want to work for the state," it sounds like an interesting perspective to be in. But yeah, they have hundreds of contact tracers, people that are processing all this information, delegating where, where funding needs to go funding all the local health departments. And then you go look at different states and how they're handling it, so, and then federally, how they're handling it, how they're handling international issues, with the pandemics. It's a very layered onion of different governments trying their best to work together. And the ultimate goal is to keep people as safe as possible, to hopefully lower the stress on the health care system because that's the biggest day like if people can get have access to the health care they need and get treated for COVID then they have a much better chances of success of surviving it. So that's a huge reason why flattening the curve is such a big or is such a big goal because you don't want to overwhelm a really fragile system. So, yeah, sorry, I kind of forgot the original question.

Tyler Urness 40:10

And then the final question kind of just about the future. Has your experience transformed during the pam-pandemic, on how you think about your family, friends and community, and in what ways?

Aleah Anderson 40:21

Absolutely. This is something I've talked about a lot. So, um, yeah, it's been, it's been a really difficult year for me and missing my family. It's been like, honestly, the hardest thing for me. And because of that, I will, Well, A: I've been practicing gratitude, way more than I used to just being grateful for things that used to be so small, like I went to a thrift store this week, and I got new clothes. I haven't done that in a year. And I also like, dyed my hair because I, I was like, I want to change. Oh, it's not that different. But I'm just like these little things. And then well, also a little interesting, like, I graduated a semester early. And I didn't know that until my fall, like halfway through my fall semester that was actually graduating that semester. And then so all of a sudden, I just like had like, a month of like, what are my plans? What am I going to do? And now that I'm graduated, I'm like, "What am I doing?" Like, "What is my life now?" I've never, I've literally never been out of school before in my life. I've been in school this whole time since my first time not being a student, I'm fully vaccinated and I just want to be as free as possible. So what we did was we bought a small school bus and were converting it into a tiny house. And our goal is to just do traveling full time for like the next X amount of years. And, yeah, and a huge day, like, I just want to camp, literally right outside my family's house, and just hang out with them for a

while. They live a couple hours away. And I just I miss my family so much. I just I want to spend as much time with them as I can. And, and I also have pets, it's hard to travel with pets, typically. But I just feel like, I felt like this was the best of all the things I needed. I'm still transitioning, I'm still in my house, obviously. But that's kind of, I honestly, I don't think I would have made that decision if this pandemic didn't happen. So I miss people so much. I miss traveling, I miss, I just miss being, having control over what I'm doing, I guess, especially with being a student forever. It's like, there's always homework and everything to feel guilty about when you're not working on schoolwork. So I feel like I'm working through a lot of school trauma right now as well. But yeah, that's like, I'm just so excited for the future. I feel like the, the name, or the word of the year is gratitude, being grateful for every single thing. Like, I'm so grateful. I'm gonna see my mom on Sunday and get to hug her with no mask. So, like, these simple things. Like I never would have thought that I was gonna miss that or like I was just like something I always took for granted. So I'm really grateful for it. And especially now that the winter is over. I'm really grateful to be outside again. Yeah, that's, that's my answer.

Tyler Urness 43:42

Well, speaking of gratitude, thank you again for speaking with us.

Aleah Anderson 43:45

Yeah, for sure.

Tyler Urness 43:47

And have a good rest of your night, I guess.

Aleah Anderson 43:51

Thank you. Yeah, well, I'm happy I can help. This is a fun experience.

Tyler Urness 43:57

Have a good weekend too.

Aleah Anderson 43:59

Thank you. You too. Happy Mother's Day.

Tyler Urness 44:03

Thank you, bye.