

**Oral history interview with Sherelle Reid, interviewed by Samariya Smith for the Connecticut Historical Society's Community History Project discussing her experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Interviewed on May 25, 2022 and May 26, 2022 in Hartford, Connecticut.**

Samariya Smith: Today is May 25, 2022. This is Samariya Smith interviewing Sherelle Reid. Sherelle, can you repeat your name and give us your age, your occupation, and what town you live in.

Sherelle Reid: My name is Sherelle Reid. I am forty-seven years old. I work as a case manager for Hartford Communities That Care and I live in Windsor, CT.

Smith: Awesome. Sherelle, do you remember where you were the first time you heard about Covid-19?

Reid: I was at work, actually. [laughs] At a job that I was a long-term temp at.

Smith: Okay. What was the first disruption to your life due to Covid?

Reid: The first real disruption was actually related to that particular job because I was a temp, they were now trying to figure out how to let me work from home when they shut the office down. So that was something that wouldn't normally happen because I'm a temp, so they had to get me a laptop. That was the first real disruption, and it was a disruption I was incredibly thrilled about. Believe me. [laughs]

Smith: What precautions did you take at the start of the pandemic?

Reid: We did the social distancing and we worked from home and I tried to be the – I was basically the only one leaving the house when I needed to get stuff like groceries and things like that. Lots of cleaning supplies. More cleaning supplies than I would have normally bought. And just trying to make sure we were prepared while everybody was bulk buying everything. It was really difficult trying to get those supplies without people – without stores having to do the restrictions. I don't know if I would have been able to get as much of the stuff I needed, that I felt we needed, if they didn't, because people were absolutely insane.

Smith: Thinking back to the Spring of 2020, what do you remember about that time? The whole after Covid -- they introduced Covid and that entire spring of 2020, what do you remember about it? What sticks out to you?

Reid: I didn't like my youngest son very much.

Smith: Can you talk about that a little more?

Reid: Really it was because he's in high school. He's a teenager. And now suddenly he can't do the things that he would normally do. He can't leave the house. He can't go visit

people. So he's confined and cranky about it. [laughs] There's all these changes. School and not being able to see people and it was a lot of pressure. But also, he was kind of projecting those frustrations on everyone else. Mostly me. Because he'd want to go see people and I'd be like, no! [laughs] I do distinctly remember not really liking my son very much. [laughs]

Smith: I don't think you're alone with that. [laughs] What do you remember when the restrictions started lifting in the summer of 2020?

Reid: I remember thinking, why are we doing that? [laughs] Let's keep those in place. I don't know if you realize but it's still out there.

Smith: Even today.

Reid: So I was not keen on the restrictions being lifted in that sense.

Smith: As it relates to Covid, who or where did you get your information from?

Reid: I mostly got my information from the CDC. I tried to follow only what I knew were verifiable sources.

Smith: How do you view personal choice during a pandemic?

Reid: I view -- personal choice is important but not at the risk of public safety. Yes, you are allowed to make public choices. Even now I look at people who go into the store without masks on like, alright. You realize we're still in the middle of a pandemic? That didn't go away. But okay. So I think personal choice is important, but you should also make decisions based on how it might affect the public good.

Smith: What do you remember about the 2020 [presidential] election? And if you're comfortable sharing, how did you vote and why?

Reid: What I remember about the 2020 elections is really not much, honestly. I know there was lots of discussions. I know there was lots of talk thrown out about the pandemic itself. About the virus. About the economy. About race relations. It was just, I already knew I wasn't voting for Trump because I didn't vote for him in the first place. I don't remember much about the election because I tended to avoid news that mentioned Trump. And he was the news for four years. I was like, no, I'm good. [laughs] So I don't remember much. I do remember being happy to have the option to do mail-in ballots. That was -- even though it was something that was already offered, I liked that it was more readily available. So I was more comfortable voting because they had a box outside City Hall and just drop it in there and keep it moving. I ain't got to see anybody. I ain't got to get out of the car. [laughs]

Smith: Exactly.

Reid: So that part was great.

Smith: What do you remember about the insurrection events of January 6 [2021]?

Reid: I remember the kind of hypocritical view of, yes, we're all for police, but the police are being injured and harmed in this ridiculous attempt at a coup. I remember just the sea of faces just nonchalantly walking around and trying to get in to overthrow something that just basically boiled down to, it didn't go their way.

Smith: How did the internet affect your experience of the pandemic?

Reid: I think it helped my experience with the pandemic because it was – because of restrictions and social distancing and the way people had to work and do things, it made it easier to get the information I might need on the internet. Like I was always one to research and find stuff on the internet anyway so that just made it more so, where I can track down information a little easier and get updates about what's going on in particular places. Like if I have a resource, I can check to see if that resource is still actually available. So the internet actually really helped in that respect.

