

Chapel Hill Public Archive
Pandemic Stories Project
recording with Yvette “Ms. V” Mathews

Narrator: Yvette “Ms. V” Mathews

Date: March 29, 2022

Location: Community Empowerment Fund office, Chapel Hill, NC

Interviewer: Klaus Mayr

Klaus Mayr [01:36]: All right, well, so first of all, I'll say we're here this morning with Yvette Matthews at the Community Empowerment Fund. It is just after 9:00 on March 29, 2022, and we're doing an interview for the Chapel Hill Public Library's Pandemic Stories Project.

So before I start my questions, is there anything when you're thinking about the Pandemic and your experience in it, is there anything that you want to reflect on, anything that sort of immediately comes to mind that you want to talk about?

Yvette Mathews [02:16]: in terms of the members?

Klaus [02:19]: In terms of... this is your story, so you don't have to be a representative of CEF.

Yvette [02:26]: Okay. Yeah. I think the Pandemic has caused, I don't know, a lot of the things that I do in the community to slow down. By me being the office and community organizer — I have to drop CEF's name right there — I come in contact with a lot of different members who have a lot of different things going on the Pandemic, when it started with me a couple of years ago, when this started, I was on our way doing marches for affordable housing here in Chapel Hill for 30% AMI below. And because of the Pandemic coming in and sweeping through our community, it stopped a lot of things so that we couldn't do it because we had to practice social distancing, we had to wear masks, that kind of thing. But I didn't let that stop me. Okay. I continued to have Meeting of the Minds, which is something I put together in 2016 for a population of people that I saw that were not being serviced in terms of housing, fixed income, low income, and no income people. I kept listening to the stories, and it bothered me because I saw that there was a gap in what Chapel Hill was building for different AMIs, and we were not included. I fall into that percentage myself because... I am a married woman, but if I were not married and I have a two family income, I would fall into the 30% AMI. And I couldn't live in Chapel Hill either. So that was very important to me. It made it very difficult. When I thought about not having a two family income, where would I live? And I could not work in the same place. So that's when I began to reach out to the community and say, okay, well, let's make a

difference. Let's make a change. So I started going to Town Council meetings because they specifically said in Town Council that they were not seeing people who look like me there and did not know, supposedly did not know what was going on financially with the 30% AMI and below population. I think that's bull. It always has been. I think that when you walk on Franklin Street and you see the homelessness in Chapel Hill, or you walk by certain apartment complexes, public housing, and different... I'll drop the name IC4s. I think that it is very clear that people who make this type of percentage, they're not building for us. And so that's been pretty much my fight to make sure that that does not continue to happen. And so in the last couple of years, while the pandemic has been going on, I've put together marches, which I named the "House us now", so that we March for 30% AMI and below, specifically to get us in those forms where people keep saying that they don't see us. When you look at homelessness, like I said, here in Chapel Hill, you can walk up and down Franklin Street and see the homelessness. So it is very clear that it's here. And the population that we service here at Chapel Hill makes it even more clear that fixed income, low income and no income people have no place to live. Yet Chapel Hill continues to build, but it does not include us. I can't not do anything about that. And so the Town Council... what I decided to do is to make sure that they come to our spaces to see us, because they always say they never do. A lot of the population is not comfortable in Town Council settings, in a little office. They're just not comfortable. And so I wanted to have a place where we could speak freely, talk to the Council members one-on-one. They look at you, you look at me and actually see the folks that they are making the decisions for. As we have talk people into... I put together a choir, I should say that. And at the time, it was a bond, I think it was 2016... it was a \$10 million bond. A lot of people didn't know about the bond. And so what I did was put a choir together. I rewrote songs that represented our population and we went to every Church. And you would be surprised at the people who did not know about the 30% AMI and below. And so because of that effort, many people voted for the bond. So the \$10 million bond was passed. We did a \$5 million, which passed. All of that money to me should have been used for this specific population, still wasn't. To this day, which is 2022, I can't tell you where the money is. And I have a really bad taste in my mouth when it comes to people telling me, okay, we're going to do something. And if you show up, if we ask you these questions, if you tell us what it is that you need over and over and over again, we've done what they've asked, but they haven't built what we need. And now it's still, now it's 2022. We're still asking. They say that there are certain parts of the building that's going on in Chapel Hill that is going to represent 30% AMI and below. They always build... say they build 100 apartments, they might give us maybe ten, maybe less. I don't think kibbles and bits are for us. I think that they should actually build something that represents all of us. And AMIs, they're tricky because a lot of the people who live in Chapel Hill, it's old white money, you know it's old white money, right? They don't want to share, and that's fine. We're not asking for you to give us anything. The people that we

