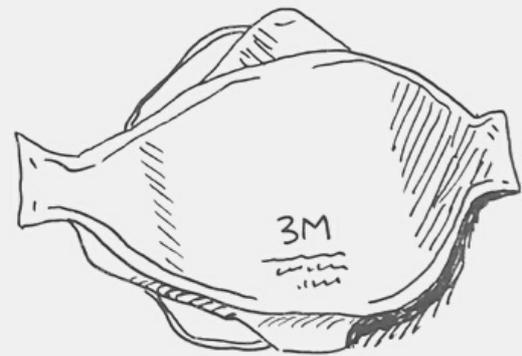
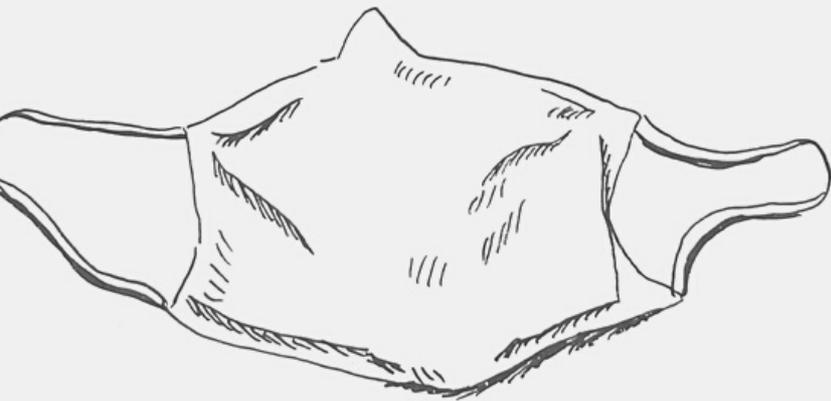
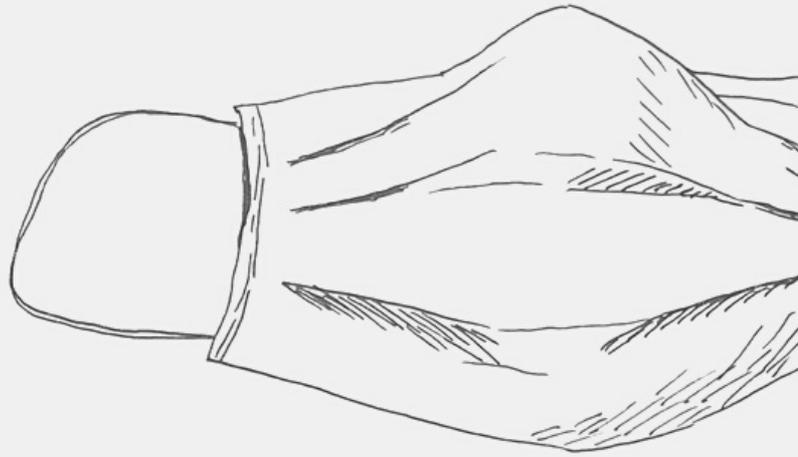


CENTERING OUR VOICES

LIVING WITH A COMPROMISE IMMUNE
SYSTEM THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



KAREN

DUNOLLY RESIDENT

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My name is Karen, I'm 60 years old and I live in a rural aspect five k's outside of Dunolly with my partner. I have rheumatoid arthritis as well as being recently diagnosed with latent tuberculosis. I don't work - I don't think I'd be able to get a job due to my health problems.

My health situation actually commenced when I was diagnosed with a brain tumour, which on reflection I probably had for over eight years but had been missed by the GP's that I'd been seeing at that time. Due to the trauma of the surgery for the removal of the brain tumour, had such an effect on my body that I developed the rheumatoid arthritis after that. That was in 2018. I finally managed to see a rheumatologist in November of that year, although I had been told I couldn't get an appointment until July of 2019, but I kicked and made a fuss and eventually got to see her in November. She's actually a rheumatologist that is based in Wangaratta and comes down to Bendigo every three months from what I can gather.

I then went on to steroids and methotrexate and have been on those two since 2018. The rheumatologist recently had wanted me to go on to what they call Biologics. To do so you have to be tested for hepatitis B and C as well as tuberculosis, so I did those tests in February and it was then that I learned that I have latent tuberculosis. It was quite a shock for me during that appointment. She didn't really elaborate where we go from, from there, and as I said I was in shock so I didn't really have any questions that I now do have. But she then determined that I didn't need another appointment til September, some six months later, so I won't be able to have any of my questions answered until that time, and I really don't know what sort of program she plans on putting me on. If nothing else I need to get off these steroids, cos they've caused me to put on over twenty kilograms in weight, as well as mood changes and a lot of other ill effects that they have.

