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COPS/Metro Alliance- StMU Oral Histories with Lizzy Gore

Kensley Dieckow

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COPS/Metro Alliance-StMU Oral Histories

Narrator: Lizzy Gore

Date: 03/26/2024

Location: Interviewed in San Antonio, Texas

Interview Session: 1 of 1

Interviewer: Kensley Dieckow

Transcribed By: Kensley Dieckow

Narrator's Biographical Information:

Lizzy Gore is the Documentarian and Media Organizer for COPS / Metro (Communities Organized for Public Services), and previously worked as an Organizer for COPS / Metro. Prior to moving to San Antonio and joining the organization, she was a public school teacher in California for eight years. She was first exposed to community organizing through the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation), while attending college in Chicago.

Summary of Interview:

In the oral history interview of Lizzie Gore, she shares her motivations behind pursuing a career in social justice and personal journey joining the COPS organization. She reflects on the challenges she faced going to community organizing from an education background. Lizzy shares a proudest moment involving the Cassiano Homes Project, where a struggling community, with COPS' support, successfully advocated for city funding to improve housing conditions. Looking to the future, Lizzy sees COPS evolving to meet the changing institutional landscape in San Antonio.

Interview Key Terms:

COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service)

IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation)

Housing

Social Justice

Cassiano Homes Project

Catholic Parish

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Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

Lizzy Gore Interview Index

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00:26	Background and Motivation for Joining COPS
03:00	Challenges and Growth
06:06	Proudest Moments and Community Impact
09:11	Future Vision for COPS

Lizzy Gore Interview

Kensley Dieckow 0:01

This is the COPS oral history interview with Kensley Dieckow interviewing Lizzie Gore on March 26 2024, at the National Archives of the Marianist Province of the United States at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. So thank you so much, again, for giving me my classmates the opportunity to interview you. Would you like to start off by stating your name and your role within the COPS organization?

Lizzy Gore 0:26

Sure. My name is Lizzy Gore, I am working as the Documentarian, and Media Producer for the organization. But prior to that, for two years, I was working as an Organizer.

Kensley Dieckow 0:41

How did you first get involved with the COPS organization?

Lizzy Gore 0:44

So COPS started in 1974, and then it kind of spread like wildfire. And so it spawned all these other organizations across the whole United States. And books were written about it, and I was in college in Chicago, and I opened up this book, and it was this book called Bowling Alone by Robert Putnam. Really good book about why Americans are more isolated than they've ever been before. It's called Bowling Alone and I was like, Oh, my God. And he had a chapter on the IAF [Industrial Areas Foundation] and I said, these people sound amazing! Like, I want to get to know these people! And so I called them up. And I called up the office in Chicago, went and met with that guy, Ed Chambers, who was the national director at the time. And I kind of fell in love with the organizations, and then kind of kept it in my back pocket for a while I became a public school teacher for eight years. But then when it was time for me to stop teaching, I remembered that I said, you know, I think I want to work for these people. So worked in California for six years first, and then had the chance to come here [San Antonio] and work here. And so I did.

Kensley Dieckow 2:13

What issues were you most passionate about when you joined COPS?

Lizzy Gore 2:17

It wasn't about the issues, um it was about people having each other's backs in a world where people feel isolated. For me, a meaningful life is not possible alone. It's something that you have to do together with other people. And I just love the feeling so much of being together with other people and fighting for a good life. It's an amazing feeling.

Kensley Dieckow 3:00

So I know that you said you're fairly new in the organization. How was that like adjustment whenever you first joined from, you know, going from an education background to now going to the community organization, community mobilization group? How did you kind of like, you know, did your education background help you? Or do you think that you had to do a lot of adapting?

Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

Lizzy Gore 3:23

Oh, yeah. A lot of adapting. I mean, I really thought I had all the answers, you know, like. I was used to being the one in the room who had all the answers. And I felt, it was hard to feel incompetent, and to feel like a beginner for a while, and feel like I have no idea what I'm doing. The politics in particular, were difficult. Like learning things are not just gonna happen because they're the best idea. The world is full of answers of what we need to do to fix education, and what we need to do to fix housing. We already know what we need to do. That's not the problem.

Kensley Dieckow 4:17

Is there anyone in your peer groups like your family members, friends, I know that COPS has a large like parish [religious] involvement that, you know, is involved in COPS that you have a relationship with?

Lizzy Gore 4:33

I mean, I developed relationships with people through COPS, so I didn't I didn't and I came in. No. I mean, I came in with no relationships, and I built the relationships when I got here [San Antonio].

Kensley Dieckow 4:47

So have you experienced any challenges in your personal life due to your work in social justice?

Lizzy Gore 4:56

Yeah, I mean, I moved here to Texas. I left all my friends and relatives to come here and do this. And it was, I had no social support for like two years, it was really hard.

Kensley Dieckow 5:12

How have you grown as a person? or what have you learned about yourself from your work with COPS?

Lizzy Gore 5:20

I could talk all day about that one.

Lizzy Gore 5:22

I think I have learned, just in a really basic way, how to talk to people. I was kind of awkward, I'm still sort of awkward. You know, an introvert. And I think this work has made me very comfortable talking to strangers. I think that's the biggest thing.

Kensley Dieckow 6:06

Do you have a proudest moment from working with COPS?

