



Community Reflections on the Pandemic

The stories of our community in the time of COVID are best told through the words of local residents. They tell of loss, inspiration, sacrifice and risk; of disconnection, belonging, family and friendships; and of inescapable inequity and injustice.

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Aligning Studio &
Judy Sirota Rosenthal



Don C. Sawyer III, PhD

Quinnipiac University Vice President for Equity and Inclusion and Associate Professor of Sociology; founder of the Projects2PhD Fund at The Community Foundation *for* Greater New Haven

“After the death of my father from COVID, I thought how can I pay it forward? My parents always thought education was going to be the key for me and my brother. So, I set up a scholarship fund for people who are first generation college students who live in public housing and have aspirations of going to college because I know that I wouldn’t be in the place that I am today, without people from back home, pouring into me, dropping little gems, pointing me in the right direction and giving me a little money here and there to make sure that I was okay when I was in school.”

Dr. Patrice Farquharson

Executive Director, West Haven Child Development Center

“When we first found out that we had to close, it was quite unexpected. We had one day’s notice that the state was shutting down, and it was pretty surreal. We had to figure out how we were still going to provide for our families. I saw people really coming together, and we got to know our parents and our families even more so because we had this personal, everyday connection with them through email and Facebook live. Some of the teachers did drive-bys for the families, leaving little gifts or little things, activities on the porch for the children to come out and get or so they could wave to their teachers from the windows. Teachers gave ideas for parents who were home now with their children about activities to do all day.”





Christine Kim

Food and Social Justice activist; Founder of aapiNHV, member of advisory board for The Community Fund for Women and Girls at The Community Foundation *for* Greater New Haven

“I helped organize a rally to fight hate against Asian and Pacific Islander Americans and was surrounded by neighbors, by friends, in New Haven. I left myself vulnerable and told them my story. I’ve never felt so loved and so supported by a group of people. They took their lunch break to come out and stand in solidarity. And if they couldn’t in-person, they did it with their words and support and love. And it made me realize that as much as I feared those around me, I can also feel so supported by those around me.

I talk about this pandemic as a forge, as something where we are going to be tested through a very hot fire and a lot of our fears and purities are going to rise to the surface. We need to make the decision if we’re going to have it make us stronger or destroy us.”

Adriane Jefferson

Director of Cultural Affairs for the City of New Haven

“We saw an entire switch up of how our artists and how our arts community and our arts leaders had to be imaginative and creative with how they start to reach people, how they operationalized during this time of COVID.

The arts community is just a really good example of resiliency. There are very few industries that have been impacted by the pandemic the way the arts community has been impacted. And when I say arts community, I’m talking about individual artists, I’m talking about low-income artists, Black and Brown artists. I’m talking about the arts organizations, small and large. They have been extremely impacted financially, which impacts the people who are connected to them — their ability to live, their ability to pay rent, their ability to eat.”





Bruni Pizarro

Executive Director, Junta for Progressive Action

“COVID began in March, but the inequality existed way before that. COVID exacerbated and unmasked many of the inequalities, racial and ethnic, and class-based inequalities that exist today. We saw it firsthand with the predominant Latinx community that we serve.

It’s really, really important for folks to realize who is doing the work, who has been doing the work already and support them. We need to have a transformative perspective. How are we holding ourselves accountable, each and every one of us, individually and then organizationally. How are we complicit in systems of oppression? How is the nonprofit landscape really making transformative change? These are the questions that I ask myself.”

Nieda Abbas

Head Chef, Trainer and Co-Founder, Havenly Treats

“We’d been going from one place to another for the past two years. And then when COVID hit, we found a kitchen that was sent to us from the heavens. Then we started doing food relief for the housing insecure communities in New Haven. And since then, we’ve opened a store of our own.”

Caterina Passoni

Executive Director and Co-Founder, Havenly Treats

“The priority is to talk to people that are directly and disproportionately impacted. Let them lead the charge. We can start by taking a long-term approach, not looking for solutions that are very quick but for solutions that are actually building systemic changes in power structures.”



Maria Olmo

Director of Mary Wade Residential Care Home

“Compassion. Sleepless nights. Time away from our families. Not seeing our families. We left it all on the line.

I hope that if anyone takes anything from all of this it is compassion and unity. It took individuals becoming a team and locking it in to make this work. Whatever the outcome has been, I just know that we all gave it our all.”





Honorable Flemming L. Norcott Jr.

Retired Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court;
Chair of The Community Foundation *for* Greater New Haven
Board of Directors

“My hope is that post pandemic, we can come together as a community, not only to address what has happened during the pandemic, but to address the problems that we have seen pre-pandemic and that we know are going to exist post-pandemic. We get there by not looking at each other as enemies or as competitors, but looking at each other as collaborators, looking at each other as partners to get to that end zone of equality and inclusion.”

Michael R. Taylor

Chief Executive Officer, Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center

“Our relationship with our patients in the communities we serve is ongoing. Our patients are with us in some instances, anywhere from three to four times a year, from two to three times a week. That’s not an episodic relationship. That’s where we get to know one another. It’s a thrill now to be able to turn on the national news and hear people talk about community health centers as the resource that I’ve known them to be for 35 years now.”





Eric Dillner

Chief Executive Officer, Shoreline Arts Alliance

“One of the things that we created was a project called Reopening CT Arts Venues: Science-Based Safety. That’s the key — science-based safety. We wanted to find a way through all the regulations and all the changes that were happening week after week to give artists and arts organizations some concrete things they could hold on to so that they could think about reopening or think about creating opportunities as the future came along.