Our local GP here in Dunolly who I've been seeing, he's gone. I don't know what that means and they haven't elaborated on Facebook but he's not available for four weeks. They have no one there this week but after that they've got another guy coming in for two weeks, until the local guy gets back I presume. I know with the Maryborough GP's unless you're a patient at one clinic already, you can't see a doctor there at all, they will not give you an appointment. I know previous to my brain tumour stuff, if you tried to get an appointment you'd be looking at a month.

When the pandemic commenced, I didn't want to go near Astra Zeneca so I awaited the availability of Pfizer. I had the two Pfizer injections and the effect wasn't too bad, I got a bit of a filthy headache but I then had the Moderna as the third booster shot and that didn't go down too well. I woke up in the middle of the night with pains throughout all my joints, but it was gone by the morning, so I don't really want to go back to Moderna. I haven't had the fourth booster, I've been trying to book online but there's nothing available at the local pharmacy in Maryborough. I was going to contact the doctor here but because Pfizer is a fridge product, I'm not sure if anyone will stock it. So I haven't had my fourth booster yet which is a concern.

I wear a mask everywhere I go, that's if I go anywhere. I tend to just isolate at home now. I organise Woolworths food deliveries so I can avoid the supermarket, but yeah I just basically spend my day at home and don't really go anywhere much.

I've had a bad reaction to the brain tumour. I suffer from bad anxiety about leaving home, so when the pandemic hit, it didn't really change the way I was living because I was staying at home anyway. My only real concern is actually catching the thing, and that fear is even stronger now since I've learned that I have this latent tuberculosis. I certainly don't want that to go full-blown and end up with tuberculosis as well as Covid.

I definitely feel safer just staying at home and in particular because of my medical conditions. I don't want to take on Covid, or even this nasty flu that's going on! Even before in 2018 I wasn't allowed to drive for six months after the brain tumour and I just isolated myself here at home and it became a habit and it's still a habit. I feel very anxious if I have to leave.

A lot of restaurants are complaining that nobody wants to come out, and there's no crowds at the football, but people are just too afraid to get out and about anymore.

I think the government has in the past done a good job. I think the isolation that they insisted on and the stay at home orders were well deserved, but now the majority of the requirements including mask wearing are all going out the window, even though you have the medical profession saying that they still should be worn so they're now putting it out there that ok it's a free for all with little or no care for the consequences of that. I certainly feel very strongly for the health care workers having to put up with this type of attitude that is now prevalent out there.

.I still wear a mask myself. My partner also still wears a mask when he's in close quarters. He's very supportive, he's been fabulous – he is fabulous.

The vision for the future and my current life is basically to continue as I am. I've looked at the possibility of doing some volunteer work, but again that would mean socialising or being with other people and I don't know that I have trust where other people are concerned. There's people out there who really don't care whether they pass on flu or Covid or whatever, and in this day and age they certainly should be caring. I don't think I'll be ever employable again. The rheumatoid arthritis stigmatises me, so I don't think there's any use in me trying to go for a job as such, and I don't think that I would want to. I think the majority of office environments which is where I spent the bulk of my employment is obviously run with environmental air conditioners and all sorts of things. I think they're just breeders of diseases themselves, so I don't know that I'd want to be in that environment ever again. I'll just stay at home.

When they've seen how successful working from home has been and how productivity has gone up when people have worked at home, but of course once again big business sticks its head in and you have all those office buildings in Melbourne going vacant, and you have the transport system not making any profit. People aren't utilising being in the office or using transport to get there. Big business is making a hoo hah about it and forcing people to return to their places of employment.

I've always been quite an isolated person anyway. I have a very enriching friendship with a girl that I've known since my early 20's. She actually lives down at Portland, so we do a lot of FaceTiming, usually every day. That's mainly how I keep in contact with her. As well as other long term friends – one in Melbourne, one down near Wonthaggi, but actually going to see and visit people, that's happening fewer and far between these days. I'm quite satisfied with the amount of friendship and relationships I have in my life.

I would love to see an increase in the “care factor” of the human race. We're a selfish bunch of human beings I suppose, and it's always the “me factor” that seems to drive our society. There's the attitude of “why do I need to wear a mask?” How I see it is “I should care about that health care worker that has to put up with those who are knocking on the emergency door because they're crook”. What is the big deal with putting a mask on your face, if only to care for your fellow human beings? And in particular take the load off the health care system.

The joys in my life are my relationship with my partner, my life circumstance here in a small house on acreage. I have my birds - I feed the local birds, I have my pussycat and he's the sweetest little thing and a joy in my life. I think the greatest joy is just the environment which I live in. The beautiful trees and the landscape and it's very calming, and the old man of course.