

COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES ORAL HISTORIES

Kiel Stevens Interview

October 12, 2020

Virtual Meeting, Cadillac, Michigan

Reuther Library Oral History ID: WSR002947_OH_023

This oral history interview was recorded as part of the Southeast Michigan Covid-19 Oral Histories Project on October 12th, 2020, via a virtual meeting, as part of a student practicum project for the Wayne State University School of Information Sciences archival administration graduate certificate program. The interview has been deposited at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs and University Archives at Wayne State University. The interview may be used for research and educational purposes only.

Copyright 2020 Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: My name is Robyn Pierce, working in conjunction with the Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Today's date is October 12, 2020. This is an interview of Kiel Stevens about the effects of COVID on her ability to work. The interview will go into detail about her job as a youth services librarian, both before and after the shelter in place order was issued. Kiel lives in Cadillac, Michigan, and works at a local public library. This interview is being recorded remotely and will be housed at the Reuther Library which is part of the Wayne State University.

The Reuther Library will keep administrative information about this oral history project, such as interview releases and deeds of gift, in its case files. Case files are in a locked nonpublic area of the building accessible only to the Reuther Library staff. In the event of a criminal investigation or legal discovery proceedings the Reuther Library could be compelled to turn over holdings in case files that are otherwise closed to the public. [00:01:03] Including the case files for this oral history project.

ROBYN PIERCE: So good morning, how are you?

KIEL STEVENS: I'm good, how are you?

ROBYN PIERCE: Good. So first question is always, Do you have an affiliation with Wayne State University?

KIEL STEVENS: Yes, I am a student there.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice, and then could you give me a description of what youth service librarian is?

KIEL STEVENS: Youth services is a broad term that deals with all ages in a library. So, essentially, I deal with infants through eighteen years old. I work with collection development, program creation and implementation, community outreach, and just general handling of the better presence as patrons. [00:01:58]

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: So before the stay at home order was issued can you take me through—I know every day in the library is different—but could you take me through a general, what did your work day look like before the order?

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah, so generally we get there at nine o'clock in the morning, our library opens at ten, so we have an hour to do basic opening jobs. My mornings usually consist of answering emails, program prep, organization, any little odds and ends like going through reviews for book orders, or planning out things like story time, or any long-standing reoccurring programs. The afternoons, after three o'clock—we are located right next our local community schools—so after three o'clock I would usually be involved with any kids that came over after school. [00:03:04] Just kind of interacting with them, keeping up on behavior, trying to find things to keep them occupied, and that would go till usually around 5 o'clock, or so.

ROBYN PIERCE: So then, when the stay-at-home order was issued early March, what happened with you guys at work?

KIEL STEVENS: Our library shut down once the recommendation from Michigan Library Association recommended for libraries to shut down. I think that was March fourteenth. So we closed to the public March fourteenth. We ended up closing early for the day and we had all of our patrons go home. And it was actually the biggest program day, pretty much, of my year. It was our championship for our battle of the books program. [00:03:59] So right away, when we're having this final, we get the order that, you know, we're shutting down. So after that we were work at home. We're lucky enough to be working from home and still being paid. I know a lot of libraries did not have that option, either. They still had to go into the building, or they weren't being paid to work from home. So each different employee had to find different ways that kind of connected to their job title to try and stay busy and log hours.

ROBYN PIERCE: How many hours during the week did you have to log to work from home?

KIEL STEVENS: It was suggested at least thirty. I usually ended up about thirty-eight to forty-two.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice.

KIEL STEVENS: So it was just as much, if not more, than a normal work week would be for me.

[00:05:05}

ROBYN PIERCE: So what kind of things did you do to help fill that time?

KIEL STEVENS: I'm the manager of social media accounts, so with everybody at home that's one of the main ways to stay relevant is to have content on social media. So I would spend a lot of time looking for things that—sources, resources—can help people with what they might be going through. Like links to government websites, or filing unemployment tips, different activities that could keep young kid occupied while they are stuck in the house. And then also creating different sort of programs, like virtual story time was at my house. I would do daily read-alouds from chapter books. [00:06:01] I also did program planning for the future. Like flier creation. So we do plan our programs out quite a bit in advance, so I was planning out fall programs while I was at home.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice. What kind of equipment did you end up taking from the library to your home workspace that helped you facilitate that?

KIEL STEVENS: The only thing I had to take from the library were the books actually from story time.

(audio is distorted/unintelligible) A lot of recorded software I was all set on, already.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh, yeah. Are there some of those programs that you did on social media that you didn't do well before the stay-at-home order that you're considering continuing on regardless of when we open back up? [00:06:59]

KIEL STEVENS: We're still doing our recorded story times. We have not opened programming up. We don't have in person programming, yet. So we're still doing the recorded story times and we might do a version of that even after we can have people back in the library.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: So have you guys opened—are you back at work in the actual library at this point?

KIEL STEVENS: Yes. We have a limit on capacity. We allow about twenty-five people, not counting staff, in the building at once. And we are fully open. People can come in, they can browse, they can use the computers. But we aren't doing the in-person programming yet.

