

*Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Interview with Amanda Beam*

Jen Weidner 0:04

Today is July the 9th, 2021. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library, conducting interviews for *Pandemic Perspectives: Jeffersonville Residents Recount Their Lives During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic*. This project was made possible with a grant from the Indiana Genealogical Society. I'm here today with Amanda Beam. Amanda, do you remember when you first heard about the pandemic?

Amanda Beam 0:28

It must have been in January, February of 2020, because I remember seeing flashes of it on TV, and you think, "Oh, this is kind of like, like a movie," or like,, I have the, we had the video, or like an app or video game where you plan out how a pandemic would spread, how you would take over the world. It's just a silly game, I know, it's not silly now. But you see, and you're like, "Oh, that's going to be a problem." But then you think, "How many times have we said that before? This is going to be a problem, never."

Jen Weidner 1:03

So, did you think that it would come to the United States, let alone to Indiana and Clark County?

Amanda Beam 1:10

I always think the worst of things, so yes, like, I'm a worrier. So, at that moment, probably yes. I don't think anyone thought it was going to be as bad as it was. Well, except the experts, which I am not. But yeah, as a worrier or someone with anxiety, the whole time I'm going, huh, this isn't good, this isn't good.

Jen Weidner 1:35

So, oh, where were you working when the pandemic started?

Amanda Beam 1:38

So, I started my job as a Program Director with the Clark County Jail in January, 2020, so I was there roughly two months before we started instituting some changes.

Jen Weidner 1:50

So, you were working directly with the inmates?

Amanda Beam 1:52

Directly, yes. So I provided, I brought in folks to do classes with them, we had some art therapy that was coming in, yoga was coming in. All sorts of different, different programs rotated around, initially, and so I came in there and then I personally worked to, we did a library, we have a little bit of library that started, and things kind of changed once the pandemic hit.

Jen Weidner 2:23

So, how did things change once we got positive cases in Clark County?

Amanda Beam 2:28

I think in all honesty, the jail did a really good, the jail administration, with securing that population. Early on, I want to say, end of February, mid-March, they had already instituted mask wearing, glove wearing, different things to make sure that, that Covid didn't reach our population.

Jen Weidner 2:54

So, trying to do things before it was even, like, the main stream?

Amanda Beam 2:58

Exactly, and so I was reading things later, like about a month later, in the New York Times and I'm like, "Well, here we are in Clark County, Indiana, and we've been doing this for a month, we've been doing so well." And so, they always did a really good job of protecting the populations as best as they could.

Jen Weidner 3:16

So, were there any positive cases with the inmates?

Amanda Beam 3:20

With my job, I wasn't as prone to that knowledge, but normally as, as things went on, so, initially they did, they instituted mask wearing, you had different rules with contact with the folks who were incarcerated. Eventually, that turned into they had a separate section that was a quarantine section, so that folks coming in would be in this quarantine section first. They were asked questions, if they had any contact with someone who had COVID, if they had any symptoms they were then tested, and they were segregated and kept in quarantine out. Once the thing was anywhere from two weeks to a month, quarantine period was over, then they went into the general population. And so, that was really advantageous to have that happen.

Jen Weidner 4:08

To mitigate a big outbreak.

Amanda Beam 4:11

Yes, and then, eventually, so, we were offered shots, I was, I was part of the, the study, so I actually got my Pfizer vaccine in August – didn't know until until December – but I was a part of the initial study, which is really nice, so.

Jen Weidner 4:28

That study was around here?

Amanda Beam 4:29

It was in Bardstown, Kentucky. So it was the clinical trial is what I...

Jen Weidner 4:33

Oh, very cool.

