

Interviewee: Brenda Thompson

Interviewers: Madeline Heffernan

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Location: Wisconsin

Transcribers: Sierra Ramker

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Abstract: In this interview, Brenda Thompson responds to questions regarding her community, traditions, how she came to live in Wisconsin, her experience with access to public health, her family, education, work, and questions about religion.

Madeline Heffernan 0:03

Okay, so today is May 1, 2023. We're in the central time zone in Wisconsin, in the United States. Is it okay if I record this interview?

Brenda Thompson 0:15

Yes.

MH 0:16

All right. Um, and would you state your name for me please? If that's okay.

BT 0:20

Brenda Thompson.

MH 0:22

Okay. So where are you from, Brenda?

BT 0:27

Originally from Ettrick, Wisconsin.

MH 0:30

Okay.

BT 0:31

I'm from [inaudible].

MH 0:32

Okay. So born and raised in Wisconsin. Have you lived here your whole life or?

BT 0:38

No.

MH 0:39

Okay.

BT 0:40

I have actually lived in every time zone in the continental US, so Wisconsin, Maine, Utah, Washington state.

MH 0:49

Okay. Oh, so what made you return back to Wisconsin?

BT 0:57

[laughing] I was divorced with a young child, so I came back by my family.

MH 1:02

Okay. Um, so what is your community like? How would you describe it and who would you, or what would you include as part of your community?

BT 1:14

If I looked at the community of Ettrick in and of itself, it's a town of 525 people. If I look at community as from Trempealeau county, then it's still very rural Wisconsin.

MH 1:30

Okay. Uh, so tell me about your family. You mentioned you have a kid. Um, yeah.

BT 1:40

Yep. So my oldest son just turned 30 last week. Okay. And then I, um, my second husband and I have a son that's 20.

MH 1:50

Okay. All right.

BT 1:52

Then most of my family is in, um, Trempealeau County. My oldest son is in the Twin Cities area and I have a nephew in Rochester, but otherwise we're within 30 mile radius.

MH 2:10

Okay. Um, and then as far as education, what's your highest level of education?

BT 2:19

I have two master's degrees, one in guidance and counseling, and one in human resource management.

MH 2:24

Okay. Where did you study?

BT 2:27

The first master's is from UW Stout, as is my bachelor's. And then second master's is from Utah State.

MH 2:36

Okay. What do you do for work?

BT 2:41

I'm a social worker with children's long-term support or kids with special needs.

MH 2:46

Okay. How long have you been doing this?

BT 2:50

Eight years.

MH 2:51

Okay.

BT 2:52

Nine. I'll be nine.

MH 2:55

Uh, how would you describe your work, and what are some challenges that you face?

BT 3:01

I work with kids with special needs, so developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health issues. Biggest challenges that we have in Trempealeau County are resources. We just don't have services readily available when we need them. And the other barrier that we're encountering now is that we have a lot of Spanish speaking families without employees that speak Spanish. So, sometimes services are delayed or contact with the family to start our process is delayed while we wait for an interpreter.

MH 3:46

Okay. Do you face any challenges specific to working with interpreters or, yeah?

BT 3:53

Availability is our biggest issue. So we have two interpreters that we use within human services and both have other jobs.

MH 4:04

Okay.

BT 4:05

So, one of them, she primarily works with child protection, and then we have one one day a week that works with birth to three and children's long-term support.

MH 4:17

Okay. Have you, I'm guessing mentioning the short availability, have you ever been in a situation where an interpreter was needed and you weren't able to access one?

BT 4:31

Yes. But now with modern technology, smartphones or like I said, with our Zoom computers, we can type in, in English, have it translated or speak in English, and then it translates to Spanish. Okay. Not the best, but it is better than nothing.

MH 4:52

Right. Do you feel that the need for an interpreter or the lack of an interpreter may affect the care of those that you work with?

BT 5:05

Yes. The lack of interpreter can impact in many ways because, you know, we deal with Medicaid and federal dollars and people, if we're not understanding what they're saying or they're not understanding what we're saying, we could be getting wrong information, which could have a big impact later on.

MH 5:29

Right. Okay. So how many hours a week do you typically work?

BT 5:38

40

MH 5:40

40.

BT 5:41

40. Yeah. Sometimes a little more depending on family need, but usually 40.

MH 5:46

Okay. Do you receive benefits through your employer?

BT 5:50

Yes.

MH 5:51

Okay. Have you ever experienced or needed to access public assistance such as healthcare or like Medicare and food- food stamps, et cetera?

BT 6:09

Myself, yes. Like 27 years ago when I moved back to Wisconsin, when my son and I didn't have a good paying job and I had no benefits at a job I was working at, so, yeah.

MH 6:25

Okay. A couple questions for you related to community and traditions. What holidays or traditions do you celebrate?

BT 6:39

Christmas, Easter, birthdays, Thanksgiving.

MH 6:46

Okay.

BT 6:47

The town that I live in has a strong Irish, there's, it used to be a very strong Irish community, so St. Patrick's Day is, definitely a community time. And um, like they do a fundraiser for the fire station or the fire department. And so just that's a big event in our community in Ettrick.

MH 7:17

Okay. So, how have these traditions and celebrations changed throughout your life? Or have they?

BT 7:29

They really haven't changed? In my family, like celebrating Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, it's trying to get like my son and the older generation you know, like my son's generation now that they're married or, living away, trying to get everybody together for a holiday is real challenging.

MH 7:57

Yeah, right. Okay. Have you added any new traditions or celebrations, or have they mostly remained the same?

BT 8:09

They've pretty much remained the same as always with my family.

MH 8:16

Okay.

BT 8:17

It's adding more and more people, so more and more birthday parties. [Laughing]

MH 8:21

There you go. [laughing]. My last question is just related to religion. Do you practice any religion?

BT 8:30

Yes. I was raised Catholic, but when I married my husband, we, he was Lutheran and so the agreement was we'll pick one religion and it was just easier for me to start attending the Lutheran church than for him to join a Catholic church. He was totally opposed to all the Catholic stuff. [laughing] And so, yeah, both our kids were raised in the Lutheran church.

MH 8:59

Okay. And have you experienced any barriers that have prevented you from practicing religion?

BT 9:06

In the last five years the biggest barrier has been Covid. Otherwise, no.

MH 9:13

Okay.

BT 9:15

We're a very fortunate church. We've had the same pastor for 30 years, not like some of the other churches that continually have changes, so that's, it's probably the biggest benefit to our church.

MH 9:33

Well, that's good. Glad to hear that.

BT 9:36

Yeah.

MH 9:38

Okay. So those are all the questions I had for you. I'm just gonna stop the recording.