

COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES ORAL HISTORIES

Laura Hanna Interview

November 9, 2020

Virtual Meeting, Mason, Michigan

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Laura Hanna Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: My name is Robyn Pierce working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is November 9, 2020. This is an interview of Laura Hanna about the effects of COVID on her ability to work. The interview will go into detail about her job as a psychotherapist both before and after the shelter-in-place order was issued. Laura lives in Mason, Michigan and works at Healing Place. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library which is part of Wayne State University.

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Thank you so much for joining me today. And then, oh I made that too big. [referring to computer window] Okay, the first thing I ask everybody is, do you have an affiliation with Wayne State University?

LAURA HANNA: No. [00:01:19]

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay. Can you give me a description of what "psychotherapist" means?

LAURA HANNA: I do individual, couples, family therapy sessions for individuals who are either referring themselves, or their doctor or the courts are ordering them.

ROBYN PIERCE: And then—

LAURA HANNA: For mental health therapy.

ROBYN PIERCE: What did a normal day of work look like for you before the stay-at-home order was issued?

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LAURA HANNA: A normal day of work would be weekends and three evenings a week. I would drive into work and see a client every hour in my office, face-to-face. I'd see children, we'd do play therapy. I'd see couples, family sessions. [00:02:25]

ROBYN PIERCE: So then, the first confirmed case in Michigan was the tenth of March, and it was very soon after that that the stay-at-home order and shut down order was issued. What did that look like, as you came off of work, at first?

LAURA HANNA: Well, I had heard about the shutdown happening and I saw a client, my last client—ended at 10 o'clock that evening. The order went into effect at midnight. And I had informed all my clients that from here on out I would only be seeing them over video. I did prepare all my clients because I had a feeling that this would last longer than two weeks. [00:03:22]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: So, I was able to do that.

ROBYN PIERCE: What kind of platform do you use for your therapy now? Is it Zoom?
[videoconferencing software]

LAURA HANNA: No, I pay a monthly fee and it's Doxy.me It's a HIPAA-compliant platform. I get text messages when my clients check into my virtual waiting room, which is really nice because I am working from home. And I do have children. So, if a client's running late and I'm in between, you know, I can run out and do stuff in the house with my kids or my husband, and I can bop back in and get online. The platform I've been using is really nice.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Did you immediately work into that or did you wait the two weeks to see what would happen?

LAURA HANNA: Nope. I mean, I saw clients that next day. [00:04:24]

ROBYN PIERCE: Wow.

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LAURA HANNA: So, yup. Very little disruption. I had a few clients who were not comfortable doing online. One client that was 8 years old and not really able to focus in front of a computer, so the parents opted to put a hold on therapy. I've had older clients who are just, they don't know how to work it. With them I offered to do a phone session or to at least try a video session for at least fifteen minutes and if they didn't like it, we could end it. I wouldn't charge them. But overall, most of my clients have been really receptive. They like being able to do therapy in their car. They might just wake up, roll out of bed, and join the sessions. It's been convenient. [00:05:25]

ROBYN PIERCE: That's nice. Did you have to take anything from your office to make sure that you could do everything that you needed to do when you set up at home to work?

LAURA HANNA: I took my iPad. That's about it.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: And I think I eventually—I've gone back and I've gotten like my office chair, some lamps, and my files. I had to buy a filing cabinet from home, er for home, with a lock on it. I needed to buy some stuff to help me transition.

ROBYN PIERCE: Do you have a space dedicated in the house for yourself and your sessions?

LAURA HANNA: I do. I have a corner of my bedroom.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: I have a desk and I have a white noise machine so I can't hear anything going on in the rest of the house and I have one outside so they can't hear me. [00:06:27]

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice. That's very thoughtful.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. Well, I mean it's for HIPAA, I mean I can't—I have to make sure that I protect all that.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Is that something that you decided to do so that you could be HIPAA compliant or is that something that they put out in maybe some suggestions due to the COVID shut down and stuff?

LAURA HANNA: No—At one point, I was working in my master closet to make sure I had privacy and space. For a lot of therapists, that was a big concern. So now we're working at home, and if we have families, how do we keep the sessions private so our clients are not worried about people walking in and listening in on a session? [00:07:20] Some therapists I heard were doing it out of their cars. I mean it was—we had to be creative. We've always had to adhere to HIPAA standards. Of course, they reminded us. The platform you were using had to be HIPAA compliant. But actually, in the beginning, the Governor did say that you could use FaceTime—or Zoom, which is not HIPAA compliant. But we were in such a desperate situation that if people needed therapy you could do it. You didn't need training in teletherapy. They waived all of these requirements. The insurance companies prior to this, the pandemic, it was very rare for all of them to allow it. [00:08:20] But the governor of Michigan really worked to lift those restrictions, so every insurance company got on board. They were covering copays—they were waiving deductibles. People were allowed to just get therapy at no cost to them.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's awesome.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. It was really exciting how it all kind of worked into place so quickly because the need was really huge. People were, you know, anxious, scared, losing their job.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: I had clients that were working in health care settings. They had patients that were contracting COVID. They were getting COVID, so.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: It was very intense in the beginning.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Was the platform that you currently use a thing before COVID or—did somebody build it because of COVID? [00:09:21]

