

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES: A Chorus of COVID

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Dr. Ben
Danielson

Zyna
Bakari



Kathleen
Wilcox

Mulki
Mohamed



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Pritchard

Lynese
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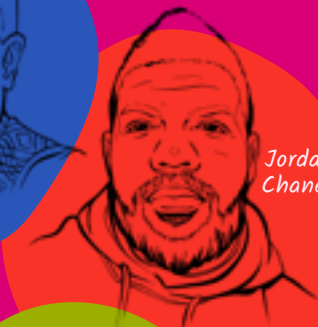
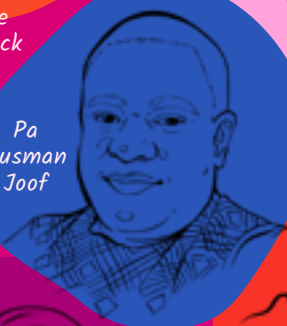
Gloria
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Kuno

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Ousman
Joof

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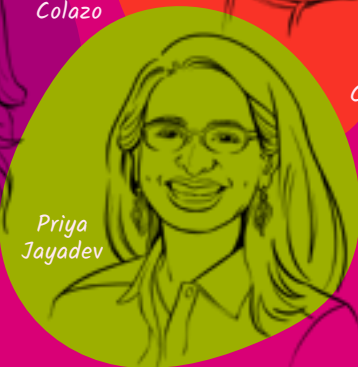
Lin
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ORIGINAL WRITINGS FROM

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE THOUGHT PARTNERS



Voices from the Frontlines:
A Chorus of COVID

Anthology Co-edited by
Anastacia-Reneé, C. Davida Ingram
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Original Writings from Community
Collaborative Thought Partners

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Introduction

This chapbook is part of a two-part effort to honor community-based first responders in Washington state.

What follows is a time-capsule.

It's also accompanied by a separate list of shared wisdom for community, institutions, and policy makers.

A tremendous thank you goes to each of the Collaborative Thought Partners for your dedication to communities across Washington state.

A full resource list with member names is at the end.

Dear Reader,

We hope this book finds its way into your heart.

We wanted to remind you through our words and our own personal experiences that you are not alone. We wanted to share our inner thoughts and writings from those of us on the front lines who stand with you.

This is an offering and an invitation.

Please write along and tell your own stories, too.

3 Things to Tell Myself

when it comes to letting go and releasing:
I will shake the dust off of the welcome mat
of my spirit and welcome in new things to hold
on to.

Jordan Chaney
Cultural Worker, Poet



Writing Prompt #1

Remembering the Pandemic

Dear Reader,

*What are 3-5 distinct memories
you had from the start of the
COVID pandemic?*

What were your hopes and fears?

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I Jump Into Action

I hope COVID will go away quickly
and fear sets in when I see too
people die.

I feel scared and alone

I jump into action
my loved ones and

many

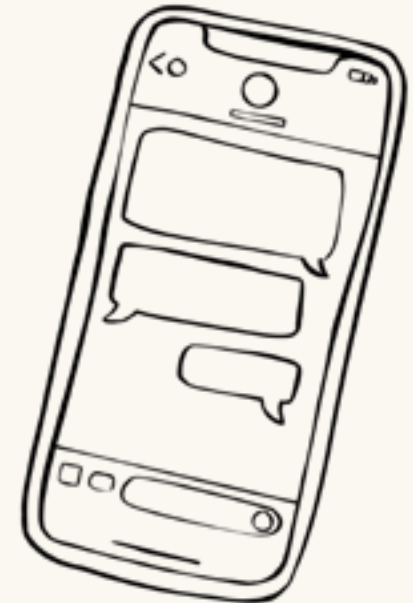
to protect
my community

I connect with my sister
while I find resources to pay rent
put food on the table for my clients

I worry maybe I will be the next (one)

Van Kuno

Refugee & Immigrant Services NW



Ground Zero

Blind Sighted

I recall having a normal teaching schedule in the spring of 2020. The next thing we know we were told that teachers “should no longer go do our lessons in person, students won’t need to go to class either.” Our school shared about the virus situation.”

The Rest of the Year Was Chaotic

Seattle had its first cases as ground zero. We were asked to learn how to conduct our classes by Zoom virtually, and all of us needed to continue our work via Zoom, not our class rooms. The teaching could not happen in person any longer. We had to figure out ways to do everything without direct, in-person contact. It was difficult to continue our normal living! But somehow, we managed.