Amanda Beam 4:35

I'm sorry, the Pfizer clinical trial. So in August, I'd had my vaccination, but in December we were amongst some of the first people to be offered it, that's how I had to unblind me. So, I found out that I already had it, and so that helped as well. Dr. Yazel was amazing in having that happen, as was Chief Maples, did a really good job getting our people vaccinated. Chief Maples and Sheriff Nole both went out in the forefront in the public and got a vaccination just when it was starting to occur. And then, Chief Maples was also offered the vaccination, along with Paula Hall, who is amazing. She's one of the head nurses at, at the jail. Together with the Health Department, they worked into vaccinating the, our population, so, the folks who are incarcerated.

Jen Weidner 5:24

So, they were vaccinated, the long term inmates, or was it anybody that came in could be vaccinated?

Amanda Beam 5:30

Anybody that wanted it. Eventually, like, so what they would do is, my understanding, anything left over from the general date they would bring in and vaccinate.

Jen Weidner 5:39

Oh, nice. So it wasn't going to waste.

Amanda Beam 5:41

Wasn't going to waste, and so anyone who wanted it could get it eventually. And so, I think they had it to a point that not everyone wants it, because of course, that population, there's, you know, folks incarcerated haven't always been perhaps treated fairly,

Jen Weidner 5:58

Right.

Amanda Beam 5:59

Especially also the, how do I say, there's folks also in our jail, people of color, things have happened.

Jen Weidner 6:12

Exactly.

Amanda Beam 6:13

In America, that's not always the best.

Jen Weidner 6:15

Unfortunately, in the past, incarcerated people have been medically tested on. So, I understand.

Amanda Beam 6:21

There's history, and even though that wasn't happening here.

Jen Weidner 6:24

Right.

Amanda Beam 6:24

Well, I mean—

Jen Weidner 6:26

We know, we know that's not happening.

Amanda Beam 6:29

It would cause them some concern, and I understand that. So I think, eventually, when I left and from this, maybe in February, March, maybe April, in that awful, my mind.

Jen Weidner 6:40

It's been a long year.

Amanda Beam 6:41

They had a good third of the population vaccinated, which is a huge deal. So, that's good.

Jen Weidner 6:47

So, what do you think that the sheriff and the jail learned during the pandemic?

Amanda Beam 6:54

It's hard to speak for them, because I come from a much different outlook, so they come from a very law enforcement, safety background, and I'm more of love, peace, you know, almost social work, even though I don't have a social work background. So, I'm not sure I can attest to what they learned. Can I say what I, what I learned?

Jen Weidner 7:23

That was my next question.

Amanda Beam 7:25

I'm sorry.

Jen Weidner 7:25

What did you learn about yourself or about your job during all this?

Amanda Beam 7:29

Yeah, so the cool thing, I love where I worked, I, and I have stopped because that's medical concerns that probably wasn't best being in a jail. Um, the cool thing about the jail is that you learn that we're all the same, in which, you know, people in the jail had as much, if not more, concerns about COVID than the general population, because not only you're in the jail, you're worried that you're going to get affected. If you do get affected, is most likely going to spread like wildfire, you have a population that, in general, if they've been such, have substance use disorder, their health, not already that great, and there's other things going on. And then on top of that, you have them hearing all sorts of things on the outside, so not only are they're hearing the news, they have a radio so they can pick up podcast, not podcasts, some things that air from different sources, but then also they have their family members who are outside getting sick and they can't do anything about it, so there's all these little things that exacerbates the jail experience that they're already ongoing. And so, I guess the biggest thing that, that we could learn is how to try to, for me, was try to make them more comfortable and try to reduce their stress, which is difficult in a jail setting, and how to do that in a safe way, cuz there's still folks in there, you know, but I always said people in the jail are some of the smartest people you ever meet, because they can change anything into anything, sometimes positive, like with art, they do some beautiful artwork, sometimes negative because they can make dangerous objects, I don't think she would think of, and that's not, you know. I'm rambling now. I'm sorry.

Jen Weidner 9:25

No, this is what this is all about, you just tell me your feelings about what you know, how it's changed you, that's what we want to know.

