

My Name: Jacqui

My Town: Surf Coast

My COVID19 Experience:

My husband and I have 3 sons and we are both secondary school teachers. 2020 has definitely been a big year for us all. Our boys were amazing. The eldest started secondary school this year and the younger ones are in primary school. During the harshest times, COVID for them meant all sport cancelled, homeschooling, no friends and not getting to see our extended family either. For Steve and I it also meant teaching from home. The first few weeks were a whirlwind, but we kept reminding each other how lucky we were. We were safe and well. We worked for an amazing school. Our kids had supportive teachers. We had so many privileges. The first lockdown was difficult as we tried to set up workable routines and work out reasonable expectations for ourselves, our kids and our students. Some days we nailed it, other days were pretty rough. As teachers, we always worry about our students, but this was next level! We tried to provide stability and a sense of routine for students when we ourselves had so much uncertainty. My colleagues were phenomenal. The school experimented with different ways of supporting staff and our leadership took the wellbeing of staff seriously. There was gentleness and kindness everywhere. The relationships we built with other staff grew stronger and stronger. They did with our students too. We got to know them outside of the school walls (I really loved seeing the incredible art they hang in their rooms.) We saw siblings and dogs and students increased their confidence in asking for help - a big win. The days were very long and it was hard to shut off - the computer and the brain!

One thing that helped me was my daily 6am walk. We (like so many others) added a 4-legged member of the family, so Sparkie, our kelpie kept me on my daily walk routine (he still wakes me at 5:45am for a walk). Sometimes I was home before the sunrise, other times I watched the dawn breaking across the ocean. This 'alone time' was very important in a full and chaotic house. We also have a family gratefulness practice which we continued throughout - each member of the family sharing at least one thing they were grateful for as we ate dinner. Sometimes the 'gratefuls' were hard to find. One day we were all just grateful that everyone managed to attend all their zoom meetings without any internet glitches. But sometimes it was things like eating lunch in the garden sunshine or participating in a primary music lesson with my sons. It was simple pleasures that we focused on.

An Act of Intersectional Kindness

I saw this heading and was reminded of the sense of hopelessness I felt at times this year, especially during lockdown. I often felt like I didn't have the mental space or time to do more of anything. I felt a need to narrow my focus - it came down to 3 things - my mental health, my family and my students. I initially felt like I was being selfish as narrowing my focus doesn't come naturally. I noticed that so many people were doing so many amazing things in the community and I felt ashamed that I just couldn't contribute. But, I also noticed the people who were continuing to ensure our lives functioned - supermarket workers, garbage truck drivers, police and of course health care workers. Everyone was doing their bit, the thing they did well to keep things running. What is the thing I do to keep things running? I teach. At a time when we all needed to focus on the important stuff - supporting my students was my priority and my way of keeping things functioning. The struggles of my students were varied and every family has a story. Doing my bit meant being an ear to listen or a shoulder to cry on (COVID- style obviously) or a motivator or an organiser or simply a regular, calming face on their screens. I am grateful for the simple things that people have done to keep the world turning and I am proud that I was able to be part of that for young people in my community.