

# REAL STORIES



## Charlene

Hispanic mother of 8 children

Hello, my name is Charlene. I am a mother of 8 children. Throughout this COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has been very difficult for our family. I had to learn how to help my 8 children with their school; since all 8 are in different grades, I had to learn how to assist them with their classes and homework online, to attend their meetings virtually. We have had to purchase more food than before as my children are home with me all day and they do not have the lunches from school. Sometimes we run out of food and hygiene items.

Our source of help and hope has been a community health worker, who has brought us boxes of food and hygiene kits. Our bills were higher than ever. At one point I had to ask for help to pay the electricity bill because we just couldn't afford it.

Not only has this pandemic been difficult financially but also emotionally and mentally.

The pandemic has caused me a lot of stress to the point of me fainting and having frequent headaches. I am busy all day long, from daybreak until I go to bed at night. That's the only opportunity that I have, for about 10 minutes, to tend myself before I go to bed so that I don't overwhelm myself. My situation is difficult right now, but I know that things will get better. Being able to obtain help from the community, from health workers has made this struggle just a bit more bearable. I have hope that the current situation will continue to improve and hopefully, my children will be able to go back to school safely and that way we get our tough situation looking better.

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## Leah

### African American single mother of 7 children left homeless

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Hello, my name is Leah. During this pandemic I have had to overcome many difficulties. The toughest one was being homeless with my 7 children. I am a single mother with 7 children ranging from ages 3 to 17 years old. When the pandemic first started, I lost my job and I was kicked out of the home I was renting because the landlord was afraid of the pandemic, and also because he knew that I wasn't going to be able to pay the rent. Because of his fear of COVID 19, my children and I had to live in our cars. We had nowhere else to go.

Many hotels were closed and the few ones we could afford, they did not have a microwave or kitchen appliances that we could use to cook our food. We had to reach out for help with people that we knew and some organizations. With the help of some community health workers, my children and I were able to find a hotel that had kitchen appliances. We stayed there for two weeks, which was the maximum amount of time we were able to stay there.

I was making a lot of phone calls asking everybody I knew for any type of help. But mostly for a place to stay together. To our luck, our situation was heard by a good-hearted person, he was able to find us a home in Barstow. We relocated from San Bernardino to Barstow. We had to leave things behind and go to Barstow where we could have a home and where I could support my children.

The pandemic has brought us, and many other people many challenges, but my children and I are hopeful that things will get better and that we are going to move forward.

We are hopeful because we know there is help, like the person who found us a home, or the support we get from the community health workers and many other people. Organizations like that are truly heroes and because of them we are in a better place now. Both physically and emotionally.

# REAL STORIES



## Christopher

Hispanic male, 22 years old

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My name is Christopher, I am a Coast Guard officer stationed in Texas. I flew to Riverside on Christmas day to spend the holidays with my family. I was very excited for the time I would get to spend with my loved ones. My dad prepared us a feast because he used to be a chef.

I noticed that he had the sniffles and said he was feeling a little bit sick but that he stated being ok. The next day I drove him to get tested for COVID and unfortunately the result of the test came out positive. He was scared, not for himself, but for us because we had all been together all those days. My sister and her daughters have asthma, so he was worried for them.

My dad decided to isolate in his room for maybe 4-5 days. During these days he felt that his oxygen levels were decreasing. He called 9-1-1 and told them that his oxygen level was at 85 but they did not take him. He called two more times and they still never took him in. He was finally able to find an urgent care that could take him in that morning. At this time, his oxygen level dropped to 77.

Once at the hospital, we talked to the doctor and he told us that he didn't want to send my dad home like that, but he gave him the option to go home or to go to a nearby hospital. My dad picked the hospital.

He went to the hospital, but he had to wait outside for 2 and a half days before a room became available. Once he was able to get a room he stayed in there for 2 days. He was in an area for non-critical patients. He was texting with my mom back and forth, letting her know what was going on but at one point he stopped texting her. My mom and my sister got worried, but I didn't think much of it. I knew he was tired, so I figured he was resting from everything. That same day, at 9 in the morning, I received a call saying that my dad had been transferred to the ICU and had been intubated. He remained intubated for a week. During this week we only got the opportunity to call two times, around noon and at night. Sometimes we would get good news and some other times not such good ones. At one point, the doctor called me and told me he didn't think my dad was going to make it. He said to me "Your dad is looking bad, we're fighting a losing battle" this broke me, but I still had hope he would make it.

