

Basic Detail Report

Title Interview with Lee Ann Gomes

Date 2022 June 2

Medium born digital audio file

Description (a) Interview with Lee Ann Gomes. Interviewed by Abbie Cowan on June 2, 2022 in Norwich, Connecticut. (b) Photograph of Lee Ann Gomes taken at her interview. She was interviewed as part of the Connecticut Historical Society's Community History Project discussing her experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Gomes was born and raised in Norwich, Connecticut. She is a retired social worker from the City of Norwich. She first learned about the COVID-19 pandemic from news outlets in early 2020. Her work life was the first disruption by the pandemic in March 2020. The City of Norwich ordered most workers home, only allowing select department heads to work in the office. Gomes stated she trusts the opinions of the medical professionals and scientists, so she and her family followed the recommendations on masking, sanitation, and social distancing. Gomes didn't see her mother for over a year, since her mother was elderly and in the at-risk population. As of the date of her interview, Gomes has not contracted COVID-19. A few of the young adults in her family did contract COVID-19 but did not require hospitalization. She discusses how people in different risk categories lived their lives and the level of precautions they may have taken. Gomes stated that everyone has personal choice, but everyone should follow public guidance to protect each other. As new information and research is revealed, then we should all adapt and learn.

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Gomes stated that she believes mask mandates are within the purview of the governments, as masks can be taken on and off. She does not agree with the vaccine mandates because everyone should have the choice to decide what they put in their body. When the restrictions began to lift in the Summer of 2020, Gomes was cautiously optimistic and erred on the side of protecting herself by continuing to wear a face mask. The City of Norwich was keeping track of infection levels, so Gomes was monitoring the level of infection in Norwich from the city's data. In her line of work, her department serves low-income populations, so services related to low-income residents, the senior center, youth and family services, and the recreation department were affected. She and her staff had to figure out how they could still serve these populations. When her staff as required to work from home, they had to ensure everyone had the proper technology, such as laptops, printers, and work-issued cellphones. A large number of Norwich residents became unemployed during the pandemic. Her office helped people apply for unemployment compensation. The food pantry and United Way mobile van stopped providing services at the start of the pandemic, so Gomes' office adapted to this by using the senior center van and other transportation to provide food and care packages to seniors and other affected community members. They also helped seniors register for vaccinations. Her office tried to make sure there was vaccine equity among the various communities in Norwich, such as the undocumented and the Black and Hispanic communities. During the lockdown, her relationships with family and friends changed because they couldn't interact in person. It taught her to slow

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down and appreciate the time she now had free to have deeper connections in her relationships. She didn't start any new hobbies during the pandemic, but she did have more time to enjoy the hobbies she had, such as sewing, quilting, and gardening. Her mental health was impacted by the pandemic. There was added stress to ensure her office could still serve the senior population, but also keep her staff safe. Her office applied for several grants, so they could keep services going or adapt to a different way of delivering those services. Gomes was supposed to retire in June 2020, but she couldn't retire once the pandemic began everything was changing for employees and the communities they serve. Gomes believes that COVID-19 will linger and become one of the virus' s people get vaccinated for yearly, such as the flu. When discussing the 2020 presidential election, Gomes stated she believed the Trump administration did not handle the pandemic as well as they could have. She voted by absentee ballot in the election, and believes that absentee ballots are important for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Gomes discusses the United States Capitol Insurrection of January 6, 2021. She was disgusted and outraged that this could happen, and that people should be prosecuted for their roles in the insurrection. She believes in protest, but this was not a protest, it was a riot. Gomes discusses the Black Lives Matter movement, the murder of George Floyd, and policing. She has two family members who work in the Norwich Police Department, so she can see both sides of the discussion around the Black Lives Matter movement and the police. She believes in the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement and has attended local rallies in support. She stated the biggest loss during the

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pandemic was the high number of deaths and the loss of people in the medical

profession. Medical professionals are overworked and stressed, and the

pandemic has taken a toll on that profession. The biggest gain from the

pandemic was the collaboration in communities and taking care of each other.

The pandemic taught Gomes to be more cautious and aware and to not take life

for granted. The advice Gomes would give some in a future pandemic is to learn

from the past, act quickly and seriously, and collaborate with everyone. The one

word Gomes would use to describe the pandemic is devastating. The pandemic

exacerbated the divide and differences among people in the United States. The

was a huge loss of life, disruption to work and school life, mental health issues

were exacerbated, and issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion were

heightened. She ended her interview by stating she hopes people recognize the

importance of the Norwich Human Services Department and that it is a critical

piece of the city's infrastructure.

Dimensions Duration: 50 Minutes, 30 Seconds