

Interviewee: Kim Dawkins
Interviewer: Mackenzie Landsittel
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Transcriber: Victoria Sergent
Overseen by Dr. Melinda Marchand Clark University



Abstract: Kim Dawkins has been working in the Worcester community for two decades. Kim was born in Hamilton Ontario Canada, and raised in England. Kim attended the University of Massachusetts Amherst and received her Bachelor of Arts in interior design and architecture. After a brief stint in her native England, she moved back to the United States where she ended up in non-profit work. This led Kim to working for Pathways for Change, a rape crisis center that serves the greater Worcester community. She has been the CEO and president of Pathways for Change since 2005. In this interview Kim speaks about her work with Pathways for Change, and the impact it has on the wider community. She also speaks about her childhood in England, reminiscing on growing up in the 1960s and the struggles her family faced. She also speaks about her time at UMass Amherst and the importance of education, and the challenges and rewards of being a single mother.

ML: Hello, this is Mackenzie Landsittel. And today we are completing a citywide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Conference, which was held in Worcester. We are focusing on, four areas of women's life, education, health, work and politics, or community involvement. Today, we want to focus on your work experience and community involvement, and do we have your permission to record you for this project?

KD: Yes, you do.

ML: Would you mind briefly introducing yourself with your full name?

KD: Sure. This is Kim Leslie Dawkins speaking.

ML: Nice to meet you, Kim.

KD: Great to meet you both.

ML: So, this is your full name? Is it? Your maiden name? Is it a married name?

KD: It's not a married name. It's the name I was given. That's the name I've kept. I have been married and did not change my name. So it is, yeah, my name. My own, nobody else's.

ML: Wonderful. So, would you mind stating when you were born and where you were born?

KD: Sure. I was born in 1960. I know it seems like, you know a century ago. In Hamilton, Ontario in Canada.

KL: Wonderful. So, can you elaborate a bit about your experience growing up in Canada?

KD: Very little in Canada. My parents, my father is British, my mother is South African. They met in Canada and that's the only reason I was born there. I have two brothers that were also born in Canada. And they very quickly left Canada. So I have very little memory of Canada. Most of my childhood memories are from growing up in England.

KL: Would you be able to elaborate a little bit more on those experiences?

KD: Gosh, okay. Yes, England, we're talking England in the 60s and 70s and that was of course the time globally when it was, you know, love not war, peace, right. It was the flower power child. It was the time of tremendous change in the world. It's sort of like age of Aquarius, kind of. You know, rebellion that was happening sort of globally in a lot of countries. And so it was a really fascinating time for me to grow up. I remember as a very young child, my parents were both artists as well as other things. And my mum was an Assistant editor to a paper in the city in England that we lived. And so that was also unusual at that time for women to who had children to also work, and so that was unusual. But she was my first introduction to even thinking about equality in women's issues before I even recognized that's what it was. But she always believed so. Growing up, for me, was about being exposed to, to art, to literature, to music, to what equality looked like for men and women. She was a staunch advocate and supporter, you know, and promoter of women's rights. And extremely talented. So I was very lucky. My brothers and I were very lucky to grow up with a very strong female, you know, influence. And my dad, who was much more traditional, you know, the breadwinner, quote unquote, went to work, not very present. Much of the time did not have the same connection to my dad till much later in life that I did with my mum. So as a child I just remember feeling very loved, very fortunate to have a very happy childhood. We had challenges. But I do remember feeling as if, we were living, knowing that we were living in very unusual and interesting times, even at a young age. But we also we were not an affluent family. So you know, I grew up at a time where for many years we did not have a car. We had to walk or take the bus. And when there finally was a vehicle it was one vehicle, you know, for the whole family, and it was used predominantly for my dad to get to work, right. And the Sunday afternoon drive, right, was like the family entertainment was, "Ohh, everybody hop in the car we're going for a ride, going to go have afternoon tea and you know Cambridge," you know. And so my dad's family was still living and my mum's brother was also living in England at the time, so I also had some family connections. So my grandparents on my, my dad's side, we got to see more regularly. And then my grandparents on my mum's side less regularly. And my grandfather on my mother's side, my I guess it would be my maternal grandfather, died when I was very little. So I don't have a lot of conscious memory of him growing up, but. So we had some opportunity during those early years to sort of get to know some of our grandparents, but mostly we were like a very what I call a single unit family. My mum had cousins and family distant relatives in Australia and in Africa. My dad's, you know, extended family were predominantly in England, and pretty much he was the black sheep of the

family, so we had very little contact with them. So we were like a single unit, you know? And so for me it was very much about the sort of the family I grew up in and going to school was not always easy. You know, we didn't live in a wealthy neighborhood. We had to go to what we call here [United States] public school, which is not called public school in England. But basically we were going to, you know, a city school. And so it was very diverse, which we loved, but it also had a lot of challenges. So, I mean, my childhood, I think I would say, was really interesting, very diverse, definitely a challenge. As I do remember a time when we literally were, I know my parents, I think now as an adult it must have been incredibly stressful for them. But as kids we didn't understand how challenging it was when they didn't know how they were going to put food on the table the next week, you know, or where we were going to live or, you know, so there was some pretty challenging times for us growing up. But we never thought of it that way. I think my parents must have been sort of brilliant in the in the way that they didn't sort of transfer their anxiety and worry to my brothers and I. And I feel very grateful to them for that because I work with a lot of families and have worked with a lot of kids that didn't have that kind of life. Where they could feel that loved and that safe and that protected, you know, in their own family unit. So I feel very fortunate that way. So I was exposed to actors and artists and right. So you think about that, right as a child, like my parents would have parties. And so people would come over and they'd stay all night, still talking. We'd go to bed we'd wake up in the morning and they'd still be in the living room talking, solving the world's problems, right. You know the beads, the bare feet, the bell-bottom pants. You know all of it. And I think that what we would now call a very bohemian lifestyle, exposed my brothers and I to a whole other world of opportunity. And we were treated it at a very young age with my parents as humans that had actually maybe had something to offer. So we were invited into very adult conversations at very young ages. So I think again, I feel grateful to them for that because we were having conversations about the issues of the world within our age, obviously capacity of understanding whether it was six, seven, eight, nine years old. But we were invited into those when again when many kids of that time and even in today's world are not included in those adult conversations. You know there often is this attitude that you know well, "you wouldn't understand, you're a kid, go play", you know, right. But we were invited into those conversations, right. And so from a very early age, we felt like we had some value that that we had something important that we could share and not the least of which was an opinion, right. And so we were encouraged, my brothers and I, from a very young age to question everything. Like find your own truth question everything, explore right, be open, be brave, take risks. So, we were encouraged to do that and so many kids, then and today are not given that kind of world or opportunity to be able to do that. So that sounds I know very esoteric and I apologize ...

ML: No not at all

KD: But that when you say well, explain a little bit about what your childhood was like. I mean I guess I could say it was pretty exciting and at the same time I also, you know would run out and play like every other kid and you know do crazy things like, you know, ride my bike without the handlebars. And you know, we thought we were, ooo, you know, oh, so cool and climbing out the window in the middle of the night because we said we just had my brothers and I wanted to take a walk, you know. So we did crazy kid stuff, you know as well but. But I think we were lucky, even though we were not living in the best of circumstances, we were not as aware of how bad some of those years were for us. So I feel grateful for that. So I have fond memories of that childhood.

ML: Do you think that being invited into those more adult conversations kind of shaped your life in a very specific way, like made you more interested in social justice work and advocating for people that don't have a voice?