We Grew

That is when I decided that we need to use our nonprofit to keep people connected, to support those who needed help. Direct support to the community followed after that! We realized our Advocacy now through our activity and activism. All the people who have become part of our coalition. Plus, the few who are committed to continue offering what they can to build our community center. I was so grateful that we found each other to support our communities, as well as each other.

I Do Not Want To Lose Hope

My hope is to continue what we have already established. I want to continue the great connections we made with each other. But my fear is also that hope is dwindling. If people only think about basic needs, and not what we all can do to make our communities better, we miss the chance to become stronger through working with each other.

Lin Crowley

**Asian Pacific Islanders Coalition SPS
Multicultural Center of the South Sound**

COVID

“Que sera sera.”

What will be

Will be
About everything

Kelvin Hoang
Asia Pacific Cultural Center

I Had Never Had a Full-Time Job

A new graduate
from my MPA program
I hit the job hunt in late August

In October 2019 before COVID
my mom and I were in a car accident
Trying to heal made my job hunt more challenging

In December 2019 I finally interviewed to volunteer at
Pierce County Department of Emergency Management
Four weeks before the pandemic

I did not know what was up ahead

Gloria Rodriguez
LatinX Unidos of the South Sound

Stress, Chaos, And Tiredness

I was transitioning to Executive Director, hiring new staff, learning my new position as well and going through COVID. I was afraid to get sick. My kids were there for me and I wanted to be there for them. I needed to stay “strong.” How was this going to impact my job? My son’s daycare? My daughters’ school?

I needed to get vaccinated to protect them. I wanted to help anyone unable to get (fully) vaccinated due to being immunocompromised.

I remember hoping COVID would go away fast. I wished that maybe it was only going to be a few months then back to normal. COVID was changing a lot. Changing policies. Changing the way we meet people at work. Changing the way staff work. Changing our workspace itself. Adding masks. Controlling how many people were in the building at a time. Dealing with staff and customers that had a cough. Allowing staff to work from home.

It all came down to knowing that all of this was my job to figure out. At times my doubts sort of started spiraling. I really feared failing. I asked myself, “What was the best way to respond to COVID so people with disabilities would not be most impacted and become even more isolated?”

Mayra Colazo
Central WA Disability Resources

A List of Memories, Connection, and Fears:

- Calling my grandma for the last time and not being able to be with her when she died
- Having to talk with my grandma with dementia through a glass door
- News clip from New York hospitals showing them building bigger mass graves
- News clip in Italy showing overcrowded hospitals with people on life support
- Skype video conferencing their loved ones for the last time
- I connected with my sister and my family who lived in Washington
- We started doing family skype calls
- I Feared in not knowing when I’d see my parents again
- I Feared for my family members who were at-risk

Megan Veith
Building Changes

Looking Back

My anxiety morphed into desperation. I was very angry over U.S. leadership not being transparent about the reality of what was happening, what was coming.

I represent community members who are at high risk. They live with disabilities and immune issues. I felt an urgent desire simply to protect people. Despite the vaccines, I was still concerned about: Crisis Standards of Care (CSC) = medical rationing. Access, physical connection to one another, to testing, quarantine, vaccine etc. Hospital capacity and congregate setting dangers. Variants and mutations in the virus. Segregation of people due to misunderstood beliefs. Vaccine availability. Testing surveillance.

I wanted people who thought the pandemic was a hoax to understand the reality of it. Misinformation was like a cancer that grew and grew. The elections cast deeper divides that would not return us to sanity.

My “go-to” connections came from a national partnership with the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies (PIDS). It was a space to understand what an emergency demands. Not only public health but the broader standpoint of how to prepare, respond, recover when crisis hits. We have been meeting daily since Feb 28th 2020. It was a godsend having these peers to connect with!

Todd Holloway
Center for Independence



Emotions

I. Fear

Of me getting COVID
Of loved ones getting COVID
Of those we serve who are at HIGH risk getting COVID
Of dying
Of having to shut down our organization
Of programs being halted
Of financial streams stopped

Of isolation
Of how we were going to serve our community members who did not have the technology and/or connectivity to access remote programs

II. Uncertainty

about the conflicting information in the media
"The virus will go away with warmer weather"
"the virus only really impacts segments of the population"
"the virus is similar to the flu virus"
"masks will help prevent spread"
"masks don't help"

III. Disbelief

That our country which is so advanced could be impacted so severely by a pandemic.
That this was a global crisis

IV. Humility

We humans walk around thinking that we are the top of the evolution pyramid.
Look how easily a single-celled virus can take us down

V. Support

I connected with family - so many more calls and video-chats happened as everyone was learning to stay isolated and safe. At my job we created service approaches that allowed us to continue connecting with our clients who were staying fully isolated - doorstep deliveries of activities/information, virtual programs, phone calls, chat messaging, facebook, etc. New platforms & approaches had to be developed in order to stay connected. Not every person could access every approach so we had to stay flexible.