Amanda Beam 9:31

It's a, it's made me a lot, so. So one thing they tell you, when you go into jail, you're not friends. These aren't your friends, you're, you're not friends with them, this is you're there to do a job, and I found that's really hard to do, because at the end of the day, you do develop, I don't know necessarily friendships, but relationships with people, because you see them every day, and you do end up caring about them, like, yeah, and at the base, again, even though some folks have been accused, because it most of our people are alleged, to, we got to remember that they've not been convicted. But, you know, some folks, and there have been, that been alleged to have done some pretty nasty things. You still, you know, you still can connect with people at a, at a human level, like, in and see the humanity in them.

Jen Weidner 10:33

So, in your mind, like, working at the jail, especially during a pandemic, it just made you realize it, we're all human?

Amanda Beam 10:43

I think I always knew that, but I think, too, that a lot of us think, like, I know initially when I was wanting the job I was going in as a teacher at, for the Center for Women and Families, so I taught some healthy relationship classes. It was kind of like going into an oddity, right, like, all, all these really look at this, oh these are, this is, this is something to see, you know this because

it's very straight, like, you know, when you hear that door clap behind you. Everyone's in very institutionalized, they're in there's, their, what do they come, jumpsuits and, and so there's a lot of fear that goes on with that too. Even though, I mean, there should be, there shouldn't be, right, because there are things to be fearful, and our CO's (corrections officers), you know, encounter really dangerous occurrences every day, I guess. Yeah, seeing people who, who are in jail, it made me know that it made me less scared of everybody. Does that make sense? I think it was more than it was, I always, I always knew everyone was human, but I now, I went in and I think it takes, took away some of that fear of the unknown, or, you know, of maybe shouldn't have, maybe I should, but, but fear of the other as a person, maybe that's what I was going for. That made sense. Sorry.

Jen Weidner 12:05

What do you think that you might keep doing after the pandemic, such as extended hand washing, mask wearing, social distancing, or anything else that?

Amanda Beam 12:16

Hmmm. I don't, I don't know. I don't know.

Jen Weidner 12:25

I know that Zoom has become a big part of our life now, where you continue to do, like, meetings via Zoom or classes or...

Amanda Beam 12:36

So, I'm a real social person, so I'll continue to, probably, wash my hands. But, I was never real touchy to begin with. That's not a problem. Yeah, I probably won't wear a mask as much because I, you know, I've been vaccinated now, until the next, until the next pandemic hits, but I don't know if I've changed that much in that way. Does that make sense? So, I think I will say what we learned in the jail, because you don't hug in the jail, because you can't hug people.

Jen Weidner 13:14

Obviously!

Amanda Beam 13:15

That's just not for female working, and even though with other females, you just don't do that, so we did our elbow bumps, so I kind of like the elbow bump concept.

Jen Weidner 13:23

I've seen a lot of that continuing.

Amanda Beam 13:25

Because it still kind of acknowledges, and you get that at that contact but it's still in a...

Jen Weidner 13:33

Distant way?

Amanda Beam 13:34

Distant, nice way.

Jen Weidner 13:37

So, what do you hope that people in the future will remember about the pandemic, let's say, 15 to 20 years, even 50 years from now, what do you want people, like, look back on in the history books or our library archives and remember?

Amanda Beam 13:52

I wish I could say it brought us together, but it didn't. That would be an amazing thing that, I mean, the treatment of folks incarcerated. Just overall, but particularly during the pandemic, I think they were highlighted because a lot of the outbreaks were in jails. Luckily, like I said, we, we got very lucky, we got very lucky, and it was not just, but they really did do a good job of being on the forefront and instituting those changes, they did awesome, but a lot of other jails and, like, federal institutions weren't so lucky, and hopefully in the future, at least from that aspect, people will go, "Hmm. Is this the right way to provide rehabilitation? Is that what we're really doing? Is this really rehabilitation and not retribution?" And then be, again, we have to rethink a lot of our folks. They, they're alleged, they're in there, awaiting trial. And so, hopefully 30 years from now, people might be able to put a microscope to that and say, "Holy cow, this is how we really treated people who, especially with substance use disorder, disorder, need, perhaps, help from the medical sense, and not necessarily in the judicial sense?"