service actually do work. They have a job. They have two or three jobs. And then after they get off work, they live in a car. What is that? You know what I mean? That doesn't make any sense to me. You're not giving a population a handout if they actually work. You know what I mean? And so we understand that you cannot raise the minimum wage, but you can build so that it will reflect what that wage is. If I make \$7.25 an hour, which is what a lot of our population makes, which is ridiculous to live off of. Why wouldn't you build something that I could afford? If my income if I'm living on a fixed income and we're talking about Social Security, that kind of thing is between 700 and \$900 a month, why would you build a one bedroom that costs \$1,500? I cannot afford that. Why wouldn't you build something that reflects what my income is? If you're going to build a hotel that I can't even sleep in or go to or spend a weekend at, I can't even work at. But you won't build something for me that I have a job... I don't understand it. So the fight is to make sure that 30% AMI continues to be included in everything that they are building. And that has been the fight: to make sure that we are counted, because we are not invisible people, like you are not invisible people, and we should be counted as such. And if you're going to be in a representation of a town or a little city like Chapel Hill, you are supposed to service — if you're going to be in public service — you are supposed to service the public. If you're going to speak for us and you say to me, "Okay, I am your Mayor," dropping your name, Pamela, "I am your Mayor. I am your Town Council member. I am speaking for you," and you have that kind of power, we have given you that kind of power to speak for us because we elected you to be in that position that you're in, then you ought to represent us and we should be included in everything. That's how I feel about that.

Klaus [11:39]: Thank you for sharing all that. Since you've already started talking about your work and everything that CEF's doing, can you talk about, since the Pandemic and over the course of the Pandemic, how your work life has changed and how it's sort of evolved over the past two years?

Yvette [12:13]: I think the one of the things that in servicing this specific population it has been very difficult for... once again, housing is always at the top of the list. But for people to maintain their jobs, to maintain their income at all because of the Pandemic. And I think that I don't know, I guess it's been really hard to find jobs for people because that's one of the services that we provide. But we have continued to try to make sure that people get interviews, that kind of thing. For those who have lost their jobs or those who are looking for work, it's been hard because of the amount of income these jobs are providing for people for them to live off of, which is crazy. You know, to work in a bar, you make \$5.50 an hour but your tips... come on, that's ridiculous. And so I think that that has grown because of the Pandemic. There has been a lot of job vacancies, yes, but in people getting jobs, the wage of the job does not sustain them. And so

CEF has tried to be there to help them to find the resources that they need to be sustainable. They have funding for Orange County has funding. It's called a housing help line, where we are close in proximity, in contact with them constantly because so many of our members have fallen away because they don't have a steady income. They have been provided funding like first month's rent and security deposits so people can find them a place. But the problem is there is no place if you're not building. The other problem I saw, we see every day here because of the Pandemic is that people are consistently losing the places that they have been in because they can't afford to stay there. And that's been really difficult to watch. So what we're trying to do is get them in contact with resources that will sustain them to be able to hold on until the pandemic... I don't think it's going to go away, I really don't, until they get it under control and make available other resources that people can reach out to until they can find a feasible job that can sustain them. And I think that the work ethic is the one thing that has been really challenged in all of this because it's been difficult for people to continue to work because it's so rapidly contagious, you'll have it, and then you have to not work, and then your boss will say, "Well, you can't come back if you had the virus," so now you got to find another job. So it's a vicious, vicious cycle and it's been really difficult to handle. But we try to be supportive in whatever that we can do for any member that we have or anybody that is needing any kind of help. But we try to make sure that we have the resources that we can, I guess, guide that person through and us and the resource we are working together. And so that's helped a lot. But people have lost their places because of it. Yeah.

Klaus [15:51]: Yeah. So I'd love to also hear about your life beyond work. I know that you work a lot. I remember from my time here that you are a very hard worker and very committed to what you do, but I'd love to still hear, you know, like what did you do for fun during the pandemic?

Yvette [16:18]: Well, I plan things like the march. I'm trying to make sure that we... the march will be happening, our House us Now march, March 9, from 1:00 to 5:00. We're going to start at the Peace and Justice Plaza walk down Franklin Street.

Klaus [16:35]: Is it March 9th or April 9th?

Yvette [16:36]: I'm sorry, April 9th. I keep saying March because I want to do a march in March,

Klaus [16:42]: Well of course.

Yvette [16:44]: Yeah, right. But we're "marching into April," That's what it's called, House us Now. And that has always been fun to plan that because I'm determined that people who say

things, if you're not consistent or you're not persistent, they don't take you seriously. And so this March is happening every year. And last year we did it in the summer and everybody, like, sweat to death, so I changed the season to Spring so that more of the community can come out because a lot of our community is older and we don't want them in the heat and having that kind of thing. So planning the March has always been a really good release for me.