Smith: How did you feel when you first heard about the vaccine?

Reid: I was very skeptical. I was really not for the vaccine. I was not for the idea of pushing the vaccine onto our communities. Cause at the time, I was working as a community health worker. So we were going from providing information about Covid and giving presentations on it and passing out PPE and talking to the community about possible resources for them that they might need. Like local businesses. Information for them. To now basically talking about just the vaccine and scheduling people and so it felt like we were now supposed to push this narrative that most of us weren't even on board with. [laughs] So I was very skeptical of the vaccine at first.

Smith: Okay. Do you agree with the mandates? The mask mandates and the vaccine mandates?

Reid: I am team mask all the way. I believe that while the vaccines may help, I don't think it's in the best interest to push a mandate for vaccine. Like, I do understand that for some specific occupations – like health care – you should have the vaccine mandated. Just like you would any other vaccination. In that respect, I am all for it. But I don't think it's something that should be mandated for everybody.

Smith: How do you think the pandemic ends? And how do you feel about the new normal?

Reid: I really -- at the rate we're going, I don't think the pandemic ends. There's always a new variant. There's always someone who's, you're trampling on my rights, I don't have to do this, and I don't have to do that. And there's this lack of concern for fellow man that will keep the pandemic around. The new normal is, I mean it's just a transition. Like any other thing that we've gone through in our lives. As we've grown, as technology changes and grows, that became a new normal. So this is really no different.

Smith: Did you or someone you know get Covid? Can you tell us about it? And has your approach to mental health been changed by the pandemic?

Reid: I do know people who had contracted Covid. I've had a couple of cousins who contracted it. But they weren't – it wasn't like I was truly interacted with them to worry about me contracting it. But because I was working as a community health worker, I was always more cautious about anything that might have -- where I might have contracted, because I was in contact with so many people who may or might not have had it. So I do know people who did have Covid. They were pretty mild, actually, in most cases.

Smith: That's good.

Reid: They were pretty mild in most cases, but I do have people who I went to church with and their family caught it and have actually passed away. It was a very large effect. I was always team therapy. [laughs]

Smith: I understand.

Reid: I was always, even before I started working here, I was always about therapy. I actually had a therapist before I started working here. So my approach to mental health was really more focused on my children. Especially my youngest. Because he was really struggling during the restrictions. It really affected his mental health. I became more focused on mental health and resources and how to best help black boys specifically and teenagers and how--

[Recording Ends here]

Smith: This is Samariya Smith. May 26, 2022. Interviewing Sherelle Reid. Sherelle, if you could restate your name, your age, your occupation, and where you live.

Sherelle Reid: My name is Sherelle Reid. I am forty-seven years old. I work as a case manager for Hartford Communities That Care. And I live in Windsor, CT.

Smith: Sherelle, do you remember where you were and when you first heard about Covid-19?

Reid: Yes. I was working a temp job in downtown Hartford and there was discussions about the office possibly shutting down, so it was trying to get the best use of – figure out how to keep me working when that happened.

Smith: What was the first disruption to your life due to Covid?

Reid: The first disruption was the schools shutting down. And then my work followed shortly after that.

Smith: What precautions did you take at the start of the pandemic?

Reid: We mostly just cleaned more. And tried to get more cleaning supplies and we had a tendency to hang out more in our rooms and be sort of separate because I still had to work, and my oldest son still had to work. It was him more so because he worked security, he had to constantly leave the house, so it was more trying to be as distanced as possible

because I was the one bringing him to work. [laughs] It was trying to keep separated from everybody to not spread anything.

Smith: Is there anything specific that sticks out to you about the spring of 2020?

Reid: The spring of 2020, I just remember how frustrated we all were in my house. More from my youngest son's standpoint because he was basically trapped in the house all day every day doing schoolwork and not being able to see friends and so he was frustrated and projecting it on other people. That was making me frustrated because he was getting on my nerves. [laughs] That's mostly what I remember about the spring. And the uncertainty. Because I have asthma, so it was that uncertainty of well, is this Covid or is this just regular shmegular me being me with my current issues? The uncertainty was equally bothersome.

Smith: What do you remember when the restrictions started getting lifted in the summer of 2020?

Reid: I remember deciding that I was still going to wear my mask and I remember still being irritated when people were less than six feet from me. Yo, we're all in this line, we've got plenty of room, back up. And still giving people side eye when they weren't wearing masks. All right, I guess. [laughs] I was reconciling myself to that.

Smith: Who or where did you get your information from regarding the pandemic?