LAURA HANNA: No. No, it was a thing. I'd never heard of it. I'd never wanted to do teletherapy. I didn't really believe that it was effective or that I was comfortable doing it. I don't even like talking on the phone. I mean, I email my clients to schedule appointments, it's just, it's more efficient for me to do that.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. So, how do you feel about teletherapy now?

LAURA HANNA: Well, now that I've been kind of forced to learn how to use it, I'm, I like it. There's a lot of benefits. There's also disadvantages.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Do you want to go into those or is that—

LAURA HANNA: Alright, yeah. I like that—part of me likes that I don't have the commute, the half hour each way to work. [00:10:19] Although, I do miss just decompressing after work and driving home, listening to music. I don't have that. I turn off my iPad and I open the door and I go down to three children and a husband and a dog. There's no down time. No separation. I like the convenience. I can see more clients because I'm not commuting, so I can use that time to see more people. The tricky part is though that it's hard to connect with new clients.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

LAURA HANNA: So, some of my people that I've been seeing for years or even months before the pandemic, it was a smooth transition. They've already met me in person, we've already built rapport. But, when I get a child as a new client, in the office we would do play therapy. We'd do an art project or board game, Legos. It's easier for me to engage with kids when they're right in front of me. [00:11:28]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

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LAURA HANNA: But over a computer, there's so many things that can go wrong. The Wi-Fi cuts out on their end, or they can't sit still enough to engage with me.

ROBYN PIERCE: Right.

LAURA HANNA: So, that's been very tricky. And then I can't do family sessions if the family doesn't all live in the same house. I have—

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

LAURA HANNA: I mean—on the platform I use, which is why I paid for it, because there's a free version, which I used for a month, but I pay now a monthly fee because I can conference in multiple people.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh nice!

LAURA HANNA: But the only problem I've found with that is the times that I've done that not everybody has a good internet connection. [00:12:20] I've made sure that I have a good one, because I need it. But if a client lives out in the country and they don't have that kind of access to the internet then it does not work.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: I've seen that quite a bit.

ROBYN PIERCE: Have you tried anything that works in place of play therapy with the tele-conferencing?

LAURA HANNA: I'm still able to do play therapy, we can still play games. So I might have the game on my end and—then we'll, they'll still participate but I'll have to move their character, or I'll have them get some Legos and then I'll have Legos and then we'll both build, like we would if we were in the office.

ROBYN PIERCE: Right.

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LAURA HANNA: There's just something different about being in person and you cannot recreate that over, as much as you try. It's still not the same. [00:13:27]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: It's close but—I can feel a difference.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. When we get to go back into a new normal, I guess, are you looking forward to going back to face-to-face, are you going to do both?

LAURA HANNA: I think I'll do both. I think I'll dedicate like one day, maybe like my Sunday's, to just doing video sessions because there are those clients that don't have transportation.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh, yeah.

LAURA HANNA: Right, like teenagers, who don't have access to a car yet, because sometimes in the past that's been an issue with people missing sessions. They can't get from home to my, or school, to my office in time. So I think for those people who want to just do video sessions, I will have one day and then I won't have to worry about commuting into work. [00:14:26] It's kind of cool because I can, I mean people can do these sessions anywhere. I've had people do them during their lunch break at work.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's nice.

LAURA HANNA: Where they normally they wouldn't, they wouldn't have enough time to drive in. So, I think I'll keep doing it for at least maybe one day a week.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, you said earlier that a lot of the restrictions were lifted for teletherapy at the beginning. Does that mean that you didn't have to become qualified or certified or take a test, or whatever, to do it? Or was it—

LAURA HANNA: Yeah, they really just wanted you to take a course so you were familiar with how to keep information private because it's harder to do when—you have to make sure you're

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wearing headphones, if you can't do it in a public place. [00:15:27] You can't go to Panera and have a session there. They really wanted everybody to be informed on pretty much everything we should have already been doing, that you're doing in an office, you make sure you're doing that out and about.

ROBYN PIERCE: Is there another layer of certificate that you would get after all of this to continue teletherapy or are you good to do it?

LAURA HANNA: No, I mean, I took an online informational class. So as far as most of the insurance companies, that's all they require.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh. Perfect. Let me look at my little list of things. [00:16:28] Can we talk about school for a little bit?