I also planned Black Queens in our community where I chose six women in our community who have been very supportive of 30% AMI in this specific population, fixed income, low income and no income people. That was fun. They are still reigning. They were crowned in February. Okay. And what they are doing... planning something for them every month has been really good. I love that. So I've been keeping the events that I planned are a lot of fun. People have been really showing up to them. The community has really been supportive of them. So that's kind of how my release is. I have to plan stuff to do that, and I guess I have to plan it so that people will understand that we're not going to go away, you know? And these events are a part of that plan to stay in your face. And I think that they have been very successful. And planning them has made me be able to kind of deal with all of the other stuff. So that's what I've been kind of doing. Yeah.

Klaus [18:50]: Who are the women that you've been working with?

Yvette [18:52]: Okay, so the Black Queens are Valerie Foushee, Senator, Barbara Foushee, who is a Town Council member. Paris Miller, who is... Barbara's Town Council member for Carrboro, but Paris is Town Council member who is just currently elected for Chapel Hill. Then we have Crystal Coleman, who is the first lady of First Baptist Church. And then we have Donna Carrington, who is our executive director. And then we have the Delores Bailey, who is executive director of Empowerment. And all these ladies were really they have anything I've asked of them they have been very supportive. I ask... I don't know. I guess everybody feels like I do, but I can see what I won't do. So it's been really a pleasure. And just to say to them, thank you for what you do in the community. And so planning, like I said, every month doing something, they will be leading the March, the 9th of April. And so then they have some other things coming up throughout the year. And then what they would do is in February, they will crown their successor, which will be the person that they choose.

Klaus [20:14]: That's awesome. I love that. That's such a cool idea. Those are some amazing women.

Yvette [20:22]: Yeah, they are.

Klaus [20:27]: So when you think about the Pandemic and your experience of it, how would you describe the different phases of the past two years? And this can be kind of like an exercise, I guess, in getting us into the mindset of the Pandemic and grounding us in this timeline. So, yeah, if you're able to just... when you think about the Pandemic, how do you sort of fill in that timeline, major events, wherever your mind goes?

Yvette [21:09]: I think that, like I said, we have to be consistent and persistent. I think that major events would include us continuously letting people know that because the Pandemic has affected everybody and everybody knows that it affects people differently. But this specific population is who I speak for, I think that we have to make sure that people are aware that, like I want to say before, we're not going away. And so when you can plan, if you can continuously be I guess on site with people, if you can continue to be open to people because everybody has a different phase of what they go through in terms of the pandemic. Like I said, it was like, step one, okay. Step one, I got a job. Step two, I need to find a place. Step three, pandemic hit, right? But I got to be consistent and work. Then I get the pandemic, okay? So I can't work anymore. So I lose my thing, I lose my apartment and all of that. Okay? Once that's lost, I got to start all the way back again, starting from the beginning. And that's what it's kind of been because it's like you can get so far, and then the pandemic, because of it, has let people down where I may have started a job two months ago, and then I got it, the virus, and then you're off 14 days, and then your boss says to you, "Well, you can't be off all this time. I need somebody in this spot." So you lose that job. So once you lose that job, you lose your place. If we did not have some of... what's the word I'm looking for? Some of the stuff in place, like the housing helpline and other resources for people financially to be helped. But it's like it only lasts for a certain amount of time. You know what I mean? They can only help you but a certain amount of time. So it's not going to last forever. And that's what the pandemic has done to a lot of folks because it exists. It has made people fall by the wayside, because these programs are government programs. Orange County programs run out of money, and then they can no longer sustain people who are already living in a place. So that person loses a place, loses a job, and they end up on the street, or they will apply... maybe they're old enough for Social Security, so they apply for Social Security. Social Security takes a minute, everybody know that, to come through. Meanwhile, whether they live, if the shelter is full, which happened to be closed, by the way, while the pandemic was going on, they close the shelters down. So if that's closed down and you don't have money for a hotel because you're not working because you just lost a job, then a lot of folks are like, what do we do? You know what I mean? If you would build for people who can draw their Social Security, they could afford to have a place. But you're not building anything for the 30% AMI population and below. So it's a vicious cycle for a lot of people. You know what I

mean? It's like, it gives people, I think what we try to do is give people a sense of hope and let them know that we're going to try to get every resource that we can for you, but we don't build. You know what I mean? But we can be there to make sure they do. And I think that that's what has been supportive for this population, that they actually know that I am in that space where we have never been before, where we are now, I guess being visually counted where years ago they would say, we don't see you. So we don't really know what you need, which is not true, because I've been doing this a long time and I'm very visible and I don't have a problem, I ain't scared, I ain't got a problem with fear. So that is so not true. But that's what they used. And so now by us stepping up that game, making sure that these marches are done, making sure that we reach the community and let them know that we're not going down until you do what you're supposed to do. Another thing I would include is election time for this population. Stop putting people in there that are not supportive of us. And that's been a really hard thing because you don't have a lot of candidates that I would choose that are running for like Town Council or Mayor. So they have gotten really comfortable with what they do, with what they are doing in terms of not being as supportive as they should be for a population that supports them. Because, like I said, a lot of our people work. We're not asking you for anything. We're only saying to you, if we put you in a seat and election seat and we give you that kind of power to have a voice for us, then you ought to have a voice for us. And stop putting that off and do what you're supposed to do. It's only the right thing to do. You know what I mean? So it's like a cycle. But I want to be clear that we are open and very supportive to any, especially the 30% population and below. But now I think that we're being included more. We're being more in the spaces where they didn't think we would be before. And I got a big mouth, like I said, so I don't have a problem with it. But, yeah, I think the pandemic now that it's starting to kind of be under some kind of control, that hopefully people will see that and change what they've done in the past and make it better for this specific population in the future.

