

Transcript of Interview with LaTonja Crowder

Interviewee: LaTonja Crowder

Interviewer: Diamond Crowder

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Location: Columbus, Ohio

Transcriber: Diamond Crowder

Abstract: LaTonja Crowder is 47 years old and resides in Columbus, Ohio. Her mother was born and raised in Alabama, but eventually moved to Columbus, Ohio. LaTonja works at Job and Family Services in Franklin County where she has been a case manager for two years now. LaTonja helps clients with benefits such as Medicaid, SNAP, and Cash Assistance. LaTonja has also worked at a nonprofit in Columbus, Ohio, for 17 years. She reflects on important events such as Hurricane Katrina and working with refugees at the nonprofit. In this interview LaTonja reveals how the coronavirus has impacted her daily, work, and social life, as well as other aspects of her life.

Diamond Crowder 00:02

So, I already told you that this interview is for my public history class and we're going to take oral interviews about the coronavirus and how it has impacted you. So before we get into the good stuff, just tell me about yourself. Like your name, your age, your occupation.

LaTonja Crowder 00:23

My name is LaTonja Crowder. I'm 47 years old. I work at Job and Family Services. I am a case manager. And what that means, I process for Medicaid, SNAP and cash assistance. It is a income-based program for a diverse of customers in Franklin County.

DC 00:54

Okay. So where are you from?

LC 00:57

Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, but I'm a city country girl.

DC 01:06

What does that mean?

LC 01:08

My mom was born in Alabama. So, I have a little twang a little, little southern accent, a little bit comes out every now and then.

DC 01:21

Okay. So, what do you know about the coronavirus or COVID-19?

LC 01:26

I really didn't know anything about it until it impact our day to day living. Everything that was put on the news, til learning about it. I know it's a disease that is killing—or, not a disease, called viru—that is killing people on a day-to-day basis and they are trying to control, the, the virus.

DC 02:00

Okay. So how have you prepared or how are you preparing right now on during this pandemic?

LC 02:09

Mmm, I was kind of prepared a little bit. I send my kids, I sent my kids out for like household goods. Like what we was low on like toilet paper, tish, paper towels, couldn't find hand sanitizer. I looked at my house, I didn't know, I didn't have a thermometer, things that you normally don't use on a consistent basis and then when you go to the store it's like, it's all gone. Like, hand sanitizer was always at the store. Now is a hot commodity. Toilet paper is like really baby wipes. I'm, like, for real.

DC 02:54

Did you find any, like, Lysol wipes?

LC 02:54

No, I didn't. Even the, like the un-name brand wasn't there, but in my house I always kept bleach in my house. So that was, you know, an alternative measure of disinfecting your house.

DC 03:17

Okay. So how do you think this pandemic will change society?

LC 03:33

Don't take things for granted anymore. Like being restricted to your house. The social distance between people. Mmm. It's not common. When you in a grocery store you don't, well, I know I give people personal space, but some people don't give people personal space right now. They

still don't. Ain't giving people personal space. Just seeing people going to the stores with masks on and gloves and being more cautious, heightened people's insecurities and panic buying, unnecessary information that is put out there to make you panic buy and just, just panic over. I'm going to say this is important, but it's just keep on feeding you and feeding you and feeding you and you're not getting a break. Making you anxious. For me, I was, I didn't feel like I was anxious. But now since all the information is, everywhere you look, everywhere you listen to is talking about this virus.

DC 04:55

So, what do you think will stay the same in society?

LC 05:01

Stay the same. What I think gonna stay the same? Just being aware. The act I, I don't know how to answer that question. I think people's insecurities still going to be there. It's still going to be kind of heightened. Even we probably get past it. People's fear still is going to be there. You're going to look at people differently. Mmm. Having speculations where it came from is still going to be there. Being biased on race about the, the virus. I mean because they said that it came from Asia, Asian people. Just looking at people's race differently like you go—you may fall into that belief or you may not fall into that belief.

DC 06:16

[Inaudible] I know a lot of people, like, went to the banks as well cause they were like, their anxiety was high. Did you go to the bank and take out any money and try to like put it under your pillow or your mattress?

LC 06:31

I took out some. I didn't take out all my money. I felt like things is gonna happen for a reason. You really can't prepare for the unknown. You try to prepare the best way, you know how, and if it's meant to be, it's going to happen. It's going to happen.

DC 06:53

Okay. So, what other crises have you experienced and how did you handle them?

LC 07:00

Before working at Job and Family Services, cause I've been there for two years, I worked at a nonprofit for 17 years and I can remember when Hurricane Katrina had hit and we had to be trained on people that was coming from Louis, Louisiana the hurricane. And they was calling them refugees and I didn't know that refugees was put on people who was born in the USA. I thought it was from people from abroad. Yeah. Like people from Iran, Iraq who lived over there and had thought when I came over here they was refugees. So, learning the terminology also how

to get the people benefits without birth certificates, social security, numbers, identification how to move through the system with nothing to identify this person and tried to make this person feel welcome in a new city. So, and also show some compassion to these people. Cause it was devastated cause some people had lost their whole entire family and they was just brought here and they didn't, they told them they was going to one place and was just brought here and dropped here to strangers and I didn't know. So trying to figure out how to interact with that.

DC 08:42

Okay. So, going back to the COVID-19, how was your daily routine interrupted?

LC 08:50

[Laughing] Um, my favorite place to go was going to Walmart, just, just to be out. That that got token. Me and my husband used to go out social drinking on a weekend. That kind of stopped, and then just me going to work on the day-to-day basis. Now we cannot be in the center—all the employees—so we have opposite days. So it's like 50 percent of our employees are working from home, some is in an office and then we switch.

How we are determining benefits now? They kind of are relaxed on the qualifications and documentations that you need to process a case. So a lot of stuff has changed trying to—mmm, wrap your head around these quick change process. Cause by human nature people don't like change. You get comfortable in your day to day routine and how things is and then one things is changed very quickly. You don't know how to react to it. And you second guessed yourself and then you heighten, your insecurities come out, and you question yourself like, am I doing this job right? Am I showing social, social distance to people? Am I being compassionate for this family? Because of how the COVID-19 has impacted them, or you know, just thinking about my nextdoor neighbors. I don't know if they young or old, if they can go out. Just a lot of thoughts going to your head.

DC 10:51

Okay. Do you have any last final words about COVID-19 and how it has impacted society or you personally?

LC 11:00

Mmm, I think that first how has impacted society once again. It just shows what kind of society that we are living in. Cause you going to have crazy people that comes out and do crazy stuff. But for the most part, I still think there still common good in people [inaudible] personally for me. We, my family still are a tight knit family. We still check on each other, not on a day to day basis, but, mmm, just checking to see each other are is doing, if we need anything. For my sister, to my brother, to my kids, to my grandkids. So just understand trying to understand a new norm.

DC 12:11

All right, well, I just want to say thank you for your time and your thoughts on COVID-19.

LC 12:15

And you're welcome