Lizzy Gore 6:12

Yes.

Lizzy Gore 6:13

You should ask, you should ask her [gestures toward another COPS member] to tell you this story too. There is a housing project called the Cassiano Homes. And just notorious bad

Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

conditions flooding, rats, cockroaches, just like really horrible, a lot of violence. Very unsafe place to raise kids. And we were working with some moms who live in those projects who wanted to do something. Because there had been a fight that broke out between two neighbors and their kids got involved. And then everybody was outside and then one neighbor got in her car and ran over the other one. In front of their kids. And there's a lot of violence in that place. But that was sort of like an extreme moment. It's sort of woke a couple of people up and they said, All right, we gotta do something. This is, we have to stop this, right. So these moms were like, alright, we got to make a positive change, what are we going to do?

Lizzy Gore 6:30

And we got together with the team at St. Timothy's Parish. And they went door to door and they knocked on the doors. And they talked to their neighbors and said, "Hey, you know, how are things in your apartment? If you could change anything about this place, what would it be?", and they got people to fill out these, you know, like surveys, and then they got them to come to a meeting at the church. And they met with the district council person, Teri Castillo, and they got the police chief over there. And they got the mayor. And they got a commitment that they were going to help out with leak-. Like this one, this woman had plumbing. You know, she had urine leaking from her second floor bathroom into her kitchen. And like, she had called maintenance for it. And it was like a month later and maintenance had still not come.

Lizzy Gore 6:27

And at the end of it all, they, those, those women, those moms, who had never thought. They, like they couldn't get the apartment manager to call them back. They had been able to confront the head of the whole public housing system in San Antonio, they had been able to meet with the mayor. And they got a million dollars in the city budget dedicated to improving maintenance at the Cassiano's. And the best part about it was watching those two moms learn how powerful they could be like if they work together and if they had an organization behind them that had that kind of power.

Kensley Dieckow 9:11

Wow. That really- that's really inspiring. Where would you like to see COPS 50 years from now? Or, what do you think COPS needs to do to ensure that it celebrates its centennial anniversary in 2074?

Lizzy Gore 9:28

Well, the tricky part is that COPS is an organization made up of institutions. It's not made up of individuals. And back when it was founded, you know, these Catholic parishes on the West Side were a thousands and thousands and thousands of families. They were a real center of community life. They were a center of Mexican-American identity. And it's it's a different landscape now. And so figuring out how do you do this kind of organizing, if it's based in institutions, when the institutions themselves are changing so much? And how do we support those institutions, to really serve people in a way that's going to attract people to the institutions, so that we can keep organizing through those institutions? Does that make sense?

Kensley Dieckow 10:29

Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

Yeah, no, that makes complete sense. I, I see what you're saying. I think that's, I think that was a really good overview of everything.

Lizzy Gore 10:39

What sticks with you? What was the most interesting part?

Kensley Dieckow 10:42

Obviously, that story of the two moms. I mean, housing crisis is something that I'm personally really passionate about. My grandma grew up on the- or lived on the south side. And I mean, I think from her 20s, she lived there. And now she lives- you know, now, on the Northeast Side, but in, you know, affordable housing. So she deals with, and she's fully disabled, deals with, you know, bad housing, unsafe housing, not being listened to-

Lizzy Gore 11:10

Your grandma does?

Kensley Dieckow 11:11

Yes, I've had to make a lot of calls, a lot of requests at the, like, the report forms about standing water, leaking from the ceiling.

Lizzy Gore 11:20

Yeah.

Kensley Dieckow 11:21

I mean, and it's just, you know, if, in their apartment complex, if they all just came together, they would probably be able to actually get change. But I think the problem is that so many people in that apartment complex work. They just don't have the time to even come together and have conversations with their neighbors about it. So I really, I really wish that something like that could be, you know, done, especially for the elderly community in San Antonio. Because I think a lot of times they just get neglected or overlooked or they, you know, luckily my grandma has me but you know, not everyone's- not all people in that situation have you know, family that are willing to do that.

Lizzy Gore 12:03

No, they don't. They're very vulnerable. Would you want to learn how to do this kind of work?

Kensley Dieckow 12:08

Social justice is something that I am super passionate about. I'm also on the education track. So I would love to be able to, like, you know, merge those two things together. I was involved in PALS in high school, which is like a, a peer mentoring group for you know, children with emotional trauma, or even coming from socio-economic disadvantage households, or even, you know, broken households. And so, I really liked the aspect of dealing with kids when it came to like, social justice and, you know, getting them involved in their community, and not feeling alone. So that's something I'm open to definitely.

Lizzy Gore 12:50

Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

Well, you all are very welcome to come and check out like, you know, anytime we have a leaders meeting, where we're talking about, like, how do we actually do this work. You guys should come and see.

Kensley Dieckow 13:01

I'm sure that, we honestly, really want to so.

Lizzy Gore 13:04

Good, good.

Kensley Dieckow 13:05

Thank you so much.

Lizzy Gore 13:05

Yeah.

Lizzy Gore by Kensley Dieckow

Transcription Notes: This interview was lightly edited as needed for readability which may include inserting paragraph breaks, removing redundant words, or adding clarifying words. Added words or words difficult to decipher typically appear inside brackets.