Klaus [27:55]: Yeah, absolutely. How have you stayed in touch with loved ones during the pandemic?

Yvette [27:59]: All of them live here. I have eight children, eight children, eight grandchildren, but all of my kids stay here but one, one is in Detroit, my mom and my sister in Detroit, because I was born and raised in Detroit, but all of my kids are here. So it's been really easy to as a matter of fact, we all got infected at the same time because we have Sunday dinners. I cook Sunday dinner for the family every Sunday. And so we all got it at the same time, but everybody came out of it well.

Klaus [28:35]: When did that happen?

Yvette [28:36]: What is this, March, April?

Klaus [28:37]: We're in the end of March now.

Yvette [28:41]: Okay, so it was December, I want to say.

Klaus [28:46]: Omicron?

Yvette [28:49]: Yeah, the one that was real contagious, that was like *snaps*. Yeah, that one. It just passed through us real quick. I was like, "Aw, man," we all got tested, and all of us like positive. I was like, my baby girl, my oldest granddaughter, she got it first from school, and I take her to school every morning. So then it passed to me. Then I passed to my husband, and she passed it to her mom. It went through my family, but we all ended up all right. Nobody got really, really sick. Most of us are vaccinated anyway.

Klaus [29:21]: I'm glad you're all doing okay.

Yvette [29:25]: Yeah we're fine. It was a trip, though. Yeah.

Klaus [29:29]: So how have those relationships with your loved ones or with your friends, how have they changed over the course of the pandemic?

Yvette [29:39]: Well, I'll tell you about our friends, though, because, see, usually on Sunday... my weekends are always full, and it's full of family, you know what I mean? But when we do have friends that come over, like, every weekend and come from out of town, too. And so by that, by us all having it, they were scared. They didn't come nowhere near us. Like weeks. We would be on the phone talking, but they would not come by. And as soon as... we made sure that the house was nice and sanitized and everything, and if they didn't know that we had it when they came to the door, we would tell them and they would go back out. They wouldn't even come in the house. It was funny, because as soon as we said... whacha call it?

Klaus [30:32]: Vaccination?

Yvette [30:33]: No no, what's the disease?

Klaus [30:37]: Oh, COVID.

Yvette [30:37]: COVID! Couldn't even think of it! There we go. As soon as the door open, because we don't have a locked door. We only lock it at night. So during the day, anybody could just walk in the house. Somebody's always at my house, that's the kind of house, you know, somebody always at it. And so you walk in and we would be sitting there watching television. We were like, "We got COVID!" They would run back out the house. They were not coming in the house. I think two months we didn't see kind of like our friends that we normally see every weekend, because they were like, "I can't go over that, I ain't trying to get COVID." But we were very open and honest with people about it because I would want people to be very open and honest with me about it. It got nothing to do with you, but I don't want it. So I think that people... we just made them aware. And so because they were aware of it took some time for them, and they didn't come back for like two, three months. But that's all right. You know what I mean? That's how it affected us. But we made sure that everybody knew. Snd where we live at the end, we live in an apartment building at the end. So if you're coming in, it's the first apartment, if you're going out to the last one. So we're right there on the end. So we didn't have to worry about people like in the middle because we were only in our apartment. So that made it better, too.

Klaus [32:04]: Yeah. How about before you all got COVID, if you're thinking about pre-March 2020, before the pandemic hit and then after the pandemic hit, and that whole time sort of in between before you all got COVID yourselves, what did your relationships look like? How did those weekends that you spent with friends and family... did they change at all, like after the pandemic hit?