ROBYN PIERCE: What kind of safety protocols do you guys have for—or requirements do you have for people to come in? [00:08:00]

KIEL STEVENS: Well, we are limiting the capacity. I think it's about 40 percent if I'm not mistaken. We also require masks, no exceptions. If there's somebody who is medically exempt from being able to wear a mask we will bring whatever they need outside to them. We do have the plexiglass shields, we have spaced out our computers, and have spacing signs, as well. And we go around and we regularly disinfect hard surfaces. And we're quarantining all items that come in for four days.

ROBYN PIERCE: So I want to come back to the quarantining items, but do you find that most patrons are compliant and just happy that you guys are open and they follow the protocol, or have you had any push back? [00:08:59]

KIEL STEVENS: I would say there's been minimal push back. There are a few people especially about wearing masks but, you know, they're probably only a hand full of people.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's good.

KIEL STEVENS: It is. You know, there's been a little bit of a few comments here and there about items taking longer to come in from other libraries when they're ordered but, for the most part, when we explain why they're taking longer the vast majority of people understand.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's nice.

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: When people return their items and you're quarantining them, what does that mean?

KIEL STEVENS: So all of our items are being returned to our outside drop box. We collect it once a day to minimize contact with those items. [00:09:54] And we glove up, employees are wearing masks, as well, and we load the items onto a cart, we label the cart for when it's going to be okay to be checked in, and then we put it in back. And it is not touched, unless you are wearing gloves, for that period of time.

ROBYN PIERCE: And then, when you do interlibrary loans, are you quarantining those things as they come in from other libraries, too?

KIEL STEVENS: Yup. They are left in their transportation totes for four days—

ROBYN PIERCE: Okay.

KIEL STEVENS: —before they're unpacked and checked in.

ROBYN PIERCE: So then potentially, when you get those interlibrary loans back, you're going to keep them for four days, and then package them and send them out, and they're most likely going to keep them for four days before they reshelve them?

KIEL STEVENS: Correct.

ROBYN PIERCE: That's pretty efficient.

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah so, you know, regardless of whether an item is our item, or an interlibrary loan return, it gets quarantined for four days upon coming back to us. [00:11:00]

ROBYN PIERCE: Very cool. So are you back to work in the building full time at this point?

KIEL STEVENS: Yes, employees have been back to work since the first full week of June, and then the library has been fully open to the public since the end of June.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: So what would you prefer, if you were the person to make decisions, would you like to be in the library full time, at home full time, or kind of an amalgamation of both of those things?

KIEL STEVENS: You know, I think our director has done a really good job in balancing the library's role that it has to fill within the community, and being concerned for public and employee safety. That has been her number one goal, from the start, is safety of people. [00:12:02] So she—I'm very fortunate to work for someone who actively stays up on protocol and is constantly reading recommendations and taking part in—(audio distorted/unintelligible)—make sure we're staying up on the recommendations for us. So I am comfortable with what she's decided for being open, especially given our location. I do feel it makes sense with the frequency of cases in our area. I think she does a really good job of making sure that everybody is following protocols for safety and that, you know, I trust her if things were to get to a point where it was not safe for us to be in the building, she would make the right call. [00:12:56]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. If you could take the pandemic out of it, just for you, did you enjoy working at home? Would you make that part of your weekly—?

KIEL STEVENS: No, it was awful. I would still want to go back. But, I mean, that's just not an option. Because even now I don't get the same number of kids in that I used to by a long shot. You know, and we can't have the programs, so I don't get that interaction. But when I was working at home it was much more stressful. There wasn't that clear divide between home and work, so the lines just were blurred all the time. [00:13:52] I would find myself working—(audio distorted/unintelligible)—It's just going. It's like I'd get up in the morning and I didn't have the getting ready time to, you know, Oh let me just make a cup of coffee and enjoy it before I go to work. It was—get up, immediately jump into whatever I was doing and be working non-stop, keep working through the night and—just my brain would not shut off. Because I had no separation between home and work anymore.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah. Did you find that the patrons—or did you hear from anyone—that they enjoyed and appreciated the stuff that you did through social media for them?

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah. A lot of people were really receptive to it and really grateful. I do think, though, that, as the months went on, people are burned out on screens. They're burned out on technology. Like right now, and even through, you know, June, July, August, we had a lot less interactions on things through social media than we did, say, in March and April. [00:15:07]

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: So a lot of people are, you know.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: They miss in person.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, I do too.

KIEL STEVENS: Yes.

ROBYN PIERCE: So, with all the work that you did, did you have a chance to spend time doing something that you might not have been able to do for yourself when you're working full time in person?

KIEL STEVENS: I'm not sure, to be honest. We had relatively unstructured work hours so, pretty much, everybody is in charge of their own schedule and determining how to allocate their time. [00:15:56] And so there really wasn't anything that I wasn't terribly—there wasn't anything I would say I wasn't able to do for myself, work wise, when I was working in person.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: That I was now able to do at home.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: I'm just going to look through my notes really quick. Did you pick up any hobbies, or get back into hobbies, during the quarantine time?