VI. Hope

That the general public will emerge from this pandemic FINALLY understanding how many disability people have felt all of their lives! That COVID can show those outside the disability community how important support and services are out of empathy for disabled communities.

Priya Jayadev
Clallam Mosaic:
Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services

The Sweet Smell of Connection

I connected with nature. I have a flower detecting app on my phone. I would walk around my neighborhood for hours, snap photos of the flowers, and learn their names. Especially during the summer of 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others.

I connected with family and childhood friends. We had Zoom Happy Hours, Zoom Coffee in the morning. We would do Zoom arts and crafts, I'd sit on my patio in the sun surrounded by homemade paper and glitter and flower petals. We would be together, but apart, no words passing between us, but feeling so connected, seen, and heard.

I got closer with co-workers as we navigated remote work for the first time. Many of my colleagues had just been promoted to new roles before the pandemic so we were learning our new jobs from a distance and had to lean on each other more to help it all make sense.

I felt like the flowers were my medicine. The sun slanting a certain way was medicine. Little things to hold on to when things were scary and sad and so, so wrong.

Zyna Bakari
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle



Writing Prompt #2

Experiencing COVID

Dear Reader,

What has COVID taught you?

What are you grateful for?

*What has brought you happiness
in the storm of COVID chaos?*

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COVID spread through human contact but it also revealed:

We are social beings. We need each other.

Even when we are afraid of the unknowns, we continue to strive to do what we can to help each other.

We have to stay positive, not afraid of the unknowns.

Lin Crowley

**Asian Pacific Islanders Coalition SPS
Multicultural Center of the South Sound**

I had to learn how to connect in different ways, by using Facetime and Skype. I learned coping techniques. I picked up the new hobby of growing houseplants. Sometimes freedom was finding the right comfort food. COVID eventually made it clear how much life had changed (including weight gain).

Leena Vo

Asia Pacific Cultural Center

A List of Things That Drove Home

1. *What drove home* how important getting outside was to cope through the pandemic.
2. *What drove home* how much life changed was the amount of time I was allowing my child to stay in front of a screen. Before the pandemic, he was allowed 1 to 2 hours per day of screen time for “entertainment” purposes. During the pandemic, that completely changed.
3. *What drove home* how much life changed: Not being able to experience some of the joys of gathering that were “normal” - birthday parties, baby showers, weddings, concerts, festivals.
4. *What drove home* the importance of focusing on self-care. Situations arise that make it tough to rely on others to improve your own mental health. It is critically important that I did things that made me happy and prevented me from going stir-crazy. Ritual saved me. I did morning Yoga and afternoon walks. I decided it was important to turn off work at specific times. This meant I was able to make sure to spend quality time with my child, not just during meals but playing games, plus hiking and enjoying movies together, too.

Priya Jayadev

Clallam Mosaic:

Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services

A Poem For Respect

Be more respectful.
Even to the ones
who are not listening

(are still)

//political, stubborn and foolish//
good people.

They're just different from me

Faaluaina “Lua” Pritchard
Asia Pacific Cultural Center

From Microbial to Global

Life became far more precious. At all levels. From the microbial to the global. Something so invisible to the eyes changed the planet, regardless of how people chose to think of it. COVID had a goal of survival, just like most of us. But put it in perspective: What other life forms on our beautiful planet likely experiences catastrophe caused by human-made climate change and other man-made variables?

Todd Holloway
Center for Independence

Experience Beauty Even in the Bleakest Parts of the Pandemic

I learned to create my own joy.

When I couldn't find any outside, I turned inward. Flowers on the windowsill of my mind, protecting my peace.

I realized who in my life I felt I could truly lean on.

I realized What made me feel free: having flexibility around my schedule, designing my day how I wanted, enjoying the experience of being home with my love and my pet. I enjoyed time alone, I don't always want to socialize, so it was freeing for me to not have any plans.

I realized if I have any tiny bit of joy, I should feel it all as an act of resistance. I tried to let myself hold many feelings and truths at once.