Yvette [32:33]: They did, yeah, they did. Our friends didn't come by, like I said, as much as regularly, we have friends that come from out of town. They really didn't come. As a matter of fact, they came for my birthday, which was in February, but a long span there before that, after they found out about us having it, they didn't come by at all. The kids, they were very good. They really were because I have two they live out in the same complex I live. So they didn't come by. I didn't go by their apartment. They didn't come by mine. It was just me and O and then the rest of the kids, they had their own thing. So it was a space in there where we did not see each other. We'd do a group chat and we just talk to each other that way, you know what I'm saying? But eventually, once everybody got well and we saw that it wasn't going to be anything that somebody couldn't control or go to a hospital or anything like that, wasn't affecting us in that, you know, in that way. But it did affect us socially for a while because it's so many of us, and we didn't want it to affect our friends in there and then their family go home and affect their family, you know what I'm saying? And so we kept 'em away and they were very supportive of

that. And the kids were very supportive, too, because they usually come by all the time because that's why I don't knock the door, because they always walking in and out. But yeah, it took a toll on it, but it's getting better. I think it still has affected some of our friends, and they're still not as comfortable as they were before we had it. So it has affected a little bit, but not where they never come back again. But it did stop them from coming.

Klaus [34:34]: Yeah. Do you feel like the pandemic has affected your emotional and mental health in any way? And then if it has, how?

Yvette [34:45]: I wouldn't say. I think the only thing mentally was it was tedious. It made you tired. So you have to have like me, I have to have vision... I have a lot of visions in my brain. I'm just that kind of person and my brain is a little different from everybody else's. But I had to keep it active, which is one of the reasons why I put the Queens event. I thought about that. It was two years in the making. I wanted to do originally a Black Girls Rock, but then I found out that they have some other kind of Girls Rock something down here. And I didn't want it to taint it or be misconstrued as being the same thing. I really wanted the Queens to have their own specific thing. And so, when the pandemic hit, like I said, this has been two years in the making, well probably three, it caused me emotionally and mentally to really throw myself into what I could control, because of course we couldn't control it. I thought a lot about, I visualized a lot about what I wanted the Queen event to look like. Definitely the Queens that I chose were the six women that I felt were very supportive of this particular thing of 30% AMI and below income population. I got more into their work ethic and found out things about them that I didn't know. That kind of thing. The research, I researched a lot of stuff. So I was able to throw myself into my work. March the same thing: making sure that I came up with a planning committee that could help with the moving parts of everything because I couldn't do everything myself right. So I would designate people with the different organizations who are on the flyer to do specific things, setting up the goal and making sure that it looked exactly the way I wanted it to look. And the Queendom, it was cool, it was at the Century Center, okay? And I had these beautiful, beautiful Thrones at each Queens... I'm gonna show you pictures when we through. It was this... so I really though myself and all of that mentally and emotionally. So that took away from a lot of me being panicked about the pandemic, from a lot of me being concerned and scared about the pandemic, because you never know about medical stuff. This stuff is medical. You know what I mean? At first I had a conspiracy theory, and I thought and I was like, "I believe Trump set us up and put that shit somewhere—oh stuff, I'm sorry—and put that pandemic in biochemical warfare. Because I don't trust the government — never have, I don't think I ever will — with our lives. I think that they do what they want to do, and then we just get the backlash and the backfall. But I said, "Okay, I got to get out of that because I ain't [*inaudible*], you know what I

mean? So I had to change my brain. And I think that me being involved in these events or creating these events is what helped me not to be so emotionally distraught, 'cause I probably would have if I didn't have nothing else to do. But all of these were all in the making before the pandemic. So the pandemic just enhanced exactly what I wanted to do. And so my vision became alive. Each one of them, everything that I've done visually or creatively has actually come to fruition, and it's something to see. It really is. To actually put something on paper and then actually see it happen. It's amazing. It really is.

Klaus [39:17]: That's beautiful. How has the pandemic affected your relationship to your faith or spirituality?

Yvette [39:26]: Well, I'm a believer, so I don't think it's affected my faith at all. I know there's something bigger than me. I have never had a problem with knowing that. I was raised to know that, and I've lived it, because I've seen it all my life. So my faith has not been affected. My spirituality... it has made me read more. I've never been a reader, you know? Because I've never had the time. I still really don't. But one of the things my daughter Tamia always does is give me really good books. Sometimes I can't get through them. But the last three books she got me was the Michelle Obama book, *Just As I Am*, Cicely Tyson, and talking about Will Smith smackin' Chris Rock! And the last one she bought me was *Will*. So I haven't gotten into that one yet. But I think that I read a little more than I used to, but my spirituality, it's non-negotiable. I don't weigh that in any kind of way. I've been raised to know about the higher power and my God anyway. And I know that He exists, and I know that it's because of Him that I exist. And I know that I'm very sure of that. I don't question that. So it hasn't affected that in that aspect. Like I said, I had a little fear about the pandemic because it all happened so quick and it happened to all of us at once. And it took me a while to get vaccinated. I mean, it did it took me months. I was like "aaahhh," okay, because I don't trust, like I said, the government. So I'm like, "I don't know." And then I'm 64 years old. And Donna, my boss, was very concerned about... everybody in the office was, they was like, "Please, Ms. Yvette, get the shot, get the shot." I was like, "I don't know. I'm going to have to wait a minute." And then when I did go Klaus to get it, I went to the Friday Center, right? So when I did go, I know the girl in there was like, "I wish this old lady would just come on and let me give her this shot." I sat there. I couldn't do it right away. I couldn't do it. I sat there. She was looking at me, I was looking at her. I was looking at her, she was looking at me. I could see in her brain, she was saying, "Come on, woman, let's take this shot." But it took me a minute. But I did get it. It took a while. I haven't gotten a booster. I'm still working on that, but, yeah, it took me a while. But I did finally get it. So spiritually, that kinda, I had to pray about that. I was like, I have a prayer closet, and I go in it all the time. I'm always in there. But I had to pray about the pandemic and shot and all that stuff before I actually did it. So I had to consult my high