KD: I definitely think so, particularly on my mother's side because she was one that was one of those advocates right and always reaching out to sort of lift someone else up and fighting for somebody else, advocating for somebody else. It was just who she was. I don't think she could have not done that because it was part of her DNA. So I definitely think some of that rubbed off on us, right. So I do think that helps. Shape. You know, sort of the trajectory, if you will, of our lives as kids in school going into high school, you know, leaving high school and etcetera and into adulthood and all of those things. But at the same time, I will say that's what's interesting is my I have two brothers, as I mentioned, and we were raised by the same parents in the same and family, and are all very different personalities, right. So like every other family out there, you can be raised the same way and have completely different personalities, right? So it would, you know, it would be kind of interesting for me after this to sort of ask my brothers if they feel that, you know, our upbringing had impact in that way in terms of an interest in social justice issues and an interest in, you know, trying to make a positive difference in the world. And, you know one thing, my mom, I think also taught all of this from the from very young age was how important it was to be kind to each other and to the world and how important it was to bring your bring your best self. She always used to say “whatever you do like, you know, do it with gusto.” “Do it with that and. If you're gonna be the street sweeper, be the very best street sweeper there is, right.” It didn't matter to her what you wanted to do. That wasn't as important as you fulfilling your potential like if you have a gift, use it right. You know if you love history, how do you take that interest and turn it into something right that is bigger than you are that's going to fulfill you. So she really believed that life was about, you know, following your passion. And that definitely influenced me certainly. In a big, big way. I did my first activist steps at 11 years old in school because again, you have to, I know it's hard for you to imagine because it was before either of you were born. But at a time we went to a school where boys had to enter through the boy's entrance girls had to enter through the girl's entrance.

ML: Oh wow.

KD: We had to wear uniforms, which I hated. And I decided I was going to start a petition 11 years old. So think about back to when you were both 11, what you're doing at 11. At 11 years old, I remember going to my mother and saying, "you know, this just isn't fair how come the boys get to wear trousers?" You know, pants. "How come the boys get to wear pants to school, but the girls have to wear skirts or dresses." And sometimes they were called pinafores. At that time, you know I said, "how come we have to wear dresses to school, but the boys get to wear pants." And remember we were walking to school we didn't have school buses, you know, transporting us, you know. So we were walking, you know, a mile to school and a mile back. And in the winter it's cold, and England's very rainy and very wet. And so I decided at 11 years old that I was going to change that at the school. And I said to my mum, "what do you think if I start a petition so that we can get the school to agree to let girls to wear pants to school". And my mother said "go for it, if that's what you want to do". But she said, "be ready for the battle, be ready it's not going to be as simple as you think", right. And she was very wise, clearly. Because I go toddling off to the school at 11 years old and I'm talking to my friends, of course, all the girls like, "yeah, yeah girls need to be able to wear pants to school, why not," you know. And I had some great teachers that were, you know, on my side, you know. Of course, you go to the teachers that are your allies first, right, because you're trying to recruit them to go to the other teachers that you know, you know, are not your allies. "So what do you think? You think if we sign a petition, you know, we can change this rule at this school." And so some of the teachers said yes. And we literally got hundreds of signatures from students and some of the some of the teachers, the faculty. And then it was presented to the leadership of the school and who was a woman interestingly enough. At that time the headmaster or headmistress, they weren't called principles, then, right. So she was the headmistress of the school. And we thought, you know, this is this is a winner this is like a definitely win, like, this is going to happen, we got all these signatures. So what happened was this. It was one of my first lessons in how pick your battles and how sometime you can, you know think that you're winning, but it's not really a win. So what happened was they said "okay, sure, we'll let the girls wear pants to school. To school. When you get to school, you have to change out of your pants into your uniform skirt or dress." So of course it meant that most of us were wearing our pants under the skirts because who's going to go to school and, you know, go to the bath, the the bathroom, to take your pants off and put on a skirt. So we all wore pants underneath our skirts and our, you know, our dresses. So it was like a small win. We were able to wear them to school because of the weather and they they basically said "yes, we'll let you do it because the winters can be cold and yes, we understand that you know, coming to school, you know it can, it cannot be the best scenario. But when you get to school, you still have to take them off." So, they were still basically saying when you're in

school and on school premises, girls must be girls and boys must be boys and some girls have to wear the skirts and boys could wear pants.

Right, today in 2024, you know, we'd be advocating for the boys wearing skirts. You know, for heavens sakes, right, in 2024, there are still schools that think it's ridiculous that, you know, boys should want to wear. Why not everybody wear what you want to wear, whatever that is, right. So we're having conversations now in 2024 about, you know, gender norms, right and also gender stereotypes. But we weren't, we didn't even have that kind of language back then in the 60s. Talking, we weren't using the language gender stereotypes. We knew that's what was happening. But we didn't have that language for it. I just remember saying, well, I came home so mad at 11 years old, you know, and saying to my mum, you know "it was terrible, you know, they, they, you know, it was just like a waste of all my time and my energy because now now we like, now we have more layers we have to wear our skirt over our pants and we get to school like, really, we have to take our pants off and now the boys are making fun of us", because you're in the cloak room taking off your coat at the same time you're taking pants off, right? So, it was like this, and she said, "well", "you know", it was sort of like "mhm, mhm, mhm" listening to me ranting and raving as an 11 year old. And she finally said, "but that's one of the first lessons, but it was a win Kim, if you hadn't done that, you wouldn't even have gotten that much." So, think of it. Celebrate those small victories right. You are getting to wear pants, at least to go to school.

So, then it was, is that the most important thing that you care about in school, or is there something else? You know, right. And I wanted to eliminate uniforms. I thought uniforms were ridiculous because they always used to say that "uniform leveled the playing field, that if everybody was in uniform, you didn't know who had money and who didn't you didn't know who the poor kids were and who the rich kids." But that was BS [bullshit] because those of us who were the poorer kids got hand me downs or second hands or patched elbows. You always knew the kids in the school that came from money that was done because they got a new uniform every year. We [the poor kids] got uniforms passed on from our siblings to sibling to sibling. Right, so that so-called level playing field, well, if everybody wears a uniform it's equal was never equal, right. And again, fast forward to like 2024 when we talk about equality and when we talk about equity, right. What does that really look like and you know how do we make sure that there is equity in all things? So that's an example though of like a first activist step that I took as a child that was definitely influenced and supported by the way that my mother raised me because of who she was. And she did not come from that background herself. Like she got there on her own. She grew up in a very traditional family, so she broke away. She was one of those first ones right to break away from tradition. And so, I got the benefit of that because she wanted to raise her kids differently. So that's kind of an example of something that happened as a child in England at 11, who knew that that would end up being my story as my first activist, you know, step that I took. But that was a big one at 11 years old and it was a lesson learned.

ML: Yeah, you mentioned that you, your mother, raised you in this sort of philosophy. When you had your own child did you want to raise them in that same atmosphere? And can you explain just who your child is when they were born and what they do now, if that's Okay?

KD: Yeah, absolutely. So, I was a single mum and had my child later than a lot of my peers. I and it's. He's a male. His name is Adam. He's 33 years old currently. I'm extremely proud of who he is as a person. And I feel very lucky to know him not because he's my son, but because I think he's an extraordinary human. But I think I can't honestly take any credit for who he has become. And I think, my mum probably felt the same way about me maybe. That you plant the seeds, you try to do your best as a parent. And there's no there's no recipe for how to be a good parent. There's no guidebook on the best parenting. Because every child is different too, by the way. So, you can't ever say you can raise, children the same way, it just is you know, it's that's ridiculous and it's absurd to even, you know, think that we could. Every person is unique unto themselves, and has a very individual personality. So, I'd like to take some credit for how I raised Adam. I'd like to think that I have raised him to be a kind, considerate, passionate, feminist male, right. Who cares about equality in the world, and I believe he does. But I don't know that I'm responsible for that. I think he's made choices to either accept or reject what I offered, I think right, as a suggestion, right. If we're open and we think about things like, you know, I always say "go away and think about it." Like, don't believe it just because it's me. Don't believe it just because they're considered the authority, whoever they are, right, whether it's politicians, law enforcement, doctors or, you know, lawyers. Find your own truth, right. So, sort of do your research, listen, be open but then make a decision for yourself. Is that what I believe in to or not? And where does that belief come from? I used to question that a lot like why do I accept societies norms about how a girl is supposed to behave when I when I was growing up, right. That what it was to be female, you know. When did I decide, in other words that, you know I'm not as acceptable if I'm not considered pretty or I'm not as acceptable if I don't have makeup on or I'm not as acceptable if I'm not, you know, acting a certain way, i.e [that is], being the quiet reserved, you know? So, I think that, we all have exposure growing up to our surroundings. And from a historical and certainly from a sociology perspective, it's interesting to think about whether or not we just accept a way of thinking because that's all we've been exposed to. Or whether or not we accept a way of thinking because we've actually taken the time to really think about it and say, well, my parents taught me this, but do I actually believe that? Religion is a big one for a lot of people, right, politics is another big one, money is a big one, right, relationships is a big one, how you raise children is you ask that question is a big one, right. So where do those sort of feelings and opinions for each of us come from? Are we genuinely, truly asking ourselves is that what I believe, or is that a social construct, and that's what my the society I live in is telling me I should believe so? Back to your question about Adam, I think, my son has made decisions on his own as he grew into young adulthood. And maybe or maybe not I had some influence on that. But I

