**Interviewer: Yuchen Zhao**

**Interviewee: Lauren Roberston**

**Date of Interview: 04/18/2024**

**Location: UWM Children’s Center**

**List of Acronyms: L: Lauren, IN: Interviewer**

**File: 4.18.2024\_Childrens Center\_Lauren Robertson.WAV**

[Begin Transcript 00:00:16]

IN: So, could you tell me your name first?

L: Hi, I'm Lauren Robertson.

IN: And anything you want to say about yourself?

L: I am a faculty member here at UW Milwaukee. I teach design and visual communication. My students designed the Teach a Kid to Vote Challenge T-shirts and stickers. I helped design the booklet for it, and the children of the UWM Learning Center, the kindergarteners, they are the ones that provided the artwork.

IN: Ooh, sounds great, really interesting. What do you think was the most fun part of doing this?

L: Definitely working with the little kids. They are really excited. I got to learn all about what they wanted to vote for. Sandcastles, maps, candy. Lots of candy. I had a student who had just candy on their list of things that they want to vote for, and they once said fancy restaurants, which I agree, we need more fancy restaurants.

IN: Yeah, that's true. Yeah. And also, I noticed that there are certain elements on the booklet. So could you tell us more about that?

L: Yeah, so we included a bunch of things that are recognizable symbols, such as the I voted sticker, the ballot box, what it looks like to go voting with your parents. We also included some images of that. I remember being a kid and going voting with my parents. So it felt really reflective to see that represented.

IN: Yeah, I really like the idea of the stickers. It also kind of reflected the same process, right?

L: Yeah, I wish I could take credit for that. That was all Anne. She said what she wanted the stickers to be, and my students just, you know, ran with it. They all fell in love with doing this project. They really enjoyed having a project that was so important to our community and getting people engaged with voting, especially with the election happening in 201 days, now that I know that from our stickers.

IN: Great. Cool. So, let's talk a little bit about the trust of the voting system. So, if you think of the process of voting in the US, like, how would you say you are on the if there's a scale, like how would you put your numbers from zero to ten? 0 not trusting the voting process at all, to 10 with having complete trust. How would you put your numbers?

L: I'd probably say 7 out of 10. I think there's things that work really well, and I think that there are great policies that are being put in place to help make some of those things better. I think it's very difficult to vote, especially depending on the location that I've lived in. I've noticed that sometimes it takes 5 seconds to vote, sometimes it takes hours to go vote. And I would like to see more consistency across the board. That's why I'm not quite out of 10, but anything to do with the Electoral College makes it a little difficult to feel like my vote counts. But at the end of the day, when I see the infographic of how people are voting, it really feels like, ohh, I'm part of that. That one pixel is me, so yeah.

IN: So it's just a 7, right? So where do you expect the points to be?

L: I want it to be a 10. It would be great if it was a ten. I think with the Internet, we're slowly getting more and more accessible to voting. You know, my vote wi.gov is really great. Things like that make it easier for people to vote absentee. Make it easier for people to know what's on their ballot. There's a lot more transparency. Also, the candidates all have their websites. You can read what their beliefs are. You can read what bills they voted on. So I think we're getting there. I think it's just more making it more accessible. I think people have most of the resources they need. It's just a matter of making it easy to go to the polling places so we don't have these long 2-hour lines of people just trying to get their vote in. I think I'd also like to see election days be a holiday so that way we can have paid time off instead of, you know, having to take time out of our busy schedules to try and do it. I also think, you know, childcare could be free on those days. So that way people don't have to worry so much about having to take their child with them. I do think it's important if you can bring your children with you to let them see what voting looks like. But yeah, I think there's so many things. Transportation, having more free transportation to get people to the polls, having poll workers get all the resources they need to withstand that long day, so yeah.

IN: Sounds really good. Yeah, sounds like very practical measures that we can take.

L: Yeah. Ohh definitely.