power, and then I had to be comfortable with it because I wasn't. I really wasn't. But that's, outside of that, I think everything spiritually, it just worked together like it should have. And so I went on and got it.

Klaus [43:03]: I'm just going to check on that time here real quick. So it's 9:53 right now. Do you need a couple of minutes before 10:00 or can I ask you two or three more questions?

Yvette [43:15]: Let me use the bathroom.

Klaus [43:17]: Yeah go for it.

[break in recording]

Yvette [43:27]: So what do you do? You rewrite it or what?

Klaus [43:28]: Oh, I'm not going to rewrite anything. It's just going to be the raw interview and we're going to upload it onto the chapelhillhistory.org website. There's going to be kind of like a little archive kind of thing that people can engage with. It's possible that we might do, like a little podcast thing or something at some point with combining different interviews together.

Yvette [43:53]: Didn't we talk about that before?

Klaus [43:54]: The podcast? I'm sure we've talked about the podcast before.

Yvette [43:59]: I still want to do that. What did I name it? I can't remember the name, but I've got it written down somewhere.

Klaus [44:12]: You mean the podcast?

Yvette [44:15]: Mhm.

Klaus [44:15]: Well it was *Re/collecting Chapel Hill* is our podcast. That's what it was called.

Yvette [44:18]: Okay. I was going to do one. Yeah, me and somebody else. Some advocate we had talked about it quite a while ago. That's still something that's got to come into fruition by CEF.

Klaus [44:34]: Well, that's cool. Well so do you need to open the office up?

Yvette [44:39]: Yeah.

Klaus [44:41]: What I can do, I mean, I don't know, are people going to flood in once the door is open?

Yvette [44:48]: What I'm going to do is I'm going to get everything set up and we can finish.

Klaus [44:51]: Okay. That would be great.

Yvette [44:51]: Let's do that.

Klaus [44:51]: Let's do it.

Yvette [44:59]: David should be here this morning.

Klaus [44:59]: Oh, really? Oh, my gosh. I hope he is.

[break in recording]

Klaus [45:23]: So is there anything that you wish you had done differently earlier in the pandemic?

Yvette [45:26]: I think I wish we had been more prepared, but I think it hit everybody so quickly and all at once that it just kind of slapped us in the face. And then we had to figure out just what to do to sustain ourselves, especially in the community and especially in terms of our work. We had to shut down for a minute, but we still continuously Zoomed and emailed. The Zoom thing got on my nerves. Still does.

Klaus [46:01]: Tell me about it.

Yvette [46:03]: I like the in person thing myself. It's very difficult to reflect when you're talking on Zoom, to me. It's very difficult to get an intimate kind of view of a person when you're on Zoom. And I think that most of — I can only speak for myself — most of my stuff is heartfelt, so when I'm on a screen, I don't get that from people. I'm a kinda touchy, kinda feel-y, kinda huggy person, so I like to be able to look at you and you look at me, you know what I'm saying? I don't want to be looking all around. It's distracting. I don't like it. So I think getting used to that — I still haven't — but making that a part of what's in existence now because we have to do it made it difficult for me. I know that it made it difficult for members because we weren't able to be one on one, and that's how we usually function. I think that all that we do is heart. I think that Zoom

takes the heart out of it and makes everything really technical and you just don't feel right. I just didn't feel good. I still don't. I'm still waiting for them to take the Zoom away. They probably never will. Not that they figured out that everybody do it, but I just, it's not a heart thing, and I think that my thing is all heart, and so it makes it hard for me, but I know it's necessary. And so that's the only reason why I've had to do what we've had to do. But I don't like it. I never have. I really don't. And I don't like not having, like I said, not being in the same room with Members. And then a lot of our Members don't have access to it because they don't have computers. A lot of them don't have phones. A lot of the way we network is by mouth, and it's person to person. So it's like, if I see you on the street and I tell you what CEF is doing, so and so and so and so, that's how I'm going to get to CEF, you know, where's CEF at? How do I get there? And a lot of our members have public transportation. It shut down. They wouldn't let people on the buses for a while, you know what I'm saying? So people couldn't get to appointments, so we had to think about we have students who are advocates here, the pandemic took over the campus, so they have to shut that down. So it hindered us, but it did not stop us. So I think that's what I would say about that. But that Zoom. I don't like it. I do not like it.

