

Communities for Immunity: Stories about COVID The Peale, Baltimore | 2022

Whitney Frazier (00:00): All right. So I'm here with Ms. Pauline. Ms. Pauline, will you introduce yourself?

Pauline Charles (00:05): Certainly. My name is Pauline Charles. I live in Dolly Park, I'm the president here. I'm 62 years old and I've been in the community over 40 years.

Whitney Frazier (00:16): Great. And when did you first become aware of COVID and what are your thoughts on how your experience has been over the last two years?

Pauline Charles (00:27): Well actually, right before they introduced COVID or was talking about COVID, I was extremely sick, and it just felt like it was something more than the flu. I mean, complete with body aches, the shakes, the chills. And as time went on, I spoke to a few other people who said pretty much the same thing, believed that they had COVID before they start talking about it so much or during the big shutdown. But actually COVID, it affects so many different people in different ways. Once they start closing down things and we watching the prices of everything go up and then you watch families that was receiving food stamps. And it was just amazing to go into the market and watch how some people carts... You could pretty much tell people are during the COVID time, just in the market. They were getting double food stamps, the children were getting food stamps. So you would see people and the cart running over.

Pauline Charles (01:33): And then you would have the working class people, what have you, and you could automatically you could just tell, I don't know if you noticed it, but you could look at someone elses cart and they would have five or six things that you're like, "Oh, they're paying with cash." And the person in front of a cart could be running over. So basically, you watch that sort of thing occur and then you just became a part of a distance. You couldn't communicate, you couldn't do family gatherings. We had two family reunions that we were supposed to have, that we couldn't have. So it's been a long time, even now, since financially now, family can't seem to get together.

Whitney Frazier (02:15): Yeah. Say more about that. So it sounds like you saw different impacts on different groups of people based on [crosstalk 00:02:24]

Pauline Charles (02:24): Absolutely. Yes. Just back again to the supermarket, you've been of course, and just seeing how the prices have went up tremendously. So of course, once again, you could tell, I'm in the market in the express line, because I only have six items, where if you look at over to my left their cart is running over, because these folks have food stamps, which makes all the difference. Then it's like, I went to Sam's Club this morning. We were actually looking at the prices of meats. My husband's a steak eater and literally, the steaks are running 45, \$50 bucks a pack. Even looking at the meats in there, some of them look dark, they're so expensive. So people, they're sitting there and then probably go on sale. But it's definitely... I mean, as you know, the price of chicken wings, how that is. It's really affecting people, just the price of food.

Whitney Frazier (03:26): Right. And I guess, people that already had access to food stamps continued to have food stamps [crosstalk 00:03:36].

Pauline Charles (03:36): Yes. They continued to have food stamps. And then they gave all the children, their kids that were school-aged children, they got their own cards with money on it.

Whitney Frazier (03:47): Oh.

Pauline Charles (03:49): I mean, I've seen families that say, "Oh, I got \$600 of food stamps, this month. \$900 worth of food stamps in one month." Because of the children all having carts. Now that's fine, but here I am basically on a fixed income, but just making \$10 more, I'm not eligible for food stamps. So therefore, I can't afford to shop like them, even with the prices going up. I just have to buy really smart, I have to be very smart with my dollars. And now with everything's going on in the war, you can actually see that... As of today, right now, I don't see things getting any better.

Pauline Charles (04:32): And it's hard to believe that prices seem it could even go even higher. And of course, we've got to be smarter without trips. I used to go visit my daughter, it wouldn't be a thing. I mean, she's only two miles away from me, maybe two and a half miles and it would be nothing to jump in the car and go up there. But now my trips has to be smarter I have to like, "Okay, well, I'll go up there today." I can't run up there every day or twice a day to see my little grand baby and things like that, because of the price of gas. I just seen a place on Harper Road, \$4.19.

Whitney Frazier (05:09): So I guess, let's go back a little to the beginning when you did start finding out about COVID, how did that impact you or your family or your way of living?

Pauline Charles (05:24): Oh, it really made a difference. My family are really a close knit family and we are so used to for gatherings and used to being together. And I think it actually put a toll on the family thinking we can't go visit this one. My mother-in-law is 84 years old and she lives in Annapolis and we all love her dearly, but she only would let her sons in, two of them really, because she was just afraid to have people around her. She had two appointments that she had to go to the doctors and literally the way she was covered up and just so scared of catching COVID or being around anyone with it. So I missed seeing her, I mean literally, it was over a year before we could actually go down for a visit.