I’m really looking forward to seeing faces light up when they see something, whether it’s a sculpture, or a piece of art, or a singer producing some beautiful tone.”

Matthew Chasen

Music Teacher, Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School

“I put myself into the shoes of my students and demonstrated to them that, despite the fact that I might not necessarily come from the same set of circumstances, they have an ally in the process. There is someone who wants to understand where it is that they’re coming from and what their story is, what their truth is.”

Patrick Smith

Teacher of wind ensemble and jazz band and AP music theory,
Cooperative Arts & Humanities High School

“I was inspired to think about what we could do at Co-Op to really make this relevant for the students and for us. So, I began to explore the idea of virtual performance through video. There was an uptick in engagement on the part of the students, but there was even more of an uptick in engagement on the part of adults. The net result of that is going to be a really big, positive step forward in the way we look at what we do, who we are, and the way we interact as human beings, regardless of our age.”



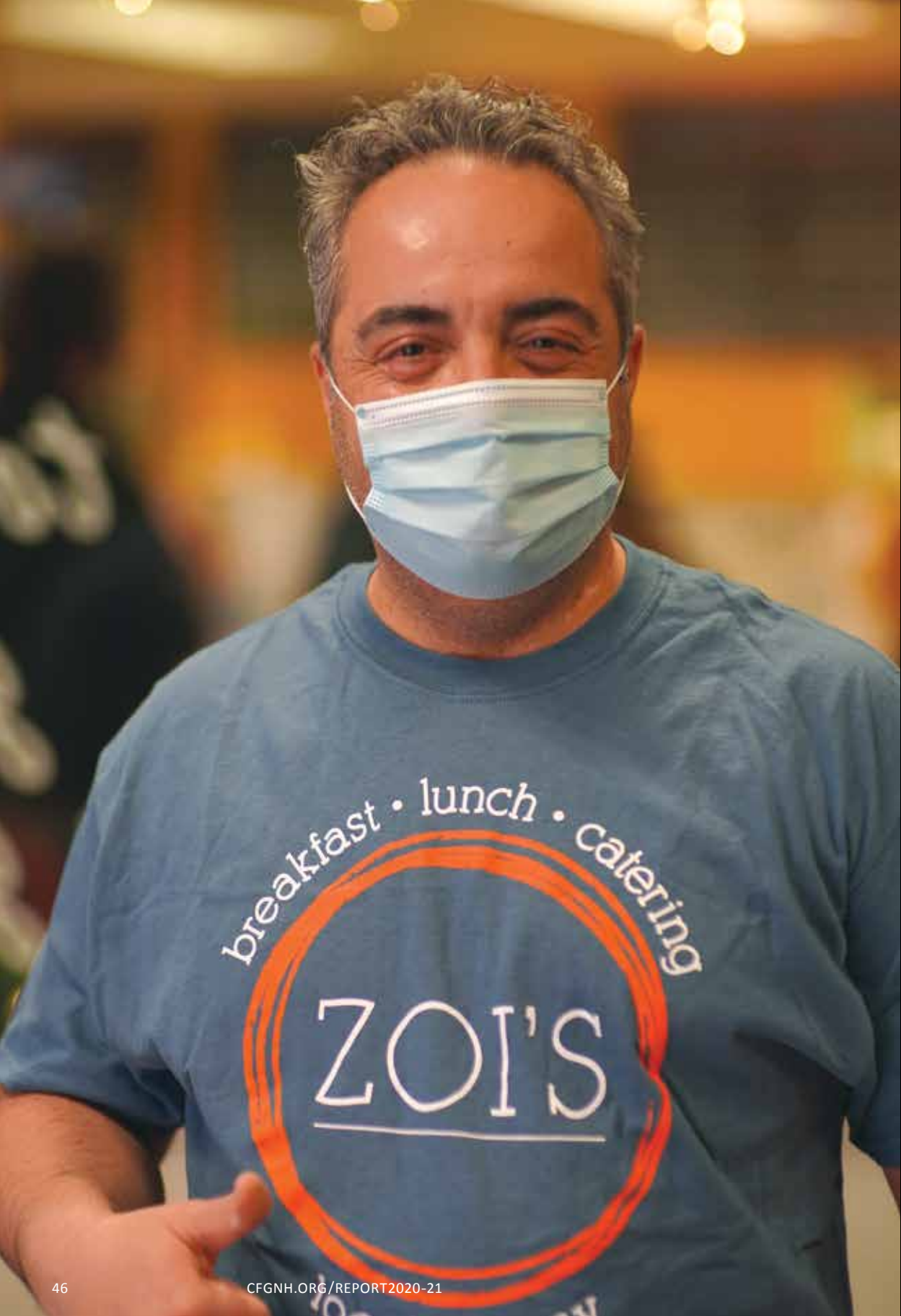
Joy Brown

Co-owner, Sharon Joy Salon

“The pandemic made us more aware of our surroundings and what’s really going on in this world. It exposed a lot of what Black and Brown people have been going through. A lot of the young girls that come to us can relate to us because we have a story, and we can encourage them as young Black women.

This is how my sister Sharon and I always looked at our business and what we wanted people to feel — inspired. It starts with when you open the door and when you walk in, we want you to feel warm. We want you to feel that love, that sisterhood and think ‘this is where I’m supposed to be.’”





Pete Maniatis

Owner, Zoi's New Haven

“At the beginning when it was all happening we had to sit down and ask what are we going to do? Are we going to use all our savings to maintain our employees or are we going to shut down? I can lead us through, but I needed to have everyone's backing. Everyone was on board. We have a good solid team. We're going to make it with lots of hard work and resilience.”