Klaus [48:55]: Yeah. What do you want to be sure that future generations remember about this time period, about the COVID pandemic?

Yvette [49:05]: I think that they should remember that even though there is a crisis, it doesn't have to stop progress. I think that they should remember that they have to look at different avenues. And I think that's in anything, even if we hadn't had the pandemic, I think that different avenues, creative avenues... So many entrepreneurs came out of the Pandemic because they figured out "Well hell, I just got fired, and I can't go to work," you know, that kind of thing so they figured out a creative way to make that income. And I think that's what people should be doing all the time, because entrepreneurship only opens up creativity to me. It makes you find and figure out and actually think and use your brain of how something that you created can make a difference. Something that you said, you spoke, you wrote it down, you saw the vision and actually start coming to fruition is what we all need to do. I think that future generations should realize that we are here for each other. We won't exist without each other and that we should take care of each other. And I really think that one of the greatest things that I've learned throughout this pandemic is that no matter what you do or what you say, people will always remember how you make them feel. I think that's the greatest thing that you can do is actually be a part of making a person feel better, not just about themselves, but about the situation. And they can be in a really dire one. But if you can make them feel like there is a way out of that situation, I think that's the most important thing. And I think that people in power should realize that you were put in power by other people. You didn't just step into it. You had to have other folks to give you the leg up to be able to speak to them, that you didn't do it alone. And that the people that supported you, you should reciprocate. When they give you that kind of power and they say to you, "Okay, you said you would do this. We're going to be supportive of you." You need to do it and stop messing with it, because you're messing with people's lives. I say this all the time because Chapel Hill is very big on environment. We need another park. No, you don't. Oh, we need some more trees. No, we don't. You know what I mean? No, we don't. We need some housing for people to live in. God is going to take care of nature. He always has. Nature

ain't going to never go nowhere. It's gonna always be here. But we have got to take care of each other. That's why He put us here. You know what I'm saying? And so in that vein, the only thing that I could say to people that are in power is to remember that you are supposed to support people that you've told you would and do that. Because if you want a tree, get a bucket and put a seed and grow a tree in the corner. But do you want somebody living up under the tree? Really? You know what I'm saying? If you're a bird, let the bird fly, you know, you'd rather build a bird house than to build an apartment complex for a mom and her kid. Come on, you know what I mean? Are you rather build a park, you gonna have half of the people that don't have a job and don't have nowhere to live living in the park? That don't make no sense. They need to think about what they're saying and how they treat people and what they're doing. And I'm not going to stop being supportive and thinking of creative ways to stay in your face to make you do what you said you were going to do. And that's all I got to say about that.

Klaus [54:05]: Yeah. What do you hope that we keep from the pandemic?

Yvette [54:07]: I think one of the things, one of the good things that the pandemic did cause us to take a look and see just how fragile we really are as human beings. I mean, because people were like [*snaps*] going like that. Dropping like... I was like, "Oh, my God." People that I knew, and it was so close to home. You know, it's like when people pass, they're like your grandmother and your grandfather, that kind of thing. And back in the day, they were ready to go because they'd lived to 90 and all of that stuff. But people were dropping like 15, 16 years old, 35, 25, you know, just, and I think that people should realize how fragile we really are, that we really don't have as much control over this thing life as we say we do. It's something much bigger. And I think that's the one thing that the pandemic made a lot of folks realize. You could be here one day, but you really actually can be here, be gone the next day. Because I was like, "Oh, my God," they was calling me like, "Ms. Yvette so-and-so passed, and so-and-so," so I was like, what? And they were just dying. And there's a lot of our Members that passed. I'm not saying they all passed on the pandemic, I mean, from COVID. But what I am saying is I think people started to realize that you could see somebody one day, and then the next day they're gone like forever. And I think that that's the one thing that it showed me in terms of something else that's in control, and we can just learn how to flow with what that is. And I think that's a higher power telling us, "Look, y'all can do but so much, but you can't do this here." You know what I'm saying? So it's certain things I think we'll never control. You know what I mean? But I think that everybody realizes now more that you actually couldn't be, I could see you today, and then somebody can call you, and I'll be gone tomorrow. So I think that that's the one thing that it did. It brought a closeness to people to be aware that the people that your loved ones and people who you see every day and people that you work with are very important. And you need to say those things like "I love you" to them, or you need to give them those hugs. Even though it took away the hug for a minute. We were all doing elbows, crazy shit like that. But the closeness of just the humanness of one another, I think that that, that was the only good thing it created outside of... ya know, yeah, that's the only good thing. But it did do that. You know, because a lot of people that you never think something might happen to actually it happened. So I think that's the one good takeaway that I would say.