LAURA HANNA: Um-hm.

ROBYN PIERCE: With your kids, I know that they're school-aged because they're my kid's friends. But, when the school shut down last school year and everybody kind of came home, what did that look like?

LAURA HANNA: Um, chaos.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's what everybody says.

LAURA HANNA: Just a lot to try to manage their schedule. And I already set up my schedule, so I work when my husband doesn't. I work the weekends and then after dinner in the evenings. Luckily my work schedule is not interrupted at all because he was working from home too, so I would take care of the kids while he was up there working. [00:17:28] But—it's draining to do that all day and then go to work. It was exhausting mentally for me, in the beginning. It was pretty rough.

ROBYN PIERCE: Do you think that had to do with the state of the content—because—when my kids came off of school last year, it felt like there was no organization to the school platform at

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all. And I felt that that was a lot harder than this year. Do you feel like the mental exhaustion that you experienced was more due to the way the school—they kind of threw everything together, or was it just all of the time? No separation stuff? [00:18:19]

LAURA HANNA: I think it was more the school stuff. I know they just kind of said here's the assignments, do them. And, I mean, now they have times they have to log in. I can pretty much leave them on their own. I mean, not really, but I don't have to sit there with them. They know that there's expectations and that the teachers need to show up and get in front of the computer. Whereas, when it first happened, it was a free for all, it was, you know.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: I had a kindergartener who, he didn't know how to read all that instruction so I literally had to sit there with him and do everything with him.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: And then I had a four-year-old running wild around the house. And then a second grader—she was doing what she needed but it was exhausting. [00:19:19] Nobody knew what was going on with Coronavirus and—

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: You know. That's all anybody talked about. And then I'd go to work and that's all my clients would want to talk about was coronavirus, so I pretty much had to stop watching the news.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: Because if I didn't it would be like coronavirus nonstop all day long.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. I stopped watching it too. I couldn't do it.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah, it was a lot.

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ROBYN PIERCE: So then, what's the biggest difference between this school year and last school year? What's the biggest improvements?

LAURA HANNA: The schedule that they log in at the same time every day. I have a white board; I write it down. They know their schedule; they can log into their computer. So the big difference is I think they are just more familiar with the platform they are using. Whereas before, it was so new to them it was—like I said, I literally had to sit there and hold their hand while they did it. [00:20:27]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Are they seeing their teachers face-to-face every day when they log in?

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. Yup

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. That was a big difference for us too. The last school year they didn't see their teacher after they left school.

LAURA HANNA: Oh, yeah. See, our kids had two zoom meetings a week that were optional. But I feel like the kindergarteners was more, kind of like, show and tell, which was fine. I mean, he was engaged.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: And then my second grader was not allowed to socialize at all. They were to sit there and listen to the teacher unless she asked them a question. So, it was very formal. But yeah. This year it is formal, but I feel like they can be themselves. I see them getting excited to log in because they get to see their teacher. [00:21:23]

ROBYN PIERCE: My kids have different teachers for different subjects, like their gym teacher and their social studies teacher. Do you guys have that, or do you have one teacher for the whole class?

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LAURA HANNA: Um, no. They have their main teacher that does science, social studies, math, English, and then they have like a separate Spanish teacher, separate music, separate gym, separate art.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh, that's cool. We're not doing Spanish yet. I haven't talked to anyone—I haven't done an interview with anyone yet who has kids the same age as me, so this is a cool conversation to have. What is your art and music look like for your kids?

LAURA HANNA: I try not to stay down there when they're doing music because— she's very engaging and she's energetic. She'll have them go grab stuff in the house that they can make noise with. [00:22:27]

ROBYN PIERCE: That's cool. That sounds fun.

LAURA HANNA: And she—might have them watch like a little short YouTube. She'll put it on her screen and share—a short YouTube clip. And then, what was the other one, art? Art class?

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah, that one's cool because my my third grader will do it first in the morning, and then my son has art later that day. So they do the same thing—

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

LAURA HANNA: And a lot of it is just the teacher teaching them how to draw. Which is really cool because she'll do videos and then she'll demonstrate and then they kind of copy what she's doing.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: And—one of the projects was the leaf thing so—she'll have them collect supplies a week ahead of time. So—

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh, that's nice.

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LAURA HANNA: They have time to go out and collect twenty leaves. It's very engaging because she gets them thinking about it ahead of time. [00:23:23]

ROBYN PIERCE: That's really cool. Our music class is online programming, where they can go and play virtual drum sets or whatever.

LAURA HANNA: Oh.

ROBYN PIERCE: But they like that. I was actually quite nervous that they were going to learn how to play the recorder this year. So, I'm glad they're not. But our, they call them specials, our specials rotate every two weeks. They have art for two weeks, music for two weeks, gym for two weeks.

