

Community Conversation

"Hear Us: Writing from the Inside During the time of COVID"

Notes

10/20/2021

Topic: Book Discussion and Reading: *Hear Us: Writing from the Inside During the Time of COVID*

Time: 12pmMT/2pmET

Registrations:

In Attendance:

New Participants:

Facilitator: Steven Abundis

Platform Management: Lauren Reed

Notes: Lauren Reed, Steven Abundis

Planning: Steven Abundis, Lauren Reed, Mary Gould

Summary

The Alliance hosted Exchange For Change and Authors/Contributors from the Book, *Hear Us: Writing from the Inside During the time of Covid*, in a book discussion for our Community Conversations in the month of October. In light of times throughout the pandemic, The Alliance strongly felt the experiences and struggles of the incarcerated, and impacted, needed their voices heard, to let the rest of the community know what circumstances and the environment was like first hand not only for incarcerated individuals, but also their family members. The medium which brought these voices together and to light was the group and producers at Exchange for Change, who ultimately produced the anthology of contributors expressing their hardships and first hand experiences during the COVID pandemic. Contributors for *Hear Us* came from all over the country, and we were honored to have Exchange for Change participate in our conversation, as well as Kathryn Nowotny, giving us new perspectives and spreading the awareness of what COVID 19 has done to our community.

Participants

Kathie Klarrerich - Introduction to Exchange for Change. To learn more please visit their website: <https://www.exchange-for-change.org/> and to purchase a copy of *Hear Us: Writing from the Inside During the Time of COVID*, visit [Disorder Press](#)

Readings from the Hear Us

Tina Barrett- author in *Hear us* who lost her brother John C. Barrett "JB" to COVID in a Florida prison

Reading: *Untitled*

Willae Ivory - reads her cousin's piece by Rodrick Richardson

Reading: *COVID-19*

Sonesh Chainani - Board member of Exchange for Change reads by Antoine Murphy
Reading: *Black Magic*

Kathryn Nowotny- Introduction to COVID Prison Project. To learn more, please visit their website
<https://covidprisonproject.com/>

By the numbers:

431, 463 have contracted COVID in prison

2,623 people have died in prison over the last 18 months

There is no data reporting for deaths in prisons. We have never known how many people died in custody over the years. These are the ones that have been reported but we assume the numbers are much more.

Q: What responses have you received to *Hear Us* from folks on the inside? Especially the contributors? And how far is Hear Us reaching?

A: Kathie: Received a lot from first time writers. Several letters a week to share what this has meant to them. The people inside feel as if their voice has never been heard until now. Many are being published for the first time.

Q: Did they share any responses surrounding the vaccine when the news broke out about it?

A: Kathryn: Vaccine rollout was prioritized at different rates throughout the country. Information about the vaccine remains very limited and hard for individuals in prison to make the choice to get the vaccine themselves. Staff has a low rate of vaccines which is worrisome in and of itself.

Q: What has been the response of this publication with wardens, guards? Do you get a sense that these employees have found a 'better humanity' towards the individual who is incarcerated and have grown themselves?

A: Kathie: Trouble having this book be allowed in the prison because it comes from a small publisher not a well known one.

Q: Can you tell us about the cover art of the book?

A: Kathie: The design was from an incarcerated artist. The only thing we regret is that there were no female figures but the artist said he didn't have the models in his prison.

Hear Us Book Launch Event: November 4th

<https://www.exchange-for-change.org/hear-us-national-launch-event>