The following day, when I called at night, they gave me amazing news. They told me my dad was recovering and that his blood results were coming back good. My mom and I hugged and went to sleep with a better feeling. However, on January 14th at 5:28am I got a call from the hospital. I instantly knew that it was bad news. We were informed that there were complications with his breathing, that they had to change his tube because his lungs were so swollen that they couldn't put the new one in, so his oxygen dropped to the 30s. This news broke me and my family down.

We went immediately to see him; at around 1 pm the doctor asked us if we wanted them to do CPR on my dad if it were necessary. We obviously said yes, but the doctor also prepared us for the worse and gave us the opportunity to say goodbye to him. He told me: "your father is going to die. Go and stay with him because no one deserves to die alone". Since my mother was still hopeful, I kept my mouth shut and remained "strong" for her.

My father's heart stopped 5 times, 5 times he came back with the CPR, but we got to the point where sadly we had to stop the doctors from doing any more compressions.

My father's passing has left us struggling. Not only emotionally but also financially.

My mother isn't employed, she has always been a stay-at home mom. I am currently stationed in Texas, so I am alone here; now my command is sending me to San Diego, so I can be closer to my mother and be able to help her financially.

After my dad's death, caused by COVID, there is not a day that I don't go missing and crying for him. But I let it all out, wipe my tears off and go about my days because that is what my dad would want me to do.

I want to tell people that are going through a similar experience to be strong, to cry if they need to cry. Don't fight the losses but live to honor their lost ones.

I want to tell them that they should keep in mind that their loved ones are in a better place and that the ones that remain here need to be safe, to follow precautions, and stay hopeful because this won't last forever.

# REAL STORIES



## Octavio

Hispanic male, 42 years old

My name is Octavio, and I am a victim of COVID. I got infected with COVID in November of last year. I got infected at the warehouse where I work because some of my coworkers had the virus and didn't know. The warehouse also doesn't have good ventilation, one by one we ended up getting infected.

When I came out positive for the virus, I was sent home to quarantine. I never thought that I would get it but I did. While being home I didn't feel really sick or anything, so I figured maybe I didn't have it anymore or that it didn't affect me.

Once I finished my quarantine, I went back to work. This was at the beginning of January. However, when I began to work I started feeling more affected by the virus than when I had it. I couldn't work like before. I began to have sequels from the virus which to this day I still feel. I feel pain in my articulations, shortness of breath, lots of fatigue, pain in my back, and pain where my lungs are. I also have pain breathing, especially when I go outside my throat and nose dry up and it is very painful to breathe.

When I began to have these effects I went to a clinic to see my doctor and find out what I had. She told me that I had side effects from having COVID. Due to this, my job had to disable me so I can rest and not get worse.

I have been home since January because I can't work. I hope that I can go back to work in May and that I can feel better. I am the only source of income in my house and I have a baby and a family that needs me. On top of having these side effects, my doctor also diagnosed me with anxiety. All of this has brought me a lot of stress and anxiety. It causes me to have panic and anxiety attacks. There are moments where I feel like I am dying.

Despite everything I am enduring, I keep my head up and try to maintain a positive attitude. There is a vaccine now, but I know we can't let our guard down. I never believed in COVID and thought it would never happen to me, but it did. Now more than ever I know I have to take care of myself and my loved ones.

Thank God I am getting help for my panic attacks and anxiety. I also know that I have my family by my side, and that motivates me. They are who keep me alive and safe so I can provide for them. I hope to go back to work soon and help my family get better, and I hope that people take care of themselves so things can get better with time. I want people to know that this is real and that they need to be careful. Time heals everything, and I know that with time we will get past this.

# REAL STORIES



## Sam

Asian male, 21 years old

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My name is Sam, I am currently a college student. The coronavirus pandemic affected my family and me in a very tough way. My parents own a small Chinese food restaurant and it has been extremely affected by the pandemic.

When the pandemic first started, and everything closed, our business decreased significantly.

The restaurant is our only source of income, so we were very affected financially.

My parents were the main cooks and I would help with taking care of the clients alongside another employee we had hired.

