

Dear fellow Tasmanians,

Let's be honest, 2020 so far has been a rough year. The global pandemic has created unprecedented and at times overwhelming challenges. Our plans have been put on hold. Our livelihoods threatened. Our sense of safety and security has been compromised, replaced by uncertainty. Our social and emotional connections interrupted. Definitely not the year we had been looking forward to or expecting.

Just like you, I too have experienced my own rollercoaster of emotions as my world was turned upside down. My husband was stood down from his job in an industry he loved; our daughter in her final year of school went to a whole different level of worry about exams and her plans for next year; our 15 year old son was less than thrilled by having to learn from home and not being able to play sport; and with the borders closed, plans to pack up my sister's house in Adelaide following her passing in early March have been put on hold indefinitely.

It's been months of missing hugs and handshakes and my interstate family, and just generally worrying about everything – from my immediate family, to my team at work, to the whole world!

But if there's one thing I've learned so far, it's that I am not alone. Not alone in feeling worried, frustrated, angry, scared, sad, overwhelmed and a lot of the time, just "over it". We are all feeling this. You can see it in the eyes of your friends and family, your colleagues, the stranger in the supermarket.

While it's meant different things to each of us and your experience through this year has been unique to you, you can bet that for every time you've felt like this, there's been someone else feeling the same way. We may not all be in the exact same boat, but we're all bobbing around together in the same ocean of uncertainty.

Despite this, you have shown incredible strength and resilience and have always managed to find hope. The selflessness and care you have shown to keep your community healthy and happy has been a truly inspiring demonstration of what it means to be Tasmanian. And while you may have already written the year off and are holding out for 2021, it's important you don't overlook all the incredible things you have achieved despite the adversity.

Mental Health Week (5-10 October) kicks off next week and the theme this year is 'We all have a role to play'. This theme carries over from last year, but is more meaningful than ever, given the unexpected turn that 2020 has taken. It is an opportunity to reflect on your mental health and wellbeing and celebrate our collective resilience.

'We all have a role to play' speaks not only to the things you CAN do every day to help look after your mental wellbeing, but more importantly, it celebrates all the things you HAVE done this year, and continue to do each day, to ensure the health and happiness of all Tasmanians.

You have found new and innovative ways to stay connected with friends and family, adapted to new ways of working, while also juggling home schooling. You have reached out to vulnerable community members to check in and to offer assistance. You may have baked, gardened, learnt to play an instrument, watched all of Netflix, or found a new appreciation for a daily walk. For some, you have used the extra free time to unwind and escape from everything that's going on, and that's fantastic too!

Whether you've done these things to cope or to escape, you've also been looking after your mental wellbeing.

If someone was to ask me what I've got out of the last 6 months, one thing I'd say is a newfound appreciation for our ability as humans to adapt and overcome, and I believe that not only will we get through this together, we will learn and grow from it as people and as communities. It might be difficult to see right now, but I truly believe there will be many good things that will come from this time.

Mental Health Week is an opportunity for us to reconnect with our community – the communities that we've worked so hard this year to protect. With lots of fun and informative events happening right across the state and online, we encourage you all to get involved. Head to www.mhct.org/mentalhealthweek/program to find an event near you.

This year has shown that we are stronger and more resilient than we have given ourselves credit for. We have adapted. We have endured. We have made sacrifices to help keep our families and communities safe, happy and healthy. We still have a way to go, but we will get through this together.

You've got this, Tasmania.

Sincerely,



Connie Digolis
Mental Health Council of Tasmania CEO

