

SUPPORTING & PROTECTING

Our online Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) initiative was a huge relief for Ricky who is confined to her bed and unable to leave her home.



My name is Ricky. I'm a middle-aged, bedridden and homebound person living in Melbourne with a flatmate and my cat Vesper. I live in public housing. I have been bedridden for 20 years with a couple of years in the middle when I could sometimes go out in a power wheelchair.

My flatmate is wonderful - I always say he brings the world in and makes my life bigger. I can't go out so he comes home and he tells me what is different because of coronavirus, no toilet paper on shelves and all the interesting stuff, and also just comes home and says how was my day and wants to know what I did or who I was chatting to.

It lessens the feeling of isolation. If I didn't have a flatmate then pretty much everyone I talk to is paid to be around me - I feel nobody would want to be with me, it's not good for mental health. I lived on my own for a lot of years before I had a flatmate. It was the worst feeling.

How did you feel when the COVID-19 pandemic first began to have an impact in Australia?

Scared, like everyone I guess, it was so unknown and different. I didn't really know how it would affect me - but I knew it would affect me differently to everyone else. Staying home was a big part of the fight so that wouldn't affect me - but I was worried at first that I couldn't have my support workers. It was very unclear at first - because disability isn't the first thing the government thinks of, they weren't very clear in communicating about what was going to happen.

But it was also very exciting because a lot of things not usually available online suddenly were all there - a Melbourne Symphony Orchestra concert, GP appointments, film festivals, Broadway concerts, all sorts of that stuff that used to only be available online if you could pay a lot.

It is a big area of advocacy I have been doing for years and years to try and get access to online GP appointments for people who are bedridden or homebound - it doesn't matter if my GP is just down the block or on Mars, it is just difficult for me to get there. I really hope that stays.

How has the pandemic affected you?

At first I did way too much because there were all these things to do that I couldn't do before - the first time I watched the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra I couldn't really enjoy it, I lay in bed and cried because for 20 years I couldn't go. I used to go with my Mum when I was a kid, I used to play flute, I nearly went to the Melbourne College of Arts for flute, I was pretty serious.

It was so overwhelming to suddenly have this access and I just wanted to do everything, I was afraid that this pandemic would come to an end and all these things that were accessible weren't going to stay accessible. I hope some will stay but you don't know which things will go away so it's not a good recipe for pacing myself. I felt like someone who has been starved for 20 years and then sat down in an all-you-can-eat buffet - I made myself quite ill by doing so much, plus the stress and anxiety of being in a pandemic didn't help.

Have our Connect and Support/Outreach services been helpful for you?

Yes, it's very reassuring that if anything goes really wrong that there would be someone that would already know my situation. When I call someone when something goes wrong it's so hard to explain - people don't understand what bedridden and homebound means. It's not like you can ring up and say I use a wheelchair and mostly people sort of know what you mean, but even people at the NDIS don't understand what bedridden means, which always boggles me because I think it's perfectly obvious. The NDIS told me to take my bed to a class when they denied me funding for art classes!

It's reassuring knowing that I have someone just checking and making sure I'm ok because it's pretty lonely as I run everything for myself - every so often I feel like I'd like an adult in the room seeing if I was ok - you were sort of like the grown up so it was nice.

How did you hear about the PPE online stores and were you able to easily source PPE before the stores came online?

Social media probably. I was unable to source masks, they were hardest to find. I didn't think it was really possible so I didn't try very hard before I saw your site. It was a huge relief. I didn't want to order stuff from places that I hadn't heard of and the places that I usually get PPE didn't have any. So, coming up with the Summer Foundation one I was like 'oh this is what I do'.

It was great - first time I must have hit something wrong, but the second time it worked fine. Just a few days ago I re-ordered the same stuff - so much easier. I didn't have to wander through the site or set up my account again. And it was super-fast - it was here either the next day or day after that. It was way faster than I expected, it's amazing.

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