Jen Weidner 15:16

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience in the past year-and-a-half, now?

Amanda Beam 15:21

Year-and-a-half, it's crazy! Ah, well, I will say what was really cool, and they, and they allowed me to do this at the jail, they shut down people coming in right away. Like, I said, I think March, mid-March...

Jen Weidner 15:36

It was pretty early.

Amanda Beam 15:37

Pretty early, you couldn't come in, which was even the programs, so everything was shut down. What was also shut down, was they couldn't, they couldn't go to rec, because they couldn't be in the same area because of-. So that created challenges. So, luckily we were able to bring in, let me bring in DVDs, so we did DVD days, or oh, it started DVD days, and then it ended up, that was like, every day it was DVD day. So, we had our little library of DVDs to help them, hopefully, with coping again, because it is, it, you got to do something to engage your mind.

Jen Weidner 16:12

Right, you can't just sit around, that is when the problems start.

Amanda Beam 16:14

They let us do cornhole in the, in the different sections, so it was a blessing, the curse because some of the guys were like, "We're trying to sleep, Amanda." Some we're like, I'm going to earn right, they bet tobacco patches. And so, they would bet, yeah, which, yeah, it's funny. Um, so it's interesting to see that changes. So, we did the library, like, you know, we did the art show, we were able to do art, and bring them so that they could create art, which was shown at the library, so it was really cool. We, we did coloring books, like just coloring books and colored pencils and Sudokus and word fines, and journals for them to write in. And so, I think that was a bonus that I was allowed to bring that in to kind of develop a different...

Jen Weidner 17:10

And you were allowed to still come in and still be a part of?

Amanda Beam 17:14

Yes, and I was, I was able to work throughout, and that helped me, too, because normally I wouldn't have known, because I knew about every, like, not everyone, but most of the folks in the jail, I knew. And so, so, I'm really lucky that they did. You know, I worked there as Program Director, but I, I enjoy that, I enjoy trying to make a right, little, little kindnesses on a daily race, so we had a pizza party in our class, certain classes were done, it was kind of fun. Basically, I think I was treating them almost like a, like high school students, like, I was, like, their high school teacher, like.

Jen Weidner 17:52

If that's what gets through to them and they can take this experience of being incarcerated and be like, "Oh there's this one person that helped, helped me get through this, helped me get through a pandemic."

Amanda Beam 18:04

And they taught me so much. Like, it wasn't just a one-way, like, they taught me so much about life, about living, about certain things that they would say something. I was like, some things that I – like, they would laugh at me because they would say something drug trade-related and I'm like, "I don't understand what that is."

Jen Weidner 18:23

Which isn't a bad thing.

Amanda Beam 18:26

But they thought, "Oh, that's funny."

Jen Weidner 18:27

Amanda doesn't know.



Amanda Beam 18:30

They would tell me, so, I mean, but I mean, like, again, some of the smartest people that you'll ever meet are in jail or another institution, so, so that was a big deal, able, that, that the county, that the sheriff's office allowed me to do that, because I don't think that had been done before. And a lot of people might not like that being done, you know, but at the end of the day, it, it comes with a lot of it, too, is calming folks down, it's allowing them to get out their anxieties. I think it helps the jail, and the COs in particular, because you get people, really, are just someone to talk to you.

Jen Weidner 19:06

That's not—

Amanda Beam 19:07

That's, yeah—

Jen Weidner 19:07

A law enforcement.

Amanda Beam 19:09

Yes, I got called “The Man”, I think only twice, and I'm like, “I'm not ‘The Man’, I gave you a coloring book.”

Jen Weidner 19:16

Well Amanda, thank you for taking your time to come interview today.

Amanda Beam 19:23

Thank you.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>