Whitney Frazier (06:23): I'm jumping around a little, but when they came out with the vaccination, how did you feel about that? Were you eager to get it? Were you hesitant? I don't know.

Pauline Charles (06:35): I was actually hesitant. I don't know if you are aware, that basically I have lupus. So actually, I was afraid, pretty much to get it. I didn't know how it would affect me with lupus, but my die doctor was actually afraid for her patients not to get it. She was like how important it was that we did get them, because it would help with the lungs and things like that if they was to get it, they had a better chance of fighting it off. And as I thought about it and prayed on it and to the moment of getting the shot, still praying that knowing that the father would keep us covered and that. So I went on and got it done, I actually didn't have any trouble. And now I'm glad I had it done, because I've looked at... I've heard so many different stories of people who haven't had it and been extremely sick, so I'm glad I had it done.

Whitney Frazier (07:40): Do you have people in the neighborhood or your community or family that are not getting vaccinated and how do you feel?

Pauline Charles (07:52): I have an aunt, an uncle and a cousin, all the same family and actually, I don't know how I can forget to say this, my brother and my sister-in-law. And it's because of they are Jehovah's Witnesses and their religion just doesn't allow them to get the shots.

Whitney Frazier (08:10): Do you talk to them about it or you're just like...

Pauline Charles (08:12): Yes, my brother and I, we talk about it and my cousin who's like my little sister. And surprisingly, she's an RN, but she's in private homes actually, so it doesn't require her to have it, because she just goes in homes, she's not actually in the hospital itself. And I believe her parents would have gotten it, the doctors wanted them to, but she pretty much convinced them that they shouldn't because of the religion and that sort of thing, so they didn't get them.

Whitney Frazier (08:45): But you trusted your doctor, so you went with your doctor's recommendation. Yeah.

Pauline Charles (08:51): Absolutely. Yeah. And I'm glad I did. Yeah.

Whitney Frazier (08:55): So I know there's a lot of really hard things with COVID. Has there been anything positive that's come out of the last few years? Or are there things that you're hopeful for, moving forward?

Pauline Charles (09:12): If I could be as truthful as I can, I'm always very hopeful. But at this point right now, it's actually, it's a sadness upon us. If you just look around and maybe when things... Or we get a break with what's going on around the world right now, with the war and all these things that's going on, if we could get that to calm down, but right now I'm just not... I'm actually sad, I'm sad for the country, I'm sad for the communities. I'm just not in a good place mentally, concerned of things that are going on. I've never seen so many people...

Pauline Charles (09:54): My neighbor and I sit outside on the porch, and we say, "Where are all the children?" There's nobody comes out front to sit on their porches anymore. Neighbors don't even communicate with one another anymore. Everybody just seem to be so [inaudible 00:10:12] or in their own little worlds. And then you watch how this drug scene is just getting larger and larger around the city and the shooting and all the bad things that are occurring. I mean, I'm always praying, but it's going to take a group of us really pulling together to make a change in this city. And I could never get down on the mayor, because it's way too big for him, it's going to take more than him. So I'm just not in a happy place, concerns, not at this point.

Laurel Stewart (10:50): I want to ask you, Ms. Pauline, how do you think that you've changed? And how do you notice how people around you have changed since COVID? How as a society do we function differently?

Pauline Charles (11:06): Well, I'll give you a perfect example. I interact a lot with the youth in the neighborhood, especially the young males and all of a sudden, within the last three to four months, I start seeing less and less of them. So after doing a little research, they're all locked up, they're either at Hickey or they're 18 and they're locked up. I have no young people that I can actually interact with right now. And I think that's what's really put me in such a funk. I mean, I love these kids and I love my community. I love my children here and they're not here.

Whitney Frazier (11:53): Why?

Pauline Charles (11:54): They put their selves in some really bad spots.

Whitney Frazier (11:57): Do you know why they've gotten arrested or locked up?

