



Reflections & Inspiration of 2020



The challenges of 2020 have touched every part of our society, testing all of us in a way we could not have previously imagined. Public service leaders carry a duty to deal with these complex and uncertain situations, to inspire and motivate those around them and to appear calm and in control, all while managing their own emotions and actions.

Throughout the pandemic, CEF sought to provide sources of support to our members to help build their resilience for the challenges they faced. **Dr Petra Corr, Cora Robinson, Michael Dunlop and Professor Siobhan O'Neill** all contributed to this effort and we are deeply indebted to each of them for their support.



For our Christmas 2020 message, we asked our members how and where they found the inspiration and resilience to get them through this year. We hope you enjoy this collection and many thanks to all those who shared their reflections with us...



Prof Siobhan O'Neill

NI Mental Health Champion

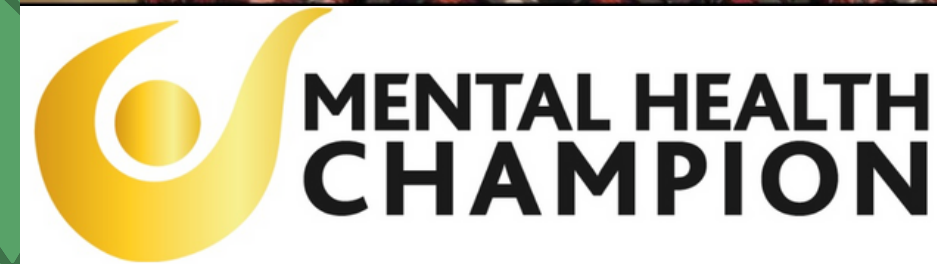
2020 has been a very tough year and there were many periods of darkness where I was consumed with fear about the virus and what it would do to me, my family, my community and this place that I call home, Northern Ireland.

However, I am inspired every day by the incredible fortitude and resilience of the people here. The thing that has kept me going is witnessing the community and voluntary groups, and health care workers who mobilised under the most difficult of circumstances to ensure that people had health care, food, shelter and a listening ear.

I learnt so much this year from people with lived experience of isolation, mental illness and suffering. I met prisoners, family carers, people with chronic illness and people living with loss and trauma. Their courage and resilience is an example to those of us for whom the pandemic was our first real experience of life changing and life limiting isolation and threat.

I'm inspired by the campaigners and activists who have dedicated their lives to alleviating illness and inequality. I have also learnt so much from the children, they have lost so much and their voices have rarely been heard. My daughter Annabel gets me through every single day, from her joy at seeing a sprinkle of snow, to her love of chocolate, and the way that she knows exactly when a hug is needed.

The pandemic has been a reminder that I have so much to learn, and also unlearn.



Anne Donaghy OBE

Chief Executive, Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

I always say I have two jobs in life – I am a Chief Executive, but firstly I am a mummy to two beautiful children – John (12) and Andrea, who is 8 and lives with Down's Syndrome.

Family is everything to me, and as a Chief Executive I am committed to ensuring our Council provides the wraparound support network our team needs for a strong family life and positive work-life balance.

Over the past nine months, I have drawn real strength from having more time with my family. Simple things that may otherwise have easily been taken for granted before, have given me such a huge lift - having dinner with my children every evening, kissing them goodbye in the morning, and welcoming them home from school in the afternoons.

I try to take a few moments during lunch, or at the end of the day, to listen to my hero Dolly Parton to give my mind a lift and a brief distraction from the pressures we are all under. Dolly has always been my role model – she is a strong, loving, hugely talented and entrepreneurial woman. I've adored her and her music for decades, and she continues to give me energy every day. As Dolly puts it: *"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."*

Another song has also been really important to me in 2020 is by Philomena Begley and Derek Ryan called *'It Won't Rain Forever'*. That is a message we can all really identify with, and a sentiment that holds so true at this time.

During these darkest of times, it is so important for all of us to stay strong, to cherish the small things in life, remain hopeful and to take care of ourselves and each other.

Better days are coming, so let's ignore the rain as best we can, and keep looking for those rainbows.





Chief Constable Simon Byrne

A song entitled '**Hope**' by an artist 'Daughter' has helped to lift my soul on some of the more challenging days, particularly in recent months.

Jenny Pyper

Interim Head of the NI Civil Service



As with many other folk the main (only ?) beneficiary of lockdown and working from home has been the dog! Much of my routine has been driven by the opportunity for early morning or lunchtime walks and, as well as the fresh air and exercise, the encounters with other dog walkers (socially distanced for the humans if not for the canines) has helped with a sense of community and normality.

Therapy from being chained to the screen and suffering back to back Zoom meetings has, for me, come in the form of yoga coupled with timeout for meditation or deep breathing. I suspect that I will need to keep this going in my new role as interim Head of the NICS!

And I've also rediscovered my inner Nigella, as having my daughter back at home created an increased demand for home baking and quick tasty meals – decadent rocky roads and crispy squid with garlic mayo anyone?

I'm trying now to reflect on 2020 and learn the lessons of tenacity, resilience and agility which so many people have shown, not only in the NICS, but right across society. And also, especially at Christmas time, to remember the impact of the pandemic on those who are most vulnerable and maybe don't have access to the sort of coping strategies that I and others have used.

The crisis for them may endure longer than for the rest of us and we must do better for them in 2021.





Shane Devlin

Chief Executive, Southern Health & Social Care Trust

I take great comfort in this poem and it is so true at the moment. About ten years ago I met a man called David Whyte, who is an organisational development poet. He shared the poem by David Wagoner called **Lost**.