Reid: I got most of my information from the CDC and from local health departments because I started in the early fall, the early to mid-fall, working as a community health worker with Hartford Communities That Care. So we had to do presentations so we had to learn about all that information about what we knew about Covid to give these presentations. That's where I got my information from.

Smith: How do you view personal choice during a pandemic?

Reid: I view personal choice as still important, but with the frame of mind of, how does this help the greater good? Because yes, you have personal choice and you should exercise your personal choice, but it should not be at the expense of other people just because it doesn't affect you the way it affects them. That's my view on personal choice.

Smith: What do you remember about the 2020 [presidential] election? And if you're comfortable sharing, how did you vote and why?

Reid: I remember what I remember about the 2020 election besides largely avoiding it because I avoided all news related to Donald Trump as much as physically possible. I remember there was a lot of frenzy, in a sense. There was a lot of frenzy and a lot of misinformation and just a whole lot of entitlement. Just being loud and wrong in a lot of respects with regard to the pandemic and science and racism and so I just remember the frenzied wrong entitlement. I voted for Biden because he wasn't giving frenzied loud

entitlement. [laughs] He wasn't out here being loud and wrong. You couldn't pay me enough to vote for Trump.

Smith: What do you remember about the events of January 6 [2021]?

Reid: I remember the hypocrisy of it. We're all for the blue lives matter and we're for police – except for when they're trying to stop us from doing what we want to do. That was the hypocritical aspect of it to me. And just the sheer audacity of it all to think, we don't like the way this election came out so we're going to try to do a coup -- because it's Tuesday. It didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. It seemed pointless. It was – I was incredulous at the fact that you could see them just walking away. No one's getting arrested. People are being escorted down the stairs. You're just like, but ain't this treason? I'm pretty sure this is treason. It seems treasonous. Last time I checked, this seemed very treasonous. But I guess you can help them down the stairs as they go back to their hotel?

Smith: How did the internet affect your experience during the pandemic?

Reid: The internet helped me to get information on what services may be available. What programs might be out there that I could use in the course of my job as a community health worker. But also, for myself in my personal life. This is going on right now, what resources are there for me to partake in, what agency or organization is open and what's closed. The internet helped a lot in that aspect. I would read. I would catch up on the news after the fact. I wouldn't watch news shows live. I would prefer to get a synopsis from the internet and keep it moving.

Smith: How did you feel when you first heard about the vaccine?

Reid: I was skeptical of it. It was it seemed like it was too soon and just too fast and there wasn't a whole lot known about the vaccine. There still wasn't a whole lot known about Covid itself, so how were we coming up with a vaccine so quickly? It seemed like it was something to just make the politicians look good. Oh look, we got a vaccine, good job. Okay. [laughs] I guess.

Smith: Do you agree with the mask mandates and the vaccine mandates?

Reid: I am team mask mandates. And I'm team mask mandates because they helped with more than just limiting exposure to Covid. They helped limit exposure to colds and flus and it was a way that helps with allergies. The air quality is not great sometimes and so mask mandates helped normalize stuff that people normally had to do to take precautions to not get sick and to not suffer from allergies, so I am team mask mandates. I'm pro-vaccine mandates in industries that are more medical and health care related. More close quarter and hands on. Like in a hospital, you can't do six feet when you're treating a patient. That's not a thing. If you work in a prison or a group home, you can do six feet to some extent, but having the vaccine adds that extra layer of protection so I'm for that. I'm not necessarily vaccine mandate for like an office setting. Cause y'all can work from home. [laughs] I don't

think it's necessary in every industry, but certain industries it's definitely more beneficial than harmful.

Smith: How do you think the pandemic ends?

Reid: With the nature of some people, and the sense of entitlement and individuality, I don't think it ends. I think it's just something we learn to work around. But I don't think it ends. Some people are – people in general are inherently selfish and if they don't see a benefit to doing something in the long term and it's not affecting them, then they're not going to go out of their way to do it. So I don't see the pandemic ending.

Smith: How do you feel about the new normal?

Reid: I am okay with the new normal. I don't mind the new normal in the, there is people now aren't crowding me, which I'm all for. [laughs] I'm an introvert so all the crowding and just random touching and in my space, I am not for. So I am very cool with that. [laughs] The downside is, people you're actually related to, loved ones and friends, you don't hug them as much anymore. There's not as much physical contact with people you actually want to be in physical contact with. But I am team give me six feet. I am okay with that.

Smith: Did you or someone you know catch Covid? And can you tell us about it.

