

My name: Catherine Barrett, Founder/Director of the Kindness Pandemic

My town: Melbourne, Australia

My experience of COVID19:

My mum and dad died during COVID19. That was so tough. It wasn't like any other family death I have experienced. The COVID19 restrictions made it such complex grief. When dad died he was in hospital in regional Victoria for two weeks with very limited visitors – and I was the city – and there were travel restrictions between the two. My sisters who were able to visit made video calls so I could speak to dad ... I am so grateful for that. Then dad was transferred to a residential aged care home which did not allow any visitors. That was tough. He died without us being there. I feel guilty still. He was confused and would have loved us to be there. I work as an advocate for older people in my day job and I wasn't able to make that happen for him. Then his funeral was limited to 10 people. We are a family of 50 with just his children, in-laws and grandchildren. We made the best of zoom funerals and wakes – but to be honest I missed the hugs and collective grieving.

Mum died 6 weeks later. She was a very beautiful woman who we adored. Oh so much sadness. She died 5 days after being diagnosed with secondary cancer. She seemed so at peace. A great comfort was that she was in St John of God Hospital in Ballarat, and they knew her and they really, really cared. It was also a comfort that she found peace. She was so peaceful in the end. Funerals were extended to 20 and burials to 50. It was such an honour to carry her coffin out of the church with my sisters to her favourite Irish lullaby called Tora Lora Lora. I hold that in my heart still.

But I also know I am fortunate. I have work. I have my health. I have friends and family. And I have love in my life. That is such a privileged position. I don't take any of that for granted.

An act of intersectional kindness I did:

On the 14th of March this year I set up the Kindness Pandemic – because I wanted to see more kindness in the world and because I was pretty anxious about what was happening. The next day there were 1000 members and within 2 weeks there were 570,000+ and we were one of the fastest growing Facebook groups in the world. Pretty shortly thereafter I realised its easy(ish) to do an act of kindness for someone we love. But there are some people who were marginalised (really doing it tough) before COVID19 and I really, really wanted us to reach out to them. I wanted us to change the world, not just during COVID19, but forever. That's what intersectional kindness is to me. Kindness for everyone. That's my act of intersectional kindness – to put this out there and say: lets create a better world, a kinder world, the world we all want to live in.

An act of Kindness that blows me away every day is the kindness of the Kindness Pandemic Project/Admin Team. This group of 12 volunteers have had their own rough rides during COVID19. Their own challenges. Their own jobs and families that need them – and every day they front up and admin for a group of over ½ million. They do it because they care. They do it because they are also committed to kindness for everyone. I could not have done this without them. I am so deeply grateful for their kindness.