

The Pandemic From Across The Border



the elul project

Reading the contributions for the Elul Project so far, I feel very fortunate living in Queensland. We have emerged from the very restrictive regulations in July, so albeit with a great deal of regulation, we have resumed going to shule and carrying on our lives in as normal a way as possible.

The difference between our experience and that of other states has led me to reflect on my life at the moment. My children are grown, and I am working only part time as a tutor in at the University of Queensland Medical school, so I now have the time and energy to give back to my community – the Jewish community of Brisbane.

Living in a small Jewish community has offered me the opportunity to feel I make a difference for the community and also it gives me a sense of achievement. My role models are my parents, especially my father Lance Phillips, always supported by my mother Jill. Dad started communal roles in his early 20's just after he was married to Mum. Eventually Dad received an OAM for his services to the Brisbane Jewish Community. He was involved in many different facets of our local community, but died suddenly in 1994 at the age of 59, leaving many unfinished goals.

Over the past 5 years I have had the opportunity to step in and follow on from his amazing legacy. I am sure I will never get to such heights as he did but I can only try!!!!

So like Dad, these days, I am wearing many hats as do many others in such a small community as we are in Brisbane.

The Brisbane Hebrew Congregation ("Margaret Street shule") is my passion. I am currently Treasurer, tour and baking coordinator.

Our beautiful 134 year old heritage Synagogue is one of the oldest in Australia. I had my Batmitzvah there, my parents and grandparents were married there, and it has been the site of many family simchas. The shule is full of wonderful memories for me and many other people.

One of the positive outcomes of the COVID closures is that we have been able to do some restoration and cleaning, and our beautiful shule is sparkling and ready for the Chagim. Our shule has not only been rejuvenated physically, though – the community is actively increasing the involvement of women in the community and the new renovations reflect this in an expanded area for women downstairs.

Just before COVID hit, we had a new board with new ideas. We have held focus groups of men, women and younger members. We are struggling with falling attendance and hoped we would be able to act on these groups to rejuvenate our community. COVID has made people realise how important community is, and so we now find ourselves in a community with a really positive energy, that we can continue to work on.

We now have a Sunday Morning Cooking Club, and a group of men and women baking for Kiddushim. There will hopefully be many more new ideas and programs to come.

I am very proud of the huge work of our forefathers to keep this small community well-resourced and hope that my efforts will help sustain these resources for many years to come.

My involvement in my local Jewish communal organisations has enriched my life, and I hope that this rejuvenation of our community, and the realisation of the importance of being connected to each other, will mean others' lives will be enriched similarly. Hopefully we can use this new inspiration and energy to continue to evolve, develop and to grow.

L'Shana Tova to you and your families.



DR LEAH PHILLIPS

Dr Leah Phillips was born, raised and lives in the Brisbane community. She is a General Medical Practitioner now tutoring in Medicine at University of Queensland. She is currently Treasurer of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, Property Officer with the Brisbane Chevra Kadisha, a committee member of the Jewish Communal Centre retirement and an NCJW (Qld) committee member of the Brisbane section. She has grown children, a daughter and 2 sons.

ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.

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