KIEL STEVENS: I did do some crocheting. I do that regular—like semi-regularly—but it was something to kind of keep my hands busy. When I was thinking about other things and working on other things. I did a little bit of painting, which was nice.

ROBYN PIERCE: Nice. [00:17:01]

KIEL STEVENS: And I got help to kind of entertain us. We bought a bunch of board games in the beginning of the pandemic, so it was fun just to get to play these board games that we hadn't played since we were kids, my husband and I. So, you know, we got Jenga, and Sorry, and Uno, and all those other kinds of fun games.

ROBYN PIERCE: Very cool. I don't know how you can think about anything else but crochet when you crochet. I can't do it.

KIEL STEVENS: (laughing) Oh gosh, I don't know. Like, my hands just kind of automatically go now.

ROBYN PIERCE: Well, I commend you on that.

KIEL STEVENS: Thank you. People ask for a lot of the same things, so some of the stuff I've made dozens of times by now so.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh yeah, that helps.

KIEL STEVENS: It does. Makes a big difference. [00:18:01]

ROBYN PIERCE: I crochet blankets and all I'm doing is making sure that the edges line up.

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah, oh gosh, yes. Blankets take a lot of time though, a lot of time. People don't understand how long those take.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, it is a little more mindless than trying to follow a pattern, though.

KIEL STEVENS: (laughing) They're good.

ROBYN PIERCE: So what are you looking forward to doing when the stay at home order is officially lifted.

KIEL STEVENS: Oh gosh (sighs). I, you know, and this might be a little bit after the stay-at-home order, but I'm ready for—it may never happen—but I'm ready for the kids to come back to the library like they used to. We used to get big groups after school like twenty, thirty kids after school. You know, just waiting for their rides or parents to pick them up. I would love for that to be able to happen again. I miss hugs. [00:19:00] I miss being able to get hugs from the kids, when they would come over. And, you know, just getting to go to concerts.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh, yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: That's one of the big things. We used to go to concerts, every couple of months we would go to a concert and, you know, haven't been to one in close to a year now.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: So getting to go to other places where they're having these events, and not having to check, like, oh what's the status of this county, and you know—

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: —is it safe to travel there?

ROBYN PIERCE: Do you know if the schools are doing any of the in-person teaching, or are they all remote up where you're at?

KIEL STEVENS: They have a combination. [00:19:58]

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

Kiel Stevens Interview

KIEL STEVENS: So it's actually a bit of a—there's a lot going on. So the year prior to this they had just started a combination of traditional calendar and balanced calendar.

ROBYN PIERCE: Oh.

KIEL STEVENS: The students could choose—students and parents could choose—which calendar they wanted to be a part of. And that was part of a three-year grant funded program from the state. So this is their second year where they got that going on. So—(unintelligible)—between the traditional calendar and the balanced calendar, and then each of those groups is also split in half. Half of them are called the green group and they go on to school in person Monday and Wednesday. [00:20:55] Then half are the—(unintelligible)—they go to school Tuesday and Thursday. And then they also have a group that kids or parents could opt into if they wanted to be 100 percent virtual. They could choose that option as well. So, essentially, there are five or six different—(audio pauses/unintelligible)—for their kids.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, a lot of balls in the air for those teachers, too, I bet.

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah. They're feeling it this year.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: For sure. They're doing amazing. I work—(unintelligible)—and, you know, they're just knocking it out of the park, I think. For everything that they got to do this year.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, that's awesome. [00:21:57] Well, I think that covers just about everything, unless you have something else you would like to add in.

KIEL STEVENS: Gosh, no I think that was really thorough. Covered pretty much everything that I can think of that effected my work and home life.

ROBYN PIERCE: Again, I really appreciate your time.

KIEL STEVENS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

Kiel Stevens Interview

ROBYN PIERCE: I hope the next thing that changes is you getting hugs. (laughs)

KIEL STEVENS: Oh, yes. I really miss hugs.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, me too.

KIEL STEVENS: I actually—it was kind of funny—I mean it’s not really funny. But we were talking before we started the school year, I was talking with my director, and I was telling her, like, man I can’t wait for kids to come back and I can get hugs again. And she had to—it wasn’t something that had clicked in my mind yet. [00:22:57] That she had told me, like, “Kiel, we’re not going to be able to hug people for a long time still.” And I was, like, Oh my God, just the little things that you just kind of—you assume are must going to happen—and, it’s just different now. Like, oh my God, it never—as obvious as it seems—it just never clicked in my head. Like, oh these two things had always added up. Kids and library, I get hugs. No, once we get one back, we’re not automatically getting the next thing back.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah.

KIEL STEVENS: So.

ROBYN PIERCE: Eventually.

KIEL STEVENS: Yes, I have faith. I have faith that—(unintelligible)

ROBYN PIERCE: Absolutely

KIEL STEVENS: It’ll just take a while.

ROBYN PIERCE: Yeah, alright, thank you.

KIEL STEVENS: Yeah, have a good rest of your day.

ROBYN PIERCE: Thanks, you too. [00:23:56]

Kiel Stevens Interview

End of interview