When things got bad due to the COVID, we were forced to shut down our dine-in service and we could only do pickups. We did not have too many clients because everybody was scared, so we had very, very few people coming in. Because of lack of clientele our income went lower than it had ever been before; soon, my parents realized that we were not going to be able to pay the other employee, so we had to let her go. We also had to cut down on several utilities and had to make sure our money would last.


In August of last year, my father, unfortunately, caught the virus. He isolated himself at home, so he could try to keep us safe, but we ended up all getting it. The virus didn't hit me too hard. I had a cough and the sniffles, but it wasn't of major concern. However, COVID affected my father the worse. He is 58 and had problems breathing. My mother and I were not as badly affected by the virus as my father. During our infection period, we had to close our business for over two weeks and waited while at least one of us recovered.

After we all quarantined my mother and I went back to take care of the business. When we came back, we noticed that we had hateful messages written on the walls outside the restaurant. I told my mom to ignore it and we painted right over them. We feared that more hateful people would go in and cause trouble, but we have been lucky that to this day we haven't had any major encounters with hateful people. People are on high alert against us, Asians, because of the virus and this has affected us emotionally. COVID not only caused fear in others, and in us, but it also added stress of losing our business and our source of income.

Our income was \$0.00 during the time that the restaurant was closed. We had to use the very little my parents had saved to be able to buy necessary things. During this time, I would take my laptop to work and do school work from there. We thought that after the infection period it would get better, but then my father began to have side effects because of COVID. He had problems breathing and was getting very fatigued quickly. He tried going back to work but he was only able to stand on his feet cooking for about 2 hours. He would get fatigued and because of the spices, he had even more trouble breathing. This is when my mother and I decided to have him stay home for his well-being and that we would run the business. I had to learn how to cook and help around the restaurant more than I ever had to do.

I was a full-time college student; it was very hard for me as a Math major to be able to work and go to school at the same time. But it was even harder when I saw myself forced to take a break from school so that I could fulfill my dad's role at the restaurant. This broke me. I was supposed to graduate in the spring of 2021, but this will be delayed because of our situation. My mother tells me to keep my head up. That this would only be temporary. My mother and I have been taking care of the business since October.

Since the reopening of outdoor dining, my mother and I have been busier than ever. It has been busy for the two of us alone, but our clients understand, and we are happy that we can have an income again. We are considering hiring someone very soon. My father is still recovering. He has gotten better but still gets very fatigued.



We are hoping that things will continue to be on the positive side, so our business can go back to what it was before, and I can go back to be a full-time student. It has been tough for us, but we know things will get better.

We hope people begin to realize that we as Asians have nothing to do with this virus and that we are humans just like everyone else.

We go through the same struggles and we want things to get better just like everyone does. I am hopeful, and I know things will improve for all of us. I hope my father can fully recover soon and things for us in the family can go back to normal.



# REAL STORIES



## Luis

Hispanic male, lost his 53 year old son

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My name is Luis, and because of COVID-19, I lost my son. He was 53 years old, a father of 3, and a grandfather. He was an excellent dad, son, brother, and friend. In September of 2020, he passed away due to complications caused by COVID-19. He began feeling sick on a Friday and decided to go to the hospital to ensure that everything was ok.

The next day he called me and told me that he had come out positive for the virus. On Tuesday he began to feel much worse, and after having the doctor see him he made the decision to be intubated because he could not breathe well. He was intubated for 2 weeks. His mother and I would be in contact with him nonstop to make sure that everything was ok. The day before he passed away, he had called us and told us that everything was better and that his lungs were looking better. However, the next day the doctors called us to tell us he had suffered a heart attack and even though they tried bringing him back they couldn't.

The loss of my son left us with pain like no other. He was a beloved man. Everyone that knew him loved him. Even though this

terrible tragedy happened, we know that he is in a better place and is looking after us.

Thanks to the immense support we received from our loved ones, we have been able to feel better. I always tell my family and clients that even after things like this happen we have to move forward because life for us continues. We have to learn how to live with the pain. We have to honor our lost ones the best way we can.

We have to be very careful and take care of our loved ones. Things like this can be avoided by complying with the protocols and wearing our masks. If we listen and follow instructions we can help end this pandemic. As a father who lost his son because of this virus, I want people to know that they need to be safe for themselves and for others because that is the only way we will all get through this.