Pauline Charles (12:00): Yeah. They asked if you were looking at the news and they was talking about the different carjackings and carjacks that were going on around the city and in Charles Village and different places, they were all part of that. And I guess, they sat around and watched them for a while and just came and did a clean sweep and took all my young men away. And they can't have any visits right now, because of COVID. I had one before that was there at Hickey, I would go visit two of them there, but can't do that anymore, so there are no visits. And then I got two that's, 20 and 21, just turned 21, that I'm really, really concerned about. He's 21, hanging with the.. And I've been sharing with him, you're too old to be running with these kids. But I'm really afraid for him because he's not, nobody should be, but when I say he's not jail material, he's just not. He's trying to be tough out on the street, but if you know him, he's just really a sweet kid, so I'm really, really concerned about him.

Whitney Frazier (13:17): So not to make a direct connection, but do you think because of the hardships of COVID, young people have, I don't know, gotten more involved in, I don't know, illegal stuff. They weren't going to school anymore, I don't know.

Pauline Charles (13:41): No school. They're not going to school. And unfortunately, with these young kids, it's a book I read one time when common sense just isn't common. And I used to talk to these kids about this, where common sense would come in if three of us is together and one do something, you would think the other two would walk away, but usually they interact on whatever's occurring that's bad. And that book is very true, if you see a group a kids together, it's more likely if one do something or two take and steal a car, the other three that's with them, going to jump in instead of saying, "Oh, I'm not getting in that car, they're getting in."

Pauline Charles (14:30): And unfortunately, I think it's part of parenting and schooling, where our kids are just followers, I'm going to say, they can't think for their self, they just want to be part of the in crowd, put it that way, they just want to be part of the in crowd. It wouldn't be cool. They'll just walk away and say, "Oh, I'm not getting in that car." That wouldn't be cool. So that sort of thing occurs a lot. My daughter's a fifth grade teacher and she really has seen such a change with the kids. And in that home with that Zoom teaching and it really... I mean, I've heard people that say though, that kids were A students and now they not even passing it. I mean, they're D's, so it is taking a real toll on the kids. It's going take quite a bit to get us back on track. I mean, it's not going to be done this year, that's for sure.

Whitney Frazier (15:31): What do you think would help us get back on track?

Pauline Charles (15:36): People like you, pulling together.

Whitney Frazier (15:40): [crosstalk 00:15:40].

Pauline Charles (15:41): You guys and the guardians, our access, getting out there. I think it is required that in our communities, such as this one, we need to have the church open their doors and come out. We need funding, we need so many things in our community here. Just as we were speaking the other

night, I have always, before the park actually got there, had a vision of you did a mural on more on that wall there and there's those two vacant houses. I've always said it would be so nice to have a safe house in the neighborhood. And a safe house would be a house that would be able to get all this information, literature of anything that's going on around the city. It would be a place for mental health, we would have information to give them.

Pauline Charles (16:41): I started something years ago where I can find... Way before COVID I would get the hand sanitizers and little wipes. And my girlfriend came up with collecting pocket books and we would put lip gloss in the pocket books and give to the young ladies walking the street, they would be so thankful swinging their pocketbook, because they still are women at the end of the day, no matter what they're doing. And they would be so thankful for little stuff like that. So I think just even small things like that, I think will help make a difference in the city. Just having people out, trying to do something is going to make a difference.

Whitney Frazier (17:24): Right. I hear you. Like a resource center.

Pauline Charles (17:28): Yes.

Whitney Frazier (17:28): People know they can go to for lots of different questions or they can go there and share stories and talk about ideas even.

Pauline Charles (17:40): Absolutely, yes.

Whitney Frazier (17:42): Maybe look for job postings or whatever. Someone needs help with something in the neighborhood, it could be posted there.

Pauline Charles (17:49): Absolutely.

Whitney Frazier (17:52): Okay. Any other thoughts about COVID? Any crazy stories?

Pauline Charles (17:59): Well, I know one thing with COVID, I heard a few people that have had it and I almost feel the same way, I don't know, it might be just everything that's going on. But my memory doesn't seem to be nearly as sharp as it used to be. And I was recently speaking to one of my church sisters and she was saying, "You're not alone." She says, she's talked to someone else and her herself who had COVID, she says literally it has effected the way she is mentally. She says, it takes her longer to remember something or things that she should know, she just don't remember. But when you hear people talk about COVID, you don't hear them talk very much about memory loss, but it's a real true thing.