

Jo Pierce-Polk

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SPEAKERS

Jen Weidner, Jo Pierce-Polk

Jen Weidner 00:06 Today is May 31 2022. I'm Jen Weidner with the Jeffersonville Township Public Library conducting interviews for pandemic perspectives. Jeffersonville residents recount their lives during the COVID 19 pandemic. This project was made possible with a grant from the Indiana Genealogical Society. I'm here today with Joe Pierce-Polk who owns Crow's Nest Consulting, is the regional coordinator for the Louisville and Cincinnati Metropolitan Statistical Area, Emergency Preparedness public health coordinator for Clark and Harrison counties in Indiana and District Nine Health Department chair; and, along with that, she helps with the theater program at Jeffersonville High School. Thanks for being here today.

Jo Pierce-Polk 00:48 Thank you for having me.

Jen Weidner 00:50 Do you remember when you first started hearing about COVID-19?

Jo Pierce-Polk 00:53 Yeah, I'm actually my husband and I were sitting, talking one day, and we were just coming. We're hot off of the heels of the hepatitis outbreak in Clark, Floyd and Harrison County and it's just exhausting working a lot of the smaller outbreaks and such. And my husband asked me he said, well, what about the UK Coronavirus in China? And I was like, what? And he told me he goes oh, yeah over in China. I was like, I'm sure we'll start hearing about it soon enough. And the very next day, I was meeting with all their 12 health departments in district nine and I was meeting with all of them and there was just some kind of whispers and talks and it was just starting to come on the rise; I think that was around December, 2019. And then it just seemed like as soon as we started to hear little bits and pieces of it. It was like starting to go into you know, we need to ramp up and start preparing for this to come.

Jen Weidner 02:16 So working in the field that you work in, did you realize pretty quickly that it would become a pandemic and get as bad as it did?

Jo Pierce-Polk 02:26 I had really, really hoped that it had been overhyped because I worked the the HIV outbreak in Scott County. And then we had like, the Ebola crisis that was all hyped up and everyone there was just that, that we call it the worried well, where everybody just kind of started to panic and they, they start to get nervous. And this one was a little different, because it had already, to me, seemed like it had a political turn to it. And you had, you know, the worry of it from being from China and a lot of rumors of Wuhan and that's where they do a lot of

experimental things. And so I didn't think that it was going to be like the end all pandemic and I don't think any of us were prepared to just keep going on, but I knew it was going to be bigger than anything that I have dealt with in my 11 plus years of public health experience.

Jen Weidner 03:43 So we're two years into the pandemic. Can you share some things you have experienced, any stories you have are great?

Jo Pierce-Polk 03:54 There are. There are endless stories. I will say overall I've seen some of the best sides of humanity come out and I'm also seeing some of just the absolute worst sides. I worked at a lot of vaccine sites. I did a lot of testing. And I went around to the local health departments and I helped evaluate their sites and their setups for their testing in their vaccines. And it seemed like you always had the same types of people, your COVID deniers. One, one particular one day in a county, it was so cold and we were working outside we're talking like it was 17 and 18 degrees. And we had I can't tell you the amount of people that kept coming over from other states trying to get the vaccine and we had this in one family from Illinois, it was like we can't we can't take you. You know we can like if the state finds out that we are giving this out to the people we're not supposed to get it they will shut this down and they will take our vaccine and then we'll distribute it so I can't, and I got the well I'm just gonna come back here with a gun and shoot you. And my response to them was looking dead in the eye and there's a line, so get behind it. Because there's a lot of people waiting to do that. And it was just consistently like that. But then we had some amazing people, this one elderly couple who were on a fixed income. They came to our site every week with a box. And inside the box was 25 Ziploc bags for full size candy bar snacks size candy bars, and for some reason they put \$2 bills, brand new \$2 bills.

Jen Weidner 05:54 That's so sweet.

Jo Pierce-Polk 05:55 So I looked at I was like well there's 25 That's 50 bucks, and every week these people are coming to our pod given that to our staff and volunteers so just

Jen Weidner 06:04 You get your good you get your bad. So what have you learned from the pandemic? Or just pick one or two things?

Jo Pierce-Polk 06:16 Think there's some small things, some things are like history definitely repeated by everybody just like this has never happened before. But if you read the book, The Great Influenza, it's all about the Spanish Influenza. I said it's a play by play book of what is going on.

Jen Weidner 06:39 We talked a lot about that around here, you know, as being like me and one of my co workers like we're big into history. So yeah, we were just like, oh, look, yeah, it's happening again.

Jo Pierce-Polk 06:48 Yes. Yeah. Because you had your women's right to vote. So you had your protesters out there, you had your, your governors who believed in it, and your governors who did not. And you had your anti maskers, your anti hand washers, your non believers or deniers and then you had your areas that were very strict on treating it and those laws that were put in place and then are now being overturned today so I think my biggest overall thing is left to their own devices. Humans will probably make not the best decisions. It's, it's we have to have law and order for a reason.

Jen Weidner 07:38 What if anything, do you hope people will keep doing once we are officially done with the pandemic because we're not quite officially done just yet?

Jo Pierce-Polk 07:48 Well, I never thought people had to be reminded to wash their hands after going to the bathroom. But I really hope people will take in more of the public health practices. I know one thing people argue about, what about flu, how come there's been less cases of flu and I can't figure out that argument in my mind because to me it is obvious. Well, if you're wearing masks and your social distancing, and you're washing your hands, it's just proof that those measures work so. But I think it's that, just, I have seen especially parents with small children being more diligent with their children and making sure they wash their hands and they're not touching their faces and licking walls and chairs.

Jen Weidner 08:39 As children do.

Jo Pierce-Polk 08:41 Children do yes.

Jen Weidner 08:42 And if you're sick, stay home.

Jo Pierce-Polk 08:44 Stay home. Yes, that's a big one. And I think you said American culture to where we're sick we go to work and that's what we do. See it as a badge of honor like oh, I don't feel well, but here I am anyway. I'm here. Fabulous.

Jen Weidner 09:01 Stand over there. What do you want people in the future, let's say 50 or 100 years from now to know about the pandemic?

Jo Pierce-Polk 09:11 It didn't have to get as bad as it did. And that was my stance from the beginning. I started to get worried because I was like, if people don't get on board soon this is going to get out and we're going to be past the point of no return is going to get bad and it's gonna get really bad. And it became so it's just politically charged. And it did not, we didn't have to lose the lives that we did. And I think that's the biggest thing is we need to learn from this. And honestly, be more prepared and be more considerate of people in our neighborhoods, in the cities just everywhere.

Jen Weidner 10:10 So is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Jo Pierce-Polk 10:14 Wash your hands social distance. And I think the big thing is to believe your public health officials. For years people used to, I used to hear no I'm not getting a flu shot. That's the government trying to kill us. Yep. Because as public health's motto is, you know, trying to kill people off one person at a time. No, that's not public health's motto. The name itself is Public General Health well being we're not doing we're not asking you to stay at home, punish you or have some political agenda. It is quite literally to save lives.

Jen Weidner 10:56 Well thank you for being here today.

Jo Pierce-Polk 10:58 Thank you.