

## **Jenene Crossan joins COVID-19 study**

At the beginning of 2020, Kiwi tech entrepreneur Jenene Crossan (Ngāi Tahu) contracted COVID-19 when she was in London. It wasn't until she returned home to Auckland in March 2020 that she tested positive—the 37th case in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Jenene has signed up to participate in the “Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona” study, and is one of four people who has had COVID-19 advising the research team.

This is her story in her own words.

“Many know my story, as I was a COVID patient early on in the pandemic, having contracted it in March 2020 somewhere in London, then travelled home unaware. I soon found myself sick, jet lagged, anxious, lonely, scared, COVID positive and then in an isolation ward in hospital—as patient #37 in Aotearoa.

Having shared the scary news with my friends on Instagram, I quickly became headline news and suddenly everyone knew that I had COVID and my life changed forever. I had never experienced online bullying before, and it even came from people who I would have previously called ‘friends’—the virus has brought out the worst in some people.

But I knew how important it was to share the story, to make people aware of what was coming, that it could happen to them too. Over the last two years, many people have told me that it helped them see that it wasn't just going to impact the ‘elderly and vulnerable’, that it could hurt anyone.

Even when telling the story has been difficult, I have vowed to keep going and I have been involved in the research side as well—raising funds, helping on the study development and being an advocate has made me feel useful in challenging times.

Unfortunately, I became one of the estimated 37 percent of people who develop Long COVID, where symptoms last many months or even years, affecting multiple systems and producing a constellation of symptoms. It has changed my life entirely and nearly two years later, I still have ongoing issues that I likely will have to live with forever.

There are a lot of us now, and we have a support group that helps people connect with resources and to others going through similar things. That has been such a vital part in my recovery—being part of a network of empathetic people.

The more we come together to understand the impacts of the virus on our people, the better we can serve and protect our tamariki and whānau. The more of us who speak up means we can drown out the naysayers and ensure that we are able to enjoy our freedoms and protect our health system ongoing. It may not be comfortable, but it is the right thing to do and I hope it is rewarding for those who bravely step up.”

### **About the study**

The “Impacts of COVID-19 in Aotearoa—Ngā Kawekawe o Mate Korona” study aims to understand the experiences of people who have had COVID-19. Researchers want to know about the impact COVID-19 has had on the health and well-being of these individuals and their whānau.

If you're aged 16 and over, and had COVID-19 before 1 December 2021, you're invited to take part in the study by completing the surveys at <https://covid.aotearoa.com>. Alternatively, you can call **0800 800 581** or email [covid.aotearoa@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:covid.aotearoa@vuw.ac.nz).

The study is led by Dr Lynne Russell (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou) and Dr Mona Jeffreys at Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora—Health Services Research Centre at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

They head-up a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, primarily from Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora—Health Services Research Centre. Dr Marianna Churchward (Lotofaga, Faleasiu, Samoa) leads the Pacific arm of the research.

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