LAURA HANNA: Oh.

ROBYN PIERCE: Do your kids have them all the time?

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. Today they have library and music.

ROBYN PIERCE: What? What does library look like?

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. The library they will do a story time. She'll read to them. I mean, it's almost like being at the children's library program.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's so cool.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. My kids are doing hybrid now, so, they're even doing it there. [00:24:20] They go into the library. They're not allowed touch the books or check them out. But when they're at school they go into the gym and do gym class. I'm not sure about art. I'm not sure how that works. But—

ROBYN PIERCE: So, the hybrid program—

LAURA HANNA: Every week they have it.

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ROBYN PIERCE: Just to clarify for whoever watches this later, the hybrid program is two days in person, correct?

LAURA HANNA: Um-hm, yup.

ROBYN PIERCE: And then the rest of the time they do virtual?

LAURA HANNA: Yes.

ROBYN PIERCE: Our school district proposed that. I think they're working on some of the kids are back in school right now. And so—half of them do two days a week, half of them do two days a week, and then Wednesday is the day that they clean everything. Is that what's happening for you guys too?

LAURA HANNA: Yeah. There's a red and a blue group. If you have more than one kid, both your kids are in the same group. So, my kids—

ROBYN PIERCE: That's nice.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah, so my kids do Monday and Thursdays. [00:25:23] And Wednesday is late start and they actually have found that because of virtual, the teachers need more planning time. So now on Wednesday's school starts at 12:10.

ROBYN PIERCE: Wow.

LAURA HANNA: For everybody. It's kind of a free for all in the morning. For my first grader, he doesn't have to do anything. But my third grader, the teacher will have her read a passage and do a math pretest so that when they do start up at 12:10 they can get right to work.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice.

LAURA HANNA: Yeah—And then the other group goes Tuesday and Friday.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's cool.

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LAURA HANNA: We've only done that for two weeks. My third grader's home now because, I don't know if the teachers all ate lunch together or they had a meeting, but the third and fourth grade classes are closed at her school right now. [00:26:29]

ROBYN PIERCE: (inaudible voices of children) My kids are on a break, can you tell? [ed. note: Interviewer addresses their children before returning their attention back to the interview: I'm in a meeting, you need to be quiet please.] Two weeks isn't very long to make a decision, but were they excited? Are they excited to be going back?

LAURA HANNA: Yes. My third grader kept asking why she couldn't go to school. We don't have any information yet. They're going to give us more. The health department's going to let us know this evening more details. But all we know is just, you know, these classes are on hold. We don't know for how long. But—

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: She was pretty bummed because she enjoys—it's mostly the social thing. She likes being around other kids that are not her brothers. [00:27:23]

ROBYN PIERCE: I don't blame her. I don't like hanging out with my brothers either. (laughter) Especially being the only girl, like I completely get that.

LAURA HANNA: And—it gives her a nice break too from me because I'm sure, you know, being around your parents all the time is not what she's wants to do either.

ROBYN PIERCE: No. It's definitely interesting around here. With you teleworking, do you—still have your schedule so that when your husband's working and the kids are at school, you're available, and then you work when he's available for them?

LAURA HANNA: Um-hm.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

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LAURA HANNA: Yup. And I've actually picked up more clients. When the kids went back two weeks ago, I decided you know what, I'm going to see somebody. [00:28:23] I'm just not used to like, not doing things two days a week. So, I decided to see somebody who needed an appointment randomly on Thursday at 1 o'clock.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice.

LAURA HANNA: I was nervous to switch my entire case load to a different day because if the schools do shut down, I'm going to, like, have all these kids at home and I can't work when they're home. There's no way.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, yeah. It's interesting. When the stay-at-home order is completely lifted and we're able to go do whatever we want to do, what are you looking forward to doing?

LAURA HANNA: Hm, I am looking forward to, I mean, just walking around Target. [00:29:24] Sending the kids to school. Going to Target. Going to eat sushi and not worrying about having to eat outside. I still have not had food in a restaurant.

ROBYN PIERCE: No?

LAURA HANNA: Well, I take that back. I guess I did. And it's weird because in the restaurant it's like—you would never think there was anything different. Right? Because you can just sit there and take your mask off and eat. So, I guess I'm looking forward to doing that most.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

LAURA HANNA: And hanging out with friends, and having our kids hang out. (dog barking) Aw, there's my dog.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Well, I'm about done anyway.

LAURA HANNA: Okay.

ROBYN PIERCE: I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me—

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LAURA HANNA: No problem.

ROBYN PIERCE: And I'm going to stop the recording here.

LAURA HANNA: Okay.

[00:30:30]

End of interview