

**My name:** Ro Allen, Commissioner for LGBTIQ Victorians

**My town:** Melbourne

### **My Covid experience**

This was a difficult year for a lot of people. For many LGBTIQ Victorians, connection to LGBTIQ community matters – its where people feel valued and safe. Lockdown presented challenges to feeling connected, and we had to work around those. So many members of our community stepped up and helped each other. One example was Switchboard Victoria, who upgraded their systems to support LGBTIQ community and provided care packages for isolated older LGBTI people. The packages were important because many of our older people felt isolated. I've seen photos of the care packages being delivered and received letters from grateful recipients about how much it meant to them. I cried every time I read a letter. This is community.

Another great example was Drummond Street Services, who delivered food parcels to people who needed them. I saw photos of Karen and Ron delivering food relief. Thorne Harbour Health did this as well. These food parcels were a direct, hands on message to our community that we love you and we care about you. The volunteers put themselves at risk of Coronavirus by going out and deliver food to our community members who needed it.

There were also people offering to shop for each other – helping each other to get through what was such a difficult time. And there was the Kindness Pandemic – the intergenerational fairy tales and #QueerStrong stories were extraordinarily powerful.

For me personally, Covid19 was stressful and unpredictable at times. Working from home required some careful adjustments. I deal with some complex issues in my role and when I leave the office, I can generally leave them behind. It was harder to set up clear boundaries at home. I learned to take the dog for a walk when I had to have particularly difficult conversations. I need to demonstrate the health promoting behaviours that I encourage my community to adopt.

We worked hard to continue promoting LGBTIQ equality during COVID19. We progressed a whole of Government LGBTIQ Strategy on zoom. We also got a Conversion Bill passed in the lower house. That was a big achievement during a global pandemic. There are members of the general public who can't believe that so called 'conversion' practices are still legal or practiced. The Bill didn't just drop into parliament, it came with a lot of blood, sweat and tears. Raising the issue of LGBTIQ 'conversion' practices came at a cost – but was the right thing to do. Survivors shared their stories and that was painful. It's not just the Government making change – it's the whole community. We got to hear each other's experiences and realise we were not the only ones. That was a brave thing to do during a global pandemic.

I want to thank all the LGBTIQ community members who rallied to support each other during COVID19. Over the past 5 years in my role I have seen how much we have achieved and I am honoured to be on this journey with you. To all LGBTIQ Victorians and to our LGBTIQ allies – thankyou for all your support and please get some rest over the end of year break – because we need your support in 2021.