think there are so many other factors that play a part in that, the environment, the neighborhood, the culture of the city, town, country that you live in, if there is, if you come from a a very mixed culture, if you come from a very a strong community of faith, you know. Those things that you know, we tend to think of traditionally, is shaping who we are. And if we have a blind acceptance of it, because that's what we've been taught that I think, is where it can be dangerous. Because I really feel like every one of us should have the courage of convictions to say to ourselves is this what I believe or is it just what the world around me is telling me I should believe? So I am, like I said, I'm enormously proud of who Adam is, but I can't really take any credit for the great person I think he is. I think he's made those decisions on his own. Like I said, maybe best case I might just exposed him to other possibilities.

KL: Was he raised in Worcester or back in the UK [United Kingdom]?

KD: So he was born in Connecticut because I've lived in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, England, Canada. But he was born in Connecticut. And most of his adult life has been in Massachusetts because he's still young.

So, yeah, his I think he's grown up. He was homeschooled, so that's definitely not something that is a very traditional path for most kids or parents to take. And as a single mom working, trying to also educate my child, right, to home school. And it I didn't do home schooling because a lot of people do home schooling for religious purposes or reasons and that's not why I homeschooled my son. I homeschooled my son because I believe all children are born exceptionally bright. And I think a lot of time, you know, we have some broken systems in our education. And Adam, at a very young age, was writing and reading, and I wanted to encourage that, and I didn't want to send him to a sort of a regular school where that could be hampered or dampened, you know, or he could end up being a nuisance, you know, to the teacher because, you know, he was going to be at a at a different level of understanding, you know so. It was really important for me that I felt like this is an opportunity for me to let him excel in where his strengths and gifts lie. And every student those are going to be different, right. Every teacher, good teacher out there knows that not all students that are in the same grade are at the same level of development. Or have the same strengths or gifts or talents, right? So, and a teacher in a room of 30 kids can't possibly give the kind of attention to every individual student. You know that I had the luxury of being able to do because it was just one child, my son, right. It was challenging because I'm working and supporting us and doing all those things. But but I had help along the way as well. So, so I think as a non-traditional upbringing he had that definitely.

He also had a relationship with my mother, so he had a very close relationship with his grandmother. Not something I ever grew up with. I was never close to my grandparents. My son Adam had the opportunity to be very close to another very strong independent female. So I think the combination of my mother's influence and mine may have helped shape who he has become

today. But I also know there are things as it should be that he's rejected about how I raised him, right. That's he's like “yeah, that was great, mum, but not enough for me.” And I think to myself, good, that means he's actually really trying to shape his own future, not shape a future under the umbrella of what he thinks is expected of him from his family or his community or his friends right. He's trying to shape his own future, and that's what I always wish him. When we talk about women, right, because this is a women's history history project. I think of that a lot because I think we're having to breakdown so many barriers for women. And I'm not discluding you know non binary or all-gendered people, because again, you know, we get into a whole new conversation about gender stereotypes. But focusing on women, or at least female identified people, right, we need to do more. And so I, because there has been for too long, too many centuries, there has been a disparity and far too much privilege that has been afforded to the male population. And so, yeah, I'm a huge advocate around how do we make the world a better place for women and female identified people, right? So.

KL: Thank you. Speaking of education, can you tell us a little bit more about your education and specifically like when you were in college, when you were at UMass [University of Massachusetts Amherst] and kind of that experience your degree and if you think that you use your degree today?

KD: I loved college. I loved going to college. Some of my, you know, most, I don't know, exciting times was in college. I went to UMass in Amherst, huge university, right, 22,000 students. But because I had spent so much of my life with my parents moving, being around, you know, in a in a huge school didn't bother me. There were many friends that I met there that were like, “it's too big there's so many students”, I said. But you're not suddenly interacting with 22,000 other students. You're just dealing with the students in your dorm or, in your class, you know, or on campus like you would living in a town, you know. So, it's like, stop thinking of it in terms of how many students are and just think of it in terms of who are you interacting with every day.

So I loved college because college is where I met more people from around the world, students from around the world. So again, exposure to diversity, exposure to different ways of thinking, exposure to different ways of living, to different foods, to different interests like it was like a Mecca, right. Because it was really a very international at that time. I don't know if it still is, but certainly, you know in the 70s it was a very international sort of university. And I loved the fact that, you know everything that you needed and wanted was right there, you know. From your, not just your studies, but your sports, your entertainment, your socializing, everything was very self-contained. And a 5-college area. So, you could take classes at the other colleges at Amherst College at Holyoke College [Mount Holyoke College], right, at Smith College, right. There was this sort of sort of amazing energy. Anytime you're in a college space, right. Like at Clark

University when you're on the campus that you can feel the energy when you're in an educational institution.

And I'm a lover of education. I'm not. I don't believe college is always the answer for everybody. But I am a lover of learning. And the probably the most important thing I think my mother taught me – which I do believe I taught my son Adam – was a love of learning. It's like I can't get enough and there's always something new to learn, right. And so, as a species, we are always evolving as humans. We are growing every day. There is no time, not biologically our cells regenerate every seven years, right. The neuron pathways in our brains, you know, we're still discovering sort of the neurobiology of the brain and how that works. So, we have a universe within us, right. Like, you know, I could go on and on and on. It's an exciting time. Whatever time you're in. To sort of get that sense of wow. Like you really are unique. It really is a unique time because you're in that space and time. And so, to to want to be open to learning as much as you can, to me was one of the most exciting things. So of course, being a college, that's what you're doing all the time, right. Like every day it was like this is great. I could be a lifelong student and I think life is a school, by the way. I think life is education. And if we recognize it for that, you know, we get the benefit of that, right. There's always something new to learn.

But so, I loved college. I did well as a student because I'm a Virgo and you know that sort of type A. But I worked hard, I played hard. I did a lot of extracurricular activities that I absolutely loved. Like I couldn't get enough of it, you know. So, for me, that experience was really exciting and really great time. And I still am in touch with a handful of people that were became close friends in college. I'm still in touch with and we're talking, like 45 something years on, right. So, to have that experience and still have those connections is also pretty, pretty exciting. So, college for me was great.