Zyna Bakari
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

Writing Prompt #3

What Challenges Did You Face with COVID?

Dear Reader,

Looking back, what were the challenges you faced head on during the pandemic?

How did you grow?

How did life feel in this unique time?

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Like everyone else, my family felt the isolation of COVID. It stopped our community gatherings. We had to learn how to connect virtually or with Facetime. The pandemic had a clear mental health aspect for many people, including myself. I also saw the physical health of my friends deteriorate who tested positive for COVID-19. Even only witnessing the pandemic unfold secondarily took a toll on me.

COVID Haiku

Life shifted my views
Immediate Change occurred
Some without Notice

Leena Vo
Asia Pacific Cultural Center

The toughest challenges were not knowing who was vaccinated and who wasn't. We had to protect ourselves by wearing masks all the time. (Still do.)

So many people did not believe in science.

Lin Crowley
Asian Pacific Islanders Coalition SPS
Multicultural Center of the South Sound

Oral Transcript with *Pa Ousman Joof*

I remember bringing people to the Monroe State Fairground, to the Arlington Airport 25, 30, 40 minutes away just to make sure our community can get vaccinated through the support of DOH and organizations like All in Washington. We were able to give stipends to community members because people were scared about losing their jobs. Even taking two hours away or three hours away from work to go [get vaccinated] would have been a big deal with the money they are going to make. So we have to really calculate the stipend that we can give people to cover up their gas and the hours that they're gonna miss. We started giving \$50 gift cards to people and providing transportation and this was all before we could have access to our own [transportation and funding].

I keep saying that it's rather unfortunate that it took COVID for us to be able to have any form of funding or support to do the things that we wanted to do for ages for our community... to be able to open this safe space where we can provide services to the kids, to the seniors. Right now as we speak, there's an activity going outside. You might have heard me saying "S'alam" to people as they're coming to grab boxes of CrossFit, which we give out every, I mean week. So we opened the space. It was only \$75,000. I had to do that. I mean as a volunteer myself and everybody else that I was working with.

So my fear was: How will we be able to sustain this thing now that there are a lot of resources that are available? What will happen post COVID? Are we gonna shut down this office and go back to me providing services to people in my living room or in parking lots and stuff? It would have been a big embarrassment, a big shattered dream. It would mean hopelessness for the community.

We serve as the 211 for the community. There is no other [culturally accessible] place to go... somewhere they can go if they have any problems and to take care of themselves. So, we [as community health advocates] see how we can take care of all of this. Those were my biggest fears of course, how [COVID] was going to impact the community. I didn't know how much it impacted the community and how it was going to end.

Pa Ousman Joof
WA West African Center

My family was caught between being cautious and skeptical of the COVID pandemic. My parents and I were part of the first in our family of 6 to get vaccinated. My brothers have no interest to this day.

Mulki Mohamed
RuntaNews

It's been challenging working with people with medical and political disbeliefs, and plain stubbornness about the danger of COVID.

Dealing with people who make up their own truths, politics, people playing with other people's lives, and those who are self-centered, don't care about themselves and the health of others

Faaluaina "Lua" Pritchard
Asia Pacific Cultural Center

Not being able to travel to see family was sad.

Priya Jayadev

Clallam Mosaic:

Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services

We isolated as much as possible during quarantine.
But I needed to support our public health department.

I was supporting emergency management in assessing sites
for testing, quarantine, vaccines...etc.

I stayed clear of my family until I decontaminated completely.

I remember asking everyone how they were feeling and if they
understood what was happening. I could tell that there was
a lot of confusion due to mixed information and messages
between me and those I knew and our everyday newsfeed.

Todd Holloway

Center for Independence

Writing Prompt #4

Any Bright Spots from COVID?

Dear Reader,

*Take a moment to remember, write,
and share any bright spots, during the
tough times of the pandemic.*

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A Poem For Bright Spots

It blew folks out of their comfort zones
and into direct action.

It, for a moment, opened up the collective conscience
and moral soul of the people, in an era not seen before.

It unmasked us all, for a spell.

A spell was broken.

It wrote a memoir and created art schools
out of dungeons designed to imprison our kids.

It has been a vaccine of sorts against the plague
of despondency and apathy
towards one's own self-love.

It brought dreams back to life.

COVID brought people together in untold ways.

It made last kisses sweeter, long goodbyes longer
sunsets slower and sultry.

It revealed all of nature's divinity
all in broad daylight.