IN: After this whole program, how do you see the importance of education in voting?

L:I think it’s huge, you know? So I teach juniors in graphic design, they're getting their undergraduate degrees right now and to see their views of voting versus the 4,5, 6-year-olds that we have talked to for the Teach a Kid to Vote Challenge, it's interesting to see kind of their perspectives on each angle of this. My juniors were so intrigued by the voting process, how we talk about voting, how we advertise about voting, how we market voting to people, how people market themselves to us. We also learned about ADA compliance, which is not talked about enough, especially with voting. Voting is a highly difficult thing to do. None of the ballots make any sense, especially from a graphic design standpoint. It drives us all nuts. We had a long conversation about that. We even had conversations about the “I Voted” sticker and what does that look like, and is it something that people actually want, or could there be something better that we could get out of it? And the kids, they were all super excited to talk about voting, I can see their passion and excitement around learning that they get to be represented. And you could tell that they all really liked feeling that their voice was important. And I hope that we can continue having them feel that way as they continue to grow up and one day be 18 and vote. I think a lot of them had 4000 odd days, so maybe 5000 for some of them. They're, they're a long way, but they'll get there, and I think starting young and teaching people about the importance of voting at an early age and seeing them talk about seeing their parents vote is important. So you can tell they're getting exposed to it one way or another. And we also talked about the different things that voting helps. They talked about loving their public parks, our beaches. Pools and after school activities they do, and understanding how voting establishes that. Even talking about this, this center that we're sitting in right now, is funded by voting. You know, we have to vote in order for our public institutions to be funded and for these programs to exist and for my paycheck to be paid.

IN: So it’s like an early way for them to learn about the concept.

L: Exactly. Yeah. And we talked about that. What's important to them and why you should vote because voting is what keeps those things funded, keeps those things important, lets people know that they're important to you.

IN: So do you have any p ersonal like stories, personal stories about your voting experiences?

L: Yeah. So, I remember when I turned 18, I voted in a small city election, I grew up just outside of Madison, and I remember going and being really excited, but I was also a little bit nervous because there were some candidates standing outside of the voting place and I was kind of a little intimidated by that. And then when I went inside, there were these wonderful poll workers that were these two retired women and they were all excited about it being my very first time to vote. They're like, we need special stickers for when it's your first time to vote. And I remember thinking that's so cool and just feeling so passionate about it and getting that sticker and feeling very much a part of our democratic process was amazing, and especially thinking about my family's history, I have family that descended from slavery and knowing that I get a chance to have something that my family only a couple generations before me didn't even get the right to do. It feels really empowering and I know that's one of the reasons my dad always likes to go in person. He likes that sticker. He likes that feeling of being there and a part of the process, and I wish I could be like that. But I'm kind of just like as long as I can get my ballot in every election, I'm happy. So.

IN: So did you go with your dad when you were young to vote?

L: Yes, my parents all have taken us, me and my siblings, to the polls whenever there's been an election. I remember as a kid, you're kind of impatient, and you're like, “I don't understand why we're here”, but we talked about it. And my parents also, you know, we're very open about how things get funded. My mom works for the Department of Health Services in downtown Madison, and a lot of our social programs are determined by the things that we vote for, so you know she is really pushing. She's like ohh, you know, the things that I'm helping people get, such as, you know, food share programs, it's all determined by us voting. She understood at a young age that importance and significance within voting because of my mom and her relationship to it, and then my dad also talking about, you know, our family history and saying, you know, even his grandfather wasn't able to vote. So, you know, finally having that is such a huge deal. I'm rambling.

IN: The atmosphere of your family sounds really great! Thanks! So anything else you want to add to this?

L: Make sure you vote in every election. They all matter. I just voted for this past one on April 2nd and I can't believe the number of things that were on that ballot, especially the referendum questions. Make sure you vote and you understand what the questions are saying because they make no sense when you read them! So do your research. Yeah. Thank you.