Do I use what I learned at college and what I do today in terms of my profession? In theory yes, because of course anything you learn in your college years is not wasted as far as I'm concerned. So, it's what I call transferable skills or transferable knowledge. I don't think anything is a waste. You know, if you really take it in. I went to school for architecture and interior design. I'm running a nonprofit, right, in social justice. People ask me all the time “Kim, how could you go from architecture to, you know, nonprofit?”. For me that was, that was not difficult at all to imagine. Because I saw the connection between in architecture and design, you can affect how people feel by the environment, the physical environment that they are in. And you can make a space be inviting and warm, and embracing, and exciting, you know, funny, playful, whatever, by what's in that space. So the space around us, our physical space – which is why I'm I'm also have tremendous interest in urban planning and city planning because we need more green space. You know we have concrete jungles, we have these high heat zones, right. So when we think about our environment absolutely has an impact on our bodies, physically and our emotions,

right. So our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health is impacted just as much from the physical environment that we're in. Like we're sitting in this room right now, right. We're sitting in a room that has four walls, windows that now look like mirrors, probably to the two of you, right, because it's getting dark outside and it's light inside. So just since we've come into this space, this space has changed already. So, the physical space, I always had an interest in trying to create spaces. My interest in architecture, creating spaces that were going to help heal people and make people feel good in that space. So, to bridge the gap from that to social justice work, where I'm trying to help people heal from within, whether it's from trauma, right, or a lack of understanding or discrimination or oppression – it's not a far leap because you connect the dots. It's about whether or not we're creating a world that is embracing all of us, or are we leaving people you know out. And we've spent too much time leaving people out. And we're, human nature I found is afraid of what we don't understand, hence the importance of education. Because if we are open to learning, it can help us change our mind about things. And it can also help us. Understand that what might have been scary because we didn't understand it suddenly now is not so scary. So, if I was in here needing an interpreter because I was speaking to you in French, *parles-tu français, oui, non?* [Do you speak French, yes, no ?]

ML: No.

KD: If I was speaking to you in French and needed an interpreter, right. The language barrier might create some challenges in our conversation, but we would still find a way to communicate, right. So we have to start thinking so much more about the total picture. We are social beings, right. We are an animal species, that is social. And so in our lifetime, whatever our lifespan may be, hopefully you know yours will be much longer and you because they are saying we're living longer now. So by the time you get to my age, you know, 64 will be the new 34, right? So you could be living to 120. By the way, science supports the fact that our bodies should be able to live 120, right.

ML: Wow.

KD: But we're not currently because of all of those factors, I think that we're talking about so. I think that the important part about, your question is more around being open to learning education can come in many forms. If I hadn't gone to college, I still think I would have ended up doing a lot of the interesting things I'd done. I went to college and loved it. I was lucky to do it. I had to put myself through college, so that was a whole another kind of learning for me, right. And it opened up, you know, in theory, opportunities for me once I left. But I think it's about again, what you can do at any time in your life. If an opportunity presents itself and you say: "oh, this sounds interesting", "Oh, this sounds exciting", "Oh, what can I do with this?" Right. And go for it. And especially being able to do it, you know, in an age when I had stamina, I had energy, I had you know, excellent health. So I could burn the midnight oil and do the all-nighters

and do it day after day, week after week and and you know. And that energy energizes you, right. And so those sort of things can really make a difference as to the path that you take at any given time.

Now, I had some horrific things happen at college, you know. I had a professor who sexually assaulted me, and that was completely obviously inappropriate and not okay. But that is again as part of that experience. I was abducted out of my home at the age of, you know, 14 literally somebody broke in and just dragged me out of my own home. So there are things that happened to each of us. There are different kinds of trauma that we all. A car accident that you have, you know, or something or, you break a bone and you're in the hospital. And everybody experiences some form of trauma. And it's not for us to just, you know, to say that one trauma is worse than another, right. We, it's part of the human experience that we encounter experiences that we'd rather not have in our lives that are, you know, what we look back on as unfortunate, negative or horrific, you know, experiences. But how we respond to everything that happens to us in our lives is what makes a difference. To help us move forward, right. So, the education in college, as you're as you were asking that question, you know, how does that education inform what I do today? I would say it's just one part of the fabric of everything else. It wasn't getting a college education or getting a degree that mapped out because as I shared with you. I I thought it was, you know, going to stay in architectural design. I was – I went in as a theater major, by the way, when I went to UMass. Because I've done, I have been on stage and performed and played guitar played in the band, you know, since I was six. So I had a whole other side of my life. All of us do. We all have different facets that make up who we are, right. The some of us, right, is not just one thing. It's not just that you're a student or you're a daughter, or you're a friend, or you're a worker, or you're a ..., right. It's we're so much more than that. So, so school, see, see. This is why I know this is later, it's going to, I feel for you both because you're going to decipher all of this recording like wow, we just asked one simple question and Kim went off on this philosophical tangent. But because that's what life is for me, I don't think you can answer a question so simply. And I think most of the time for me questions just bring up more questions. So I guess if I had to do a short answer, I would say yes, of course it impacted what I do today, but not in the way most people would assume.

ML: Thank you. Do you think that your experience in college with that Professor, did it lead you to find Pathways for Change or did you come across that separately?¹

KD: No, it didn't. That was completely separately. Yeah, that incident was a teaching moment for me about imbalance of power and what that can do. And, that wasn't my first experience of imbalance of power. That was my first experience of sexual assault, certainly, but not of

¹ Kim Dawkins is not the founder of Pathways for Change, however she is the head of the organization at the time of the recording.

certainly how differently females are treated by males. You know, I could give you dozens of, you know, examples of that and I suspect the two of you could give me some examples of that. Because it it impacts us at any age. So no, that didn't influence my path to Pathways [Pathways for Change] [laughs]. It did again offer me an opportunity to sort of think about how that came about and why something like that could happen. That may have festered subconsciously. So that because it was decades later before I started working for a rape crisis center. So, it was many, many, many years later. When I came to Pathways was that incident on my mind that I experienced, at UMass, but is it possible that somewhere again, the way our brains work and the way that we store trauma could have that have been an influencing factor subconsciously, sure right. Kind of like if you have an experience, if you you know our I don't know driving over a bridge and you look down and it looks pretty scary and suddenly you start having a fear of heights, right. Is that directly related to that experience of, you know, feeling so vulnerable on the bridge or, was that fear of height something that was there all the time and just laying dormant? Who knows?

[Interview paused, in order to move locations]

ML: So just to resume, we were briefly talking about. How you came to find Pathways for Change, can you elaborate on that a little bit for?

KD: Accidental. It really was purely accidental. I had returned from a second trip to England with my son. I traveled to England when he was two years old. I actually landed in England on his second birthday, so it was October 3rd of 1993. And thought I was going to stay in England with my son and then circumstances happen, as they often do, and my family had a crisis here. So I decided to come back and when I came back. And that was, coming back, I think was what made me realize, obviously, as a single parent who also had my own business at that time – when I had left to go back to England, I had to give up a lot. You know, I gave up, you know, the friends that I had made here, left the family behind, you know, and took my son there. So I also lost a lot of my clients that I had had at that time. Cause that was at a time when I was still doing architecture and design. So when I came back, I wasn't quite sure how I was going to sort of reintegrate into the workforce. And what that was going to look like given that I had a three-year old, you know, that I was raising. And it was a friend of mine that I had made previously who reached out and said, “hey, I work in this residential treatment facility for at risk youth and I don't want to do full time. I think my boss would be open to a job share. Would you consider doing a job share.” And I thought to myself, well, I need some kind of work, I need an income. I have, you know, I'm here, I have to raise my son. So that was at a time and it was sort of like I'll take anything, sure, right. So I went to work in a group home, believe it or not, have at risk girls. And that was in a program in Leicester, Mass [Massachusetts] at the time.

KL: Okay.

KD: And that one small move. That definitely sort of changed the trajectory for me, going sort of into much more depth, in depth nonprofit. It was not Pathways yet, but it was doing nonprofit work. And so that experience I was more in an administrative capacity there, as well as working with the kids. It was a small group home, but my boss at the time clearly saw some potential in me. And as the adolescent division started to grow within that nonprofit organization, he kept promoting me and promoting me and promoting me. And so I was director of ancillary services in the whole organization, and we had five locations, you know, five different programs sort of across central Mass. And so, all of a sudden, within a very short space of time, I went from doing part time work to being full time work in a nonprofit. That sort of movement in that time in my life when my son was young, gave me experience of wow so I can make a different kind of difference. Doing nonprofit work than staying in architecture. Architecture, as you can imagine, was much better paid. We're not going to get rich in nonprofit. So I used to call it the golden handcuffs, right. Sometimes you can get lowered into something and it was very good money, but I wasn't feeling fulfilled. Like what I need to do something that I feel is going to make a positive difference. What kind of imprint am I leaving on the world for having been here? So seeing kids that had such traumatic backgrounds and experiences get support and help and treatment that they needed to be able to move forward and have more successful life. That was hugely impactful for me. So I think that experience, in a in a way, indirectly led me to working – sort of, getting closer to what eventually was a job at Pathways.