And even with all of the agony
and ecstasy that it brought
to this planet, it also finally had to return to earth.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

And the choir sang, "Don't let the door hitcha . . .!"

Jordan Chaney
Cultural Worker, Poet

The Bright spot is we also found so many people willing to extend our hands to help each other, even with people we do not know. I'm in a community surrounded by creative ideas. We want to focus on how we keep communicating with each other. Community building during COVID was so wonderful. We are social beings. The pandemic showed us how important it is for us to stay in touch. Some way. Somehow.

Lin Crowley
Asian Pacific Islanders Coalition SPS
Multicultural Center of the South Sound

The shift to more virtual events such as conferences and job fairs helped me cope during the lockdown and find a community of like-minded individuals to network with.

Mulki Mohamed
RuntaNews

A Poem For Parting Gifts of COVID

Parting gifts of healthier habits
I routinely go for daily walks now
Treasure my relationships
and call my loved ones every day

Leena Vo
Asia Pacific Cultural Center

I allowed myself to enjoy reading again... re-reading childhood favorites, diving into novels that would take me to another world, devouring poetry... It made me feel closer to myself to be doing something I loved so much as a child.

I also got back into writing which I hadn't done in over 5 years! I got a typewriter and spent my evenings writing under the moon on my back patio with my dog by my feet. I let myself be "frivolous" and experience beauty even in the bleakest parts of the pandemic.

Zyna Bakari
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle



Writing Prompt #5

COVID Creation

Stories & Obituaries

Dear Reader,

What if you gave yourself permission to make your own COVID creation story, myth, folklore?

If you could write your own COVID obituary, what would you say?

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COVID was born under sadistic rule in already uncertain and divided times.

COVID is a bastard, an orphan with more lives than cats.

Myth has it that COVID gets extra lives (mutations) by devouring our loved ones. But it mostly feasts on the victims of misinformation.

Jordan Chaney
Cultural Worker, Poet

COVID was born MANY years ago and has languished in the background without recognition, while its siblings have gotten attention and glory. COVID erupted as a superstar on the world stage between 2019 and 2020 because mankind started encroaching more and more on its stomping grounds. COVID reminds us that humans are not “all that”.

Priya Jayadev
Clallam Mosaic:
Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services

Healers Note: Herbs for Grief

There are plant friends, like people, who can hold space for what we feel. Below is a short list of herbal teas. What folk remedies do you turn to for comfort?

Plant Friends

Willow

Comfrey

Rose

Hawthorne

Nervines: Lavender, Skullcap, Mint, Lemon Balm



Writing Prompt #6
What Comes Up:
A Meditation on
Joy & Grief

Dear Reader,

*What comes up when you ask your
body where it feels GRIEF and JOY?*

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When I hear the word grief?
I feel it in my chest

When I hear the word joy
I feel it in my face because
I smile
and in my head because I
automatically
think of a time in life
where I had joy.

Mayra Colazo
Central WA Disability Resources

if you find some joy

let yourself feel it all.

leap across the moon with it.

tumble into a field of flowers.

if you find some joy

glide around like a sailboat

guided by your dazzling heart.

feel it all

so that when you need to

you'll remember

that moments like this are possible

Zyna Bakari
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle

Writing Prompt #7

Stay in Touch

Dear Reader,

We hope you have read these collected writings from front line workers with a holding place for your own feelings and emotions.

Whatever you are holding in, sometimes needs you to hold it close.

Besides, how else would we all remember what this collective moment meant? How could our newer generations ever know?

If you want to ping us with your creative work or share any of your hopes, fears, and dreams, we are here to listen.

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Thank You

We hope you enjoyed these glimpses from the beautiful conversations we witnessed.

When equity leaders started dreaming about the Collaborative, our hope was to build a meaningful space committed to centering communities in COVID vaccine planning and response.

We knew we wanted to foster opportunities for collaboration. But we never imagined the Collaborative would span over 680 partners across WA. We'd meet virtually over Zoom. Eventually, these 24 monthly sessions helped set policy and approaches that held community vision. The space was powerful and launched two spin-off workgroups.

It's been an absolute pleasure to co-lead with our 19 incredible Collaborative Thought Partners, many of whom shared their creativity here. I've learned from each of the partners listed below. They taught me how to center community care. They taught me to uplift creativity and joy in solution-making.

These leaders' vision showed me how, as a society, we can re-imagine public health into systems that work for everyone by honoring culture, language, how information resonates, and can share it with love and care.

Fathiya Abdi
Community Collaborative



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