Reid: I had a couple of family members who caught Covid. They were mild in nature so they were just confined to their homes and rode it out. I thankfully haven't caught Covid. I am hoping to continue that trend – because it don't look fun. I do know people that I went to church with and who have had family members who caught Covid and it was severe enough that they passed away. That trauma, you can't really console someone in that respect. How they react to those more self-absorbed entitled types who it's not affecting them directly regarding the pandemic, it affects them differently. They are kind of vocal about it and just angry about it, as well. It affects how you present yourself, in a way. If there's pictures and people aren't wearing masks and they're pointing that out, it's like, okay, I took my mask off for the picture. But still, you present yourself differently based on what you know about the people you know and how Covid and the loss and the pandemic affected them.

Smith: Sherelle, has your approach to mental health been changed by the pandemic?

Reid: No. I don't think it's been changed by the pandemic because I was always advocating for mental health. For therapy and to get better and be a more whole person. So it didn't affect it in that way. It made me want to look into it more and see and find more resources and how that affects our community as a whole. It made me want to seek out and find more resources and find resources related to – at the time my job as a community health worker and now as a case manager -- dealing with more vicarious trauma. It makes me seek out different avenues for mental health, but it didn't affect being interested in mental health.

Smith: How have your relationships been affected by the pandemic?

Reid: I think in a lot of ways my relationships were stunted by the pandemic. Because you don't interact as often with people because we were isolated and separated and practicing social distancing and only being around people when it was absolutely necessary. So, I think it affected that comradery that you would build in person as opposed to on a screen. Yeah, I could do Thanksgiving via zoom with my brother and my sister-in-law and my niece, but that's not really the same thing. And I'm tired of looking at a screen! [laughs] So I think it affected it negatively in the sense that it doesn't feel like there is as much connection as there was before.

Smith: How has your household changed during the pandemic?

Reid: My household -- the pandemic was stressful for a number of reasons. One of them was we were at the beginnings of foreclosure when the pandemic and the restrictions started. So, it was just this thing kind of up in the air. We didn't know what was going on. It was like, okay, we've got these moratoriums, and everything is halted, but then happens at this date. There was a lot of stress in the house, which the pandemic compounded because we were in the house, but we didn't know how long we were going to be in the house. And if we could be in the house. It was a nightmare, honestly, and it was very, very stressful on top of worrying about the disease, worrying about if I was going to be homeless.

Smith: What did you lose, if anything, during the pandemic?

Reid: What did I lose? I lost that sense of connection with my relationships. Even with my children. Even though we were in the house all together, it was still a loss of connection because we weren't together. We weren't doing things together, really. It was so high stress regarding the foreclosure and the pandemic, and it was just -- I feel like I lost my ability to connect with people and build relationships. I think that suffered.

Smith: What did you find during the pandemic?

Reid: I found my ability to ask for help and to speak up. It was more -- I was kind of speaking up before, but I think it became more so now because I was focusing on speaking for the community and advocating for the community during this pandemic in that aspect. I think it taught me to speak up more and ask for help if I needed it. I think that's what I gained from that.

Smith: Can you describe the pandemic in one word?

Reid: Chaotic.

Smith: I hear that.

Reid: [laughs]



Smith: The greatest lesson you have learned during this pandemic?

Reid: I learned that people are going to be people. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's not necessarily a good thing. It just is. That you can't take on everyone's trauma. You can't take on everyone's logic and everyone's thought processes because sometimes they're not going to match yours and so you just have to learn to deal with the person as they present themselves in that particular moment.

Smith: How did you change during the pandemic?

Reid: I became a lot more closed off. I mean, I wasn't all rah rah let's be in front. [laughs] I became a lot more closed off as the pandemic went on. But also, I became less patient with "isms". I was actually glad that I lost that temp job. It was stressful, though. Getting other temp positions afterwards and getting temp-to-perm positions only for them not to work out. And still dealing with the pandemic itself and having to go into offices. That was a nightmare. I also didn't have to – coming to HCTC, I got rid of the racial microaggressions that I experienced at my temp job. So it wasn't all these people treating me like I'm a second class citizen or invisible or a pet. They'd say things like "good girl". Am I a dog? Who are you talking to? I don't understand. I got rid of that, which made it easier to be myself. To say things that are on my mind. And so that's how I think I changed.

Smith: What advice would you give to someone who experiences a future pandemic?

Reid: I would say, get all the information that you can and try to think outside of yourself and how your actions might affect everyone around you. Because it may not be you this one day, but it could directly affect you the next day. An hour from now. A week from now. I think it's important to get all the information and to make decisions that are good for you. And good for the general public.

Smith: What is your hope for the future?

Reid: My hope for the future is that people in general think more about the greater good and don't deny something just because it doesn't happen to them personally. Don't insult the intelligence of others because it doesn't happen to you or has no effect on you. People are whole and you're encountering one aspect, so try to think beyond that one aspect and how it might affect you down the line.

Smith: Thank you. We are finished. Your answers were awesome.

Reid: Thank you.

Smith: Very thoughtful. Really good.