And at that time Pathways was called the Rape Crisis Center of Central Mass. I originally reached out there when I left the prior nonprofit. And was sort of looking at a lot of different things. You know, what could I do? What do I want to do right now? I need a job, but I also don't want to just do any job. And they were looking to fill a position at the Rape Crisis Center. That was also a part time position. So I thought, well, I can do this part time while I look for other work. And so that was why I say it's accidental because it was not through any conscious searching or, oh, I want to work at a rape crisis center. It was, oh, I could have impact here. The job happens to be at a rape crisis center. Ohh, they work with women's issues, I care about women's issues. Oh, there's social justice, I care about social justice. So I think in that sense, it was such a natural fit for me to say, I think I'd like to try this. And when I first started, I was not working with clients. I came in as development director in the organization. So it was that experience though, because I had to be trained as a counselor as well that I thought this is kind of interesting because it kind of combines a lot of my skills and a lot of my passion in one, yeah. And it was less than a year that I was there, that the Executive Director at that time informed me before I was even there for a year, she said “Kim, I'm leaving the organization, I'm taking a job closer to where I live”, which was in western Mass. And she said, “I really want to encourage you to apply for the Executive Director position.” And I remember saying at this time I haven't even been here a year, and there's lots of other staff here that are probably well suited and well

positioned to be in that role. And she said that “you have an understanding of the business side that so many people don't in this work.” You know, they have clinical experience but not business experience. And I was fortunate enough to have. And so I was like, really, and I said, but, you know, it's a little different when you're applying for a position as an inside candidate. So the board did a search committee and there was many people applying for the position. And I went through the process. And I always say I gave birth to this position that I'm now in because it was 10 months you know, of blood, sweat and tears – while they made a decision to finally, you know, offer me the position. And I happily accepted because I felt like this was an organization that I could really have impact with the clients we serve with the staff, which were amazing and bring the organization, you know, into into another level up to another level. So and I've I've never looked back since. It's been the most extraordinary journey, so I that's what brought me there. So that's why I say it was sort of accidental.

ML: So, you were living in Leicester when you?

KD: No, I was working in Leicester. I was actually living in Connecticut at the time.

ML: Oh my goodness.

KD: Commuting from Connecticut to Mass. Yeah. And then it wasn't until 2000 and ... it was actually the year of when 9/11 happened. That I purchased the house in Worcester that I'm still living in now. So that I could be closer to work. So that's what brought me sort of back to Massachusetts. I had a house in Connecticut. And the commute was not terrible. You know, I did, I've done longer commutes. But I wanted to be closer, my parents were aging. I was also taking care of my parents more. And there was better medical care up here. And I was working up here. So it was like a, it made sense that was much more of a practical decision to get closer to working, closer to where it could be there for my parents.

ML: That's wonderful. Can you explain what the overall goals for Pathway for Change is and what you hope to achieve in your position?

KD: So yeah, the goal, I don't think the fundamental goal, which is sort of the mission of the organization has has not changed. We might have changed the language a little bit of the mission statement. But we're there to serve survivors, right, survivors, right any gendered survivor, that's eleven years or older who has suffered or experienced any kind of sexual violence. As well as their family or significant others because they need support too. I always say the supporters need support.

So we that's the primary, sort of, you know, place of how rape crisis centers, not just Pathways came about was during the feminist movement in this country in the 70s. That rape crisis centers were popping up in the early 70s because so many women at that time were saying, “whoa,

timeout enough already, okay.” And it was happening globally because it was, you know. And it's sad in a way for us to think, fast forward 51 years because we [Pathways for Change] were established in 1973, that we're still fighting this same battle, right, that it still exists. I always say “I'm trying to like work myself out of the job,” right. So that they we wouldn't need rape crisis centers, right. But that's not going to happen in my lifetime. Hopefully it happens in your lifetime.

So anyway, so the mission or the goal, if you will, is to continue to serve survivors no matter what we're there to. Help support them along that healing journey, whatever that looks like for them. You know, at their lead, right, it has to be at the survivors choice and their voice that's heard at the table, not us trying to tell them what that healing should look like. Because if you think about it, any form of sexual violence is someone who is exerted power and control over you. So the worst thing we could do would be to try to exert a different kind of power and control and try to tell you what that healing journey should look like, right. So we support, you know, we care, we offer guidance, we offer, you know, referrals we we do advocacy and that will always you know remain at one of the primary goals.

But we are also a feminist, women led, social justice organization. So that means we have to then say what more can we do. So what more we do is say what are the root causes of sexual violence and how do we tackle those? So we have to look at all forms of oppression, right. We have to build community. We have a responsibility to point out injustices when we see them. And so a big part of what we do when we talk about trying to stop it happening down the road, we call that our prevention, education side of the work. So that's where that's some of the most impactful work that we do because we go into schools in middle school, high school, and college level students talking about what is a healthy relationship look like, what does consent mean, right. You know the list obviously is is is very long but and we can't do that with. Also still talking about social justice, right, and equality and equity and racism and sexism and homophobia and and and, right. So we really are social justice agents in the work that we do. For so long, people thought of rape crisis centers as “well that's the women's issue”. Number one only women, which we know it isn't true. Number two, you know, it's sort of like, “ohh, pat them on the head let them do their thing amongst themselves,” you know. And people sort of had this vision of a rape crisis center where we all sat in cubicles with red phones, right, answering a hotline call from a survivor that had just been raped – and it was always the stranger jumping out of the bushes right. Well, we know that that's not the reality of sexual violence, right. So we're dealing with child sexual abuse. We're dealing with, you know, sexual exploitation, human trafficking we're dealing with, of, you know, boys, men, transgender individuals, right, marginalized, LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer] community. You know, it doesn't discriminate, right. So social violence impacts any one of us at anytime. And we know that therefore, in addressing those social issues, we have to really think about how, as a nonprofit organization, we

try to make real change there. So the education is a big piece and then we also we do education and training in the community.

So if we're not doing it with students, we're also, you know, trying to change laws, you know, we do a lot of actual advocacy around laws that impact, you know, survivors. One example, that I could share with you would be for many, many years, there's a law that's been on the books that helps domestic violence victims. And it's called the 209B restraining order that someone in intimate partner violence can file in a court to make sure that their abuser legally at least, is basically told you can't come within X number of feet of the victim. The problem with the 209B, and it's been around for years, is that it wasn't able to be used for someone who experienced sexual violence from someone who was not an intimate partner. The 209[B], a, it has to be an intimate spouse, an intimate partner, someone in the household that they're living with, or have a romantic relationship with. So we were experiencing this huge gap, with survivors that were assaulted by their doctor, their neighbor, their boss, their roommate, their grandfather, their right. All of these other kinds of relationship that was not a domestic relationship or intimate partner relationship. They couldn't file that restraining order. So collectively, many rape crisis centers, you know, around the Commonwealth [Commonwealth of Massachusetts] said this is a problem because we see survivors every day that need to be able to file a restraining order, against the person because it's their landlord, it's their boss, right, it's their teacher. So it took, excuse me, a number of years. But finally it was in 2011 that it became law. So we have a new law called the 258 E harassment protection order. Which helps fill the gap so that survivors of sexual violence can actually file a restraining order against the perpetrator. If they decide to take that step. Which is a brave step, you know, for anybody to take, obviously. But they have some legal protection now. That doesn't guarantee their safety. We all know that the law just because something's a law doesn't mean you're necessarily safe. But it's at least a step closer, right, to be able to provide some protections.

