

**My Name:** Claire Kingston

**My town:** Melbourne

### **My COVID experience**

I finished my nursing training last year, so this year was my graduate nursing year. I moved to Melbourne from regional Victoria and got accepted into a graduate program in an acute hospital. My first 6 months was on a COVID screening ward. This was confronting. I felt I didn't know what I was doing because it was my first-year nursing. But the senior staff struggled as well. We were being tested for COVID once a week or fortnight. But I had so much support. Everyone at the hospital was great.

I live with two nurses. One of them got COVID and went into hotel quarantine. She was ok in the end – but she got quite sick. She is such a strong & independent person but spending that time alone in the hotel gave her a lot of time to think and having the virus – which is so different for everyone – was pretty scary for her. She had chest pain and difficulty breathing at one point which would have been terrifying. I felt really sorry for her. I just wish she wasn't alone during this time.

My other house mate and I expected we would get it. We had to quarantine at home for two weeks. That was better than a hotel and easier because we did it together and had the support of each other. Everyone was so lovely – I was getting 20 phone calls a day. People were dropping off food and care packages. The messages were so great. As soon as people heard we were in quarantine they messaged us. We were both COVID negative – I don't know how, but what a relief.

On the screening ward about 25 of us were sent off work because we were close contacts of people with COVID or some had contracted the virus. Meaning the staff numbers were significantly down. That was the toughest time at work. But in some ways, I considered myself lucky because this was my first year nursing and I knew no different so I just got on with it.

We were getting care packages, food and letters dropped off to the hospital from the community. It was really special. The acknowledgement was important. The hardest part was walking in each day and not knowing what we were walking in to. Things were changing constantly. We had to don full PPE, face shields, N95 masks, gown, gloves – and as a result I had really bad pressure injuries on my face from the masks. Then I got moved to another ward. The numbers were coming down. Things started getting better.

The ring of steel was horrible – that meant people couldn't travel from Melbourne to the country. Not being able to see family and friends was tough. My sister lives in the UK and I lost two grandparents. I would have loved to have been around family during this time. Living with two other graduate nurses has saved me. We were all in the same position and just understood each other. I'm so thankful for these girls.

### **My act of intersectional kindness**

I had the best Nurse Unit Manager, she worked ridiculous hours for everyone. She would do anything for us nurses. She was genuinely concerned for all of us and remained so positive and supportive through it all. She was pregnant with her first baby – I could not believe how strong & selfless she was. I'll be forever grateful for what she did for us nurses.