Klaus [57:23]: I mean, it's a huge lesson. It's one big thing.

Yvette [57:26]: It is.

Klaus [57:28]: Okay. Well, I've got one more question here. Is there any... I know you were just talking about some of the books that your daughter had given you. Are there any books or music or TV, movies that when you think back on the pandemic time, that those are sort of the things that characterize your life in the pandemic? That make you think of your life in the pandemic?

Yvette [57:57]: Well, I really related well with Obama's book, because she was born kind of like around the same time I was. And I could envision where she came from a lot, was a lot where I came from. So, I didn't get through it yet, but I'm still reading it. But I could relate to hers really well. I could relate *Just As I Am* too, Cicely Tyson, I haven't gotten through that either. But I think it made me reflect a lot on my childhood because I was raised back in the time, in the '50s and '60s, because I was born in '58. So I was raised in a time... it's funny because in a climate of the same kind of atmosphere that's happening now with the social justice and with us as Black Americans not being supported like we should be supported. It's like, it's a circle, you know, like a full circle. Because when I was born, Martin Luther King and all of that was going on, same thing, the marches, the making sure that people's rights were not being discriminated against, making sure that I think the only thing that was different was the deaths. You know what I mean? Because they're visible now, people just killing people. And you can see it. Back then, we had television, but we didn't have cell phones and stuff like that. So you wasn't like as involved as you are now. That would be the only difference. But it's the same social thing as it has always been. And it's like didn't nobody learned a lesson from that, like when we did that over 50 years ago, and then it's right back here. All... same thing. It never left. You know what I'm saying? It's just coming to a head like it always... you know? And I think that's the one thing that I can take away, if I could take away something from all of it, would be the youth of our country being more aware of it, because when we was kids, we only saw certain things they would only show you certain things. Now they can't help but show you all of it. You can't see portions and parts. Now people can show you the whole thing about the whole whatever is going on socially. You know what I mean? Back when I was being raised, they would only pick parts for us to see. Now they have no control over us being able to see the whole picture. And I think that you kids coming up now, especially those of you who are in college that are struggling with social justice or trying to help people become more aware about what social justice really is and what it can do and what it entails. I think that you are the future, and you've got to be able to see clearly what's going on, even if you're a white American male, even if you are heterosexual, bisexual, gay, whatever. You know, you have got to keep your eyes open and see how wrong the injustice is and make that difference and turn that corner and say "We can't continue to do this. This is not right." And I think that a lot of youth, y'all gonna have that voice for us, because I ain't gonna be here like forever. I might

Klaus [1:01:53]: I hope so.

Yvette [1:01:55]: Yeam me too. But I think when we got to leave, the older people like me to leave with the youth, of you is that you've got to turn the corner. You can't let the injustice continue. We destroy each other if it does, which is a bad thing, because why should we do that? But the pandemic, I think it brought out a lot of that, you know, a lot of the wrongness of the police, a lot of the wrongness of community not being supportive of people who are just trying to live their lives on a day to day basis. They don't even look ahead. It's a day. Some of them it's an hour, hour to hour, because they don't see any future. And so we have to make sure that they know that there is one. You know what I mean? That it's not all bad, even though it's a tore up situation, but it's not all bad. And I think that we have to make that clear to folks who just don't have any hope. And I think that's one of the things... I think everybody has a calling or a purpose, and I think that's one of mine, I really do, to let people know that it can be better. It really can. But you need help from others to do that. Everybody can... can't nobody do it alone. And we've got to learn to support each other. And we gonna always see color, you know, I think people need to accept that, that's just the way that is. That's a life thing. But that color thing doesn't have to stop what we have up under us. You know what I mean? Like the soul of us has no color. So that's the part that we've got to see and stop looking at the other part, in order to make it a better life for everybody. That's what I would say.

Klaus [1:04:11]: Amazing. Well, is there anything else that you feel like you wanted to say? Anything else that you want to talk about before we stop the recording?

Yvette [1:04:19]: I would say know that CEF is here, Community Empowerment Fund is here. That we are moving forward in terms of seeing that there will be housing here in Chapel Hill. I'm saying that and I'm gonna make that very clear that it's gonna happen. We're not going to give up, we're going to continue to march and we're going to continue to be in those spaces where they say we never are and we're going to continue to make them come to our space so that we can show them that we still in this thing and we're going to be in it for the long haul. I want to give everybody a sense of hope that even though we go through a lot of crisis and even though we go through a lot of things that cause us pain and to take care of yourself because self is most important, but know that there is a supportive group in us to help you and if you should need us, please reach out.

Klaus [1:05:27]: Well, thank you so much.

Yvette [1:05:28]: You're welcome.

Klaus [1:05:28]: All right. I must stop the recording.