So as a nonprofit social justice organization a lot of the work we do goes far beyond just emotionally supporting a survivor whose experience the most horrific experience that could happen to anybody. Because sexual violence forever changes you, you are never the same. It doesn't mean that you can't move forward and have joy in your life and engage with the world again, right. But you're never going to be the same. So and we've discovered by doing this work for so many years that while the statistics, the reported numbers, talk about one in three women, you know, and one in five men. We know that it's much more likely, anecdotally, with who we work with, that it's one and two, one and three for men because there's so many survivors that never report. And it's even harder, especially for males or transgender folks, to have the courage to be able to come forward and say this is what happened to me. Because we live in a society that so blames them: "It was your fault." "Why did you go there?" "Why did you dress that way?" "Why did you drink that?" "Why did you?" "Why did you?" "Why did you?". Right. So we still

live in a very much of a victim blaming culture. And so we know that there are more survivors than ever actually come forward and report. So the data is based on who's reporting. It's not including all the numbers of people who never disclose. We work with survivors sometimes who for the first time had disclosed child abuse, and they're in their 60s. And they're finally feel like they have a voice and can talk about it. And to them, it's like it happened yesterday because they've never told the soul, right. So we know we always say that this is a silent epidemic. Sexual violence is a silent epidemic. So it's a huge issue, it is not a small issue, it is not a women's issue, it's a human issue.

And so when you ask the question, you know, like what is the goal of pathways? The goal has to be more than our mission. Our goal is to make our services accessible to everyone. Our goal is to make sure that survivors feel like they are seen and heard and supported and not blamed or judged, which is what we typically do in this culture. And to expand, how we reach the community so that they know that we're here. Because sexual violence, I always say rape is the four-letter word that nobody wants to say. Because it's a subject that people don't like to talk about. But it's not about sex, it's about power and control, and the, or the abuse of power and control. Sex is used as the weapon. But it's about the abuse of power control over another person, and most often with a a huge power imbalance. To have an adult sexually abuse a child, you know, to have a caretaker abuse an elder person and care, you know, the list goes on right. To to take somebody and sell their body because like, it's a product, you know, because they can do it over and over again, right. You sell drugs, you get the money once. You put a female on the street. You can sell her over and over and over again, right. So it's a it's a billion multibillion dollar business. And and we are treating people like commodities and not as people.

So our job I feel in in terms of like where we want to take Pathways, I'll give you an example. We have a deaf program. We're the only rape crisis center in the Commonwealth that supports Deaf and hard of hearing survivors of sexual violence. But in order to do that, well, we have Deaf staff, and we have hearing ASL [American Sign Language] fluent staff as well. Because in order to be truly accessible, right and we talk about this, you have to look and be the same people that you are trying to serve, right. So we have to look like the community we serve and our community is very diverse. So the Deaf and hard of hearing, our Deaf survivor program is a unique program and we're the only statewide video phone hotline for Deaf and hard of hearing sexual violence survivors, right. We also do a lot of work with survivors that identify with intellectual or developmental disabilities, right.

So these are ways that we try to think of as an organization, how can we be innovative and create new programs that make our services more accessible, better recognized. Because we still tend to be invisible in the community. People still say "Pathways for Change who are you? What do you do?" And when you tell them it's a conversation stopper a lot of the time. "Ohh oh, that must be

hard work. How would those Red Sox doing, right?” It's sort of like it's just so it's still tells you that this is a taboo subject, that people are still afraid to talk about. So the other part of our job is to talk about it a lot, and as often as we can and as loud as we can. You know, I yell it from the rooftops. It's kind of like reproductive rights. We need to say the word abortion, abortion, abortion, abortion, right. And we need to keep saying it. Why? Because everybody's afraid to talk about that. But every female, right, biological female on this planet should have the right to do to their bodies what they choose and not have somebody else make that decision for them. So imagine someone who is raped and gets impregnated by the rapist. And now we want government to tell that survivor well, you have to bring it to term and you have to raise that child who's a product of a rape. How is that going to impact the survivor as well as the child in that scenario?

So you know, we have a lot of work to do and we want to talk about injustice, you know, so our job is so much bigger. I always say we're in the healing business, first and foremost. We're trying to help individuals heal from trauma. And we like to say that we move them from survivor to thriver. But the length of that journey or the time of that journey is completely up to the individual to decide what's right for them, as it should be, because none of us can define for somebody else how long should – long should you grieve? Right. If you lose a loved one – your [Interviewer] new you know kitten, what if something happened to your kitten? Who you, know, Should somebody be telling you how long you should be upset about that? “Like Oh, just get over it,” right. This is what people tell survivors, though. “Oh, my God. Kim had happened two years ago. Just get over it.” Whoa, you don't ever get over it. You can move forward that's part of the healing process. But you don't get over, it's something not traumatic, it changes you, right.

So the social justice is a real big piece. And it's so interwoven, it's like a web of so many other social injustices that we need to be paying attention to. That it's pretty extraordinary, I think, not just Pathways any rape crisis center there is like 16 across the state [Massachusetts], right. So we're [Pathways for Change] one of only three standalone rape crises and meaning we're not part of a bigger organization or a dual organization. We, all we do is rape crisis work. So there's only three in the state and we're the second largest in the state and we have 47 towns and cities that we that we serve, think about that.

KL: Wow.

KD: We have a staff of 25. We can't be in every town that we serve physically every day. We don't have offices in every town and city across central Mass, but that is our communities. Those are the communities that we're there for. So how do we make sure that they all know that we're there for them, right. So that's building the partnerships is the other piece to answer your question, it's about building partnerships. It's about building awareness in the community. It's about making sure that you know we're somehow working our PR [public relations] and our

social media. And grow it to a place where people start really recognizing our logo and our name. “Oh, Pathways for Change they're amazing, they do such incredible work, they're helping make our communities safer, they're helping to stop such violence from happening, they're there for survivors, you know.” Right. We want it that's. We, like we always sort of dream about the fact that it wouldn't it be nice one day if the you know, Pathways was a name that. Would be so well known and recognized in central Mass, you know, that it would be part of your conversation over the dinner table. “Oh, yeah. I know who you can call. You can call pathways for change you to have somebody come in and do some education about sexual harassment at your company. They can do that, the hair salon, the dentist office. It doesn't have to be the big corporations.” We do that too right. But I mean, sometimes it can be the smallest things. “Ohh My child is going to you know that magnet school we need to get Pathways to come in and do some, you know, classes with these kids.” Right.

So it's it's so much bigger and it's it's bigger than us, but it's a major problem and violence in general. We're living in a world now where violence is becoming more tolerated and we're becoming numb right to it when it happens. So, and give you an example of that that more most people can relate to road rage. Road rage was not a term 20 years ago, wasn't in our we weren't using that language road rage. Now it's like a common thing that we hear about road rage. Literally to the point where people have guns or baseball bats because you cut them off at the intersection or you cut them off in the lane or the traffic light or. I think to myself, we've become that desensitized that we think it's okay to be violent towards somebody because they made our lives a little uncomfortable or inconvenient. You know what I mean? So we've become so desensitized it's like violence is it's okay because it happens all the time. So what can we do? No, we need to continue to be outraged by it and say enough already. How do we get to a place of not tolerating violence in our society, not just sexual violence, any form of violence? How do we do that? Until and unless we are having those hard conversations about how we treat each other and what are the cultural and social constructs that we are adhering to that define things like gender stereotypes. That the only way a man can express emotion is through anger. Because to show tenderness or kindness somehow makes him less of a man. That women need to be protected. Because somehow we're weak, right. So you know when you start really thinking about what forms social opinions in the world that we live in, it's a much more intricate complicated issue to unravel and unpack and address. And the only way we're going to change social attitudes, societal attitudes is through education and awareness. Because if we do the education, you know, we start with awareness and then we educate, which increases knowledge and through knowledge is what changes attitudes. And we can't get from A-Z like that [snapps]. It can't be overnight. It took us generations to get to where we are. It's not going to be an overnight solution, but we have to start and we say and that starts with us. The change starts with me and you right and the people around us. That's the only way it's going to change.

