

Our Names: Andrew Nuske and Alicia Kay

Our Town: Daylesford

Our COVID19 experience.

We are a very small funeral director and in the first stages we thought we could not do this, especially when we looked at the increase of deaths in many countries overseas. I spent a fortune on getting extra coffins and PPE equipment so that we could cope with it in the best and safest way we could. But it was still a very scary thought.

Many new measures were put into place that we never would have thought of. For example - If we had staff who had been in contact with someone who had died with Covid they then weren't allowed to go into a nursing home that had no other cases to collect a body due to this contact. And, thankfully even though we were fully prepared we haven't had any cases.

To come into people's lives after a death at such difficult time, it is a privilege and hard enough at the best of times but Covid took it to another level.

How do we justify having a funeral with just 10 people - one family who had 8 kids, not including partners, children and grandchild couldn't even have all the family there. It was so difficult. There were also a few families that under normal conditions would have had 300-400 people at their loved one's funeral – Imaging the pressure to just pick 10 who could attend! At first there was some initial pressure for extra people to be able to come to the service but once we explained to people that anyone could watch online and count the people in the room leading to possible get fines of \$10000 if we were over. They soon kept it to the nominated amount. We all wanted to do the right thing!

Thankfully modern technology has come along way. As most of the music events had been cancelled in the area, we were able to engage these IT/ Audio tech guys to help us out to live stream our funerals – they were so happy to have the work and we were happy to have them on board. We also did some fast training in live streaming and are also now experts.

We made it work and extended family members and friends were able to view the services online.

We always try and make our services personal and individual, and funerals during this time were actually really beautiful funeral because they were so intimate as people thought “outside the square” – we had a one funeral under a gazebo in a park, and another in the family's own backyard. I think the families appreciated it a lot more. The people who were lucky enough to get an invite to able to attend were there as they were so very special to the person who died. And those watching the live stream were encouraged to feel they were a part of the service with feedback and commenting online as the service was happening, often sending virtual love and kisses. All these were passed back to the family and they were all so appreciative.

For us it was about managing people expectations and to be able to give people the opportunity to grieve. This is an important part of the healing process. One of the first things I had to say to people is you can't hug each other, and to remember to socially distance. It is amazing the power of a hug! that hug of love, of comfort, of sympathy, of “I know what you're going through”, and of thankyou were all sadly missed. I would often say to people that I was giving them a big virtual hug but ...it's not quite the same.

When masks became compulsory this added another new dimension of difficulty. To be able to read people's facial reactions is a big part of our job – We gauge their emotions via facial expressions

when words often are not forthcoming. Sometimes it's the words that go unsaid that are the most powerful at such a sad time. It did make me realized how much we talk with our eyes.

Thankfully everyone was very respectful to the situation, they understood that the restrictions where in place for their safety as well as that of other. They knew it wasn't our fault that they couldn't have had bigger funerals and were grateful to be able to have what they could within the guidelines. Sometimes they even would hold off a week or two on having the service just to be able to get a few more to be able to come to the actual service.

At the start we were recommending to people to cremate or bury their loved one first and then to do something bigger later. It became clearer that this wasn't going to work. As much as a lot of families have said they may do something bigger with more people later - They needed to grieve and have closure at the time of death. It gives them license to breathe in knowing their loved one has been put to rest.

To be able to help our families to do this during this tough time has been a great privilege and we have had a lot of beautiful feedback from them for the caring way we have supported them though this difficult time.

Act of kindness – This post was based on someone else's act of kindness – One of the families we did a funeral for recommended us to the Director of the Kindness Pandemic for our kind caring and support during their mother's funeral. To know that we have been a great support to them to make this time easier is a great privilege. We feel so proud and honoured to be asked to come into the lives of people during such a difficult time.

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