So I know that again that was a long answer to your question around what is the goal of Pathways and you know, where do we want to take it? Well, my feeling is always. I'd like to believe that if I get hit by a bus tomorrow, or when I die, or leave right. That this community and the world will better be a better place for me, having been in it. And that hopefully Pathways, you know someone else will come in with better ideas and make better changes and expand even more the capacity of what the organization can do. But my biggest dream would be that there wouldn't be a need for an organization like Pathways. Because if we could get to a place in our world, do we do you dream of a world without violence? I do. I'd like to believe that we could have a world with no violence in it. So it's just it would be nice to think that one day we wouldn't need rape crisis centers, right. That would be the ultimate, you know, thing I'd love to see with Pathways. That we all work ourselves out of a job. That we become redundant, meaning we're not needed anymore. You know, I don't want my staff to be without work right now because you know they're doing good work, right. And. But as a as a mission, right, and as a goal, I would be happy if there was no need for this anymore. That would be a pretty amazing world to live in, I think.

ML: It would be. So you mentioned that you serve not only Worcester, but all of central Massachusetts. Do you work with other Rape Crisis centers in the area or other social justice groups? You had mentioned in a previous interview that you were involved in the AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] movement in Worcester? Do you have partnerships with them that have continued through the years?

KD: We all, yes, is the short answer. Partnerships, we believe in collaboration. We believe in we're stronger together and we can have more impact when more of us come together because there's a lot of crossover of issues. So as an example, you could have a survivor of sexual violence that also has substance abuse issues because that's their way of coping. Or they have housing issues, or they have childcare issues, right. So there's such an overlap. It's never just about one issue. So yes, we work all the time with trying to build and grow and develop partnerships with other organizations that serve the community. Because there's so many crossovers. And there's also obviously there for referrals that happen like a survivor that comes to us that has housing issues we don't provide housing. But we try to help them connect them to those organizations that can help with something like housing as an example. So yeah, we're big believers in that and find that collaboration and partnerships are very powerful. Yes, AIDS project Worcester we've done many different kinds of partnerships over the years. Including the YWCA [the Young Women's Christian Association] of central Mass. They they are the experts in domestic violence, we're the experts in sexual violence. There's a lot of crossover, so we help and support each. Other organizations, like Everyday Miracles, you know, Spectrum Services, Advocates Inc. I mean deaf programs across the state this so you know the the list is huge. You

know that I could share with you. But the short answer is yes, that is so valuable and so important. For us to do and we continue to to grow those relationships.

ML: That's wonderful. So another quick question, well not quick. How did COVID-19 impact your job and life in Worcester?

KD: So as you both know from personal experience going, having lived through it, we all know that everything changed for us, right. We had to rethink how we do everything. For both of you I imagine it was, you know, how do you do your college work? how do you navigate classes? You know, how do you learn how to do virtual classrooms? How do professors learn that? There was a lot of like, a big learning curve, right when we went to that okay we need to continue to do this work. You know that the term was pivot, everybody talked about pivoting in place, right, during COVID. Fortunately for us, we had always been believers that we need to provide as many different ways for survivors to access services as possible. And so it that was just another one for us to think about. You know, there were we already had things set up where people could call in, they could come in physically, you know, we provided other kinds of support. We weren't doing texting, you know, support counseling because this too much that was not protected through that. Some other organizations do do that or were at that time. But we realized we needed to provide some other way, especially during COVID, to make sure the survivors knew we were still here for them. Right. So we very quickly, you know, figured out we needed a very HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] compliant because a big part of our work is around confidentiality and privacy. And so we were able to coordinate very quickly within a company called Doxy so that we could provide virtual counseling for survivors so they could be at home and still get the counseling support. We even did it with schools. We were zooming in, you know, to classrooms, right, to provide the education that typically we would do in person, in schools. We were now doing it with the teacher, you know through that virtual link for students.

What happened during the pandemic also though that really was a challenge for us is we weren't allowed into the hospitals for obvious reasons, initially. But survivors that go to get evidence collected the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program of Massachusetts specially trained nurses right to deal with that piece of it in the collection of evidence. And for years we have a partnership with the SANE [Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner] program, that's what they call the SANE program. So the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program is a partner of ours. So when a nurse. For those specially trained nurses, needs a survivor in the emergency room and they're going to open up that kit – and it can take several hours to go through that, that evidence kit. We send an advocate to be there for the survivor, for emotional support, to provide with information, to give them a packet to just be there with them, right. We're not there in a medical capacity. We're not there in a legal capacity. We're there just for the survivor to provide support. That's always been a really successful partnership. Now suddenly COVID hit. And our funders, the

Department of Public Health that you can't go into the hospital, you can't go into the ER [emergency room]. So now we have to figure out, well, how do we make sure that we get our information to the survivor? How can we support the survivor in the emergency room? So we have to offer again, you can call us, you know. The the SANE nurse would say “do you want to talk to a rape crisis counselor, I can get them on the phone for you.” But we've all found out very quickly that wasn't as success. Because if I was like, “well, I don't want to bother somebody,” you know, right, “I don't want to make them feel like they have to get on the phone with me.” And, of course, it's by voice, not in person, right. There's a difference, right. So we found that that was a problem, meaning that we couldn't be there for survivors in the way we'd always been used to.

The other challenge for us during that time was also just in knowing that a lot of survivors were being assaulted in their own homes. And so during the pandemic, there was a lot of violence that escalated during that time because now they had nowhere to go. And they couldn't, even if they wanted to some of them couldn't call us because the abusers in the background or their children are running in and out, right. There was so many other kinds of barriers for them to get support. So. But our belief is always give everyone as many choices as possible. So the good part about COVID is it allowed us to just bring in another way to provide that support through the confidential virtual counseling. And survivors could choose to be on screen or not to. That was also something that was beneficial because if they didn't want us to see their face, they didn't have to. Because you can call our hotline and you don't have to give your real name. So we wanted to still give them that. That control over anonymity if they wanted it right. So they could still use a false name and not go on screen, so we couldn't see them right. So it was just another way to be able to provide support. So not unusual to many, many other organizations that had to shift how they, you know, provided services we had to do the same, but we were trying to do it in a way that still protected confidentiality and privacy. And again allow the survivor to choose what was right for them and not us trying to tell them.

So there were challenges, there were disappointments. In the, you know. We wanted to be in the hospital as an example, because that's what we do a lot 24/7, we go to hospitals. The courts we wanted to be in the courts. You know, when someone's brave enough to come forward and press charges. We wanted to be there for them. And courts were now virtual. Well, how can you be there comforting someone next to you if they're not next to you? They're on a little screen, you know, right. So how can how can they feel fully supported if you're just another picture in a sea of faces you know while they're in, in, in court?

So that was some real tough times for us and the other piece of that was also our own staff and volunteers. We're living through that pandemic, right, we were all living through that together. So dealing with their own, you know, barriers of they're sheltering in place, right. I was still at

the office every day. We still literally had office hours, but we had a skeletal crew. Two or three of us that were there, you know, to be able to be there in case somebody did walk through. We had all the personal protective equipment, right, masks, hand sanitizers, putting up clear barriers, and things to protect people, you know. But it was a challenge because we knew that there were many more survivors needing our help that couldn't get it.

But the positive that came out of that is that in making those changes, which we did that like many did, we've kept those as part of our practice because it provides another choice. And so there are survivors that can be in rural areas that can virtually, you know, come in and get counseling and support without having to worry about driving or childcare, you know, finding a babysitter, or transportation issues or right. They can now get support from in the comfort of their own home. So the flip side of that, it was an unexpected positive outcome from COVID. But we've all all community service organizations in central Mass have to do the same thing. How do we get to the people that need us, during a time when we're being instructed to shelter in place? Right. So how do we reach, right, the community. We upped our social media. You know, we we did a lot more on social media, which a lot of organizations did right. With messages of hope and messages of support and reminding them that there was a confidential way that they could get support. So all of those things. We did a huge statewide commercial first time ever. We actually hired a company to do a 30 second commercial that we aired on TV. It was on the Boston stations and the Worcester stations. So that during COVID we could remind people we were still here for them. So we did. We had to do some things that we had to think differently and be innovative. And and I'm a believer in you know how we solve problems is sometimes we have to think outside the box. So we like to do that a lot, think outside the box.

ML: So one of the final questions we have is based off of your life experiences what advice would you give to women today?

KD: To women in general. Not like in the just the nonprofit sector, just all women. Any women.

ML: Woman, people, anyone.

KD: I think couple of the most important things and I say this a lot actually to survivors and to the staff and volunteers that I work with. Is to get in touch with your own strength. And by strength, I don't mean, "oh, tough it out." I mean, the inner strength that is you. The power get in touch with your own power, okay. Don't be defined by others, construct or idea of what you should be as a female. To find that for yourself. Know that you're capable of so much more than you think you are. And the other thing I tell women a lot is find your allies and reach out to them. Like whatever is your sort of circle of trusted individuals, right. That's sort of what I call that safety net, whether it's friends, family, peers, you know, the people in your life that you trust. Not just trust with you, but also trust won't take advantage of of you as as a person you

know. Meaning not the ones that you know will have your back, even if that means telling you some things that are not necessarily what you want to hear, right. The ones that truly are going to be honest with you and speak their truth, right. So I think mostly I just, I really, I want women to know that I believe we've spent too many generations feeling less than and I want to remind women that you are enough. That you are more than enough. That you are miraculous and you are powerful. And it sounds such a cliché thing to say, but I always say every woman is a “shero”, right. Because and. So get in touch with your superpower, right. And that superpower is really, I think, being your most authentic you, right. Not the you that the world around you was trying to tell you to be. Because this is where a lot of these problems begin. Because we're just accepting without question, the way the culture or society defines women. And we need to rise up above that and say, whoa, wait a minute, time out, okay, like you know. And have a sense of humor. You know, like, just like, don't take life so seriously. I tell. I took life way too seriously for way too long and tried way too hard to impress everybody around me like that. I was, I was worthy, right. I was good enough. And I think all women should know, you are already good enough. Don't take life too serious. It can change on a dime. Nothing is forever. Like, you know. Like live your dream, live your bliss, live your, you know, joy, right. Live your passion. Just embrace who you are. Stop trying, to like, I think too much of the time we as women are so, trying so hard to fit in, right. That we forget the power that is us. I'm not tall enough, or I'm not thin enough, or I'm not pretty enough, or I'm not smart enough, or I'm not young enough, or old enough or whatever it is, right. So we are constantly finding more ways to tear ourselves down, than lift ourselves up. And I think as women we also. The other thing I say all the time “lift somebody up with you”. Empower other women. Like when you succeed, and you take something and move forward with it. Somebody is behind you that can benefit from your wisdom your experience, your just being there for them, listening to them, helping them, mentoring them, right. Young girls, right, in middle school and high school could benefit from what the two of you could share about your experience already. Girls that are terrified of going into college because they are wondering: Am I smart enough? Will I be able to graduate? Will I be able to afford it? What about college debt? All of those things right that can be stressed, right. You could be a huge, you know, impact and influence on the younger females behind you.

So yeah. Don't I take them way too seriously. I just realized, like, we spent this whole interview, I've been very serious. But, you know, I always think like in another life, I would love to have been a comedian. I'm just not funny enough to be one. My staff always laugh at me when I'm, like, not being funny. So I'm like, okay. I need to learn some skills that my brother. As he was the comedian in the family, he could turn any situation and make it hysterically funny. And I think that's a gift. So I like, encourage women all the time. Find the funny side. Find the funny side to everything you know you can get through so much if you can learn to laugh at yourself as well as you know situations. And I'm not suggesting that every situation is funny, but I think if

we can be more lighthearted about life. We can overcome a lot more because it doesn't drag us down into that deep, dark place right where it's so hard to crawl out of that hole, right. So yeah, lighten up. I tell myself all this, "lighten up, Kim."

ML: Well, that's all the questions we have. Is there anything additional that you'd like to share about your time in Worcester, if you like, living in the city [laughter] if you want to move somewhere else in Massachusetts?

KD: My feeling about life is I have no idea what tomorrow will bring. I wake up in the morning, it's a good day. I love what I do. I'm passionate about what I do. I can do this work anywhere. I love doing it here. I meet amazing people, every day that teach me something. Worcester constantly surprises me in the good and the bad. But that would be true anywhere and I've moved and lived in a lot of places in my life. So I am a believer that there's never going to be that perfect place or that perfect job or that perfect life. It's not necessarily what happens in our life or where we are, but how we respond and react to what life brings us.

That I think makes a difference. So I can be happy anywhere is worse to the center of the universe. No. Do I have any immediate desire to run off anywhere else? Right now, no. Cause I love what I do. And you know, so I think ultimately I would say that I feel grateful. A close friend of mine said recently, actually a term which I really love. He said I'm aging gratefully and I think about that lot now

As as I'm in my older years, meaning there's. More time behind me than ahead of me, right. As a 64 year old, I don't think of 64 as being old. But I do know that I've therefore lived 64 years, right. So I'm not going to live another 64 years, right. At least not in this generation. You guys might live to 120. But anyway, so I think that for me, it's more about getting to that place of life where. I know what really matters. And I remember what it felt like being your age, being so worried about so many things. And I wish I could go back to my younger self and say stop worrying so much. Definitely lighten up. Don't take life so seriously. Nothing's cast in stone and that you truly are like the the captain of your own ship. You really are like your life truly does become what you make of. It it doesn't mean that circumstances won't interfere sort of with your grand plan, whatever that might be, and your grand plan can change multiple times. It did for me. But that bad things can happen, but it doesn't mean that life is a bad life. It means that, you know, maybe that's a time where it builds your inner strength. Maybe it's a time that you strengthen your emotional armor, you know, gets a little thicker. Maybe you have some wisdom from that experience because you know what you don't want or you know what you don't want anyone else to ever experience, right. So all of those things in life, what we do with those experiences is what makes the difference. So that's how I think about it. When sort of your question like so, what do you think about Worcester, what's living here and working here and, you know, what does your future hold? You know. You know, it might be a tiny house because

that might be something I could actually afford to live in, you know, like a tiny home might be in my future. Off the grid, you know, with solar panels and, you know, try to get to a 0 footprint, you know, in my life. But I think mostly I hope that my future brings me to places where I can still make people feel seen and loved and appreciated. Because I think those are powerful forces. Love in the big sense of the word, not romantic love, but truly compassionate love for our fellow human beings. If we just showed more love and kindness to each other, a lot of the world's problems would take care of themselves. Because we wouldn't tolerate somebody being hungry. We'd be feeding them. We wouldn't tolerate homelessness because we'd be housing them. You know what I mean. They're simple problems that we make so much more complicated than they really need to be. Because we're, we're still trying to fight that, you know whatever that culture is that we're in at that time, right. And so maybe, you know, my hope is in the younger generation. Honestly, my hope is in your generation, my son's generation, right. That you know that you have the opportunity to make the world a better place. And like I said, I'm sorry that we made it such a mess for you to inherit, but but you can really make real change. And I see it happening. I see this like groundswell and wave right from young people who are saying I'm not going to, no, enough already. We're not going to tolerate that. We need to change the status quo. We need to start talking about you know what it means to live in the world and all of us together, and what does that look like? Right. And so that's a good thing that gives me hope that you'll be smarter and better at doing that than my generation.

ML: Well, thank you so much for your time today. This was amazing and you have a nice night.

KD: Thank you.