Whenever I feel that the pressure is too much I re-read this poem. In summary for me the poem simply says that wherever you find yourself is an opportunity to stretch and learn new things. Every difficult situation teaches you something that you will come back to at some point into the future.

Lost by David Wagoner

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

Brenda King

Attorney General for NI

Over the Years by *Hanny Michaelis*

Over the years
A great deal has to be thrown out.
The notion, for instance,
That happiness is mild and enduring,
Something like a southern climate
Instead of a bolt of lightning
That leaves scars
Cherished a lifetime.



Tracy Meharg

Permanent Secretary, Department of Communities

Despite the challenges of the last year for me the key to resilience has been to focus on the positive things that I have seen.

In particular I have been inspired and overwhelmed by the pride and energy of the people working in the Department for Communities to ensure that they deliver vital services and support to people.

I have seen collaboration and innovation in delivering within timeframes which I never would have thought possible. This dedication and commitment has kept my own energy levels up whenever things have been tough.



Mairead McCafferty

Chief Executive, NICCY



Focusing on what gives me energy, inspires and motivates me has helped greatly during this extraordinary and difficult period.

I have rediscovered my love of poetry and taken time to actually 'take time out' to revisit and enjoy my favourite writers – too many to mention.

I have also resumed going for long walks and have 'discovered' and rediscovered some really beautiful parts of this place we live in. Walking is great for thinking and reflecting as well as losing some of the 'additional cuddliness' some of us have added to ourselves during lockdowns!

Building resilience has been a focus for me during this time, including with Staff 'at work' and I've valued their positive and creative inputs – tea breaks, quizzes, wellbeing actions - and their acknowledgement and appreciation of my support.

Louise Warde Hunter

Principal & Chief Executive, Belfast Met

So when we entered lockdown I had been training for the London Marathon (which was postponed twice!) but banjaxed my knee.

Desperate to rehabilitate my knee I turned to strength training and have not looked back. I joined a gym that has a really holistic approach to wellbeing and as someone who loved hitting those milestones as a runner, I turned my attention to lifting kg instead.

Strength training has taught me a great deal, the relationship between nutrition, hydration, sleep and stress management amongst others and to take joy in the small achievements along the way.

A bit like long distance running, in leadership pace, consistency and an eye on the prize matter!



Kathryn Thomson

Chief Executive, National Museums NI

I swim in the sea. While it's something I participated in on occasion last year, at the beginning of the first lockdown I ratcheted myself up a notch and began starting every work day with a 7am swim.

It was quiet (and at times lonely) in the first couple of months, but during 2020 sea swimming has become almost as pandemic as the pandemic! I'd never be patient enough to practice mindfulness, so this is as close as I get – while good for the body it's been essential for the soul.

That and a daily Gin & Tonic!





Gina McIntyre

Chief Executive, SEUPB



I consider myself to be one of the more fortunate people during this time, in that I have continued to work throughout, and this creates a sense of stability and purpose, although I am the first to confess that I really miss working alongside my colleagues in the office, physically and mentally together.

So, much as I do not enjoy teams/zoom/webex, communication is key to maintaining these positive relationships in your daily working life, which are vital in helping you find the resilience you need.

I recently decided to teach myself how to play chess, just me against the computer, and at a time when there is very little for any of us to do, which is outside our now normal and curtailed routine, I strongly recommend challenging yourself in some way, no matter how small, as the sense of achievement you get with each little improvement really lifts the spirits.

I take as many opportunities as possible to go and walk in the beautiful country estate of Montalto, time away from a screen in a little oasis of beauty, so necessary to replenish your energy levels, and so good for the soul.

I discovered this poem at the beginning of lockdown and I listen to it regularly (beautiful spoken version can be found on YouTube) DESIDERATA by Max Ehrmann - A life Changing poem for hard times, which I love as I find it so calming and reassuring.





Montalto Estate

Photo by Gina

Desiderata by Max Ehrmann

GO PLACIDLY amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant;
they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble;
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful.

Strive to be happy.




Roisin McDonough




Chief Executive, Arts Council NI

A poem by Maya Angelou which I read for a friend who had turned 70 and whom I had known over many decades. She is also a member of all female book club that brings 7 of us together every 6-8 weeks to discuss a shared book. It's called **Alone** and it reminds us of the importance and value not only of developing strong relationship and friendships but sustaining them over time.




Alone, Maya Angelou



Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf not a stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I am wrong
But nobody
Can make it out here alone

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.




There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like
banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone

Alone, all alone
Nobody but nobody
Can make it out here alone

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan
'cause nobody
But nobody
Can make it out here alone

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.



Katrina Godfrey

Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure

2020 was to be the year when I would run (and I use that term very loosely) my first ever marathon. I'd secured a coveted ballot place in the 40th London Marathon and had got up to 17 miles in training when the first lockdown struck. With no marathon to prepare for, my training plan was quietly parked for a few months and the marathon returned to being a distant and unfulfilled dream.....until late August, when I got talked into giving the virtual London Marathon on 5 October a shot.

I knew there wasn't time to get the miles in to run the full 26.2 miles but reckoned that, with a bit of effort, I could manage a fair chunk of it (and what's wrong with walking anyway?). It was just the boost I needed to get back out into the fresh air every couple of days, escaping from the spare room and the laptop to clear my head and regain my fitness. A further side effect was being constantly hungry which helped in reminding me to take breaks during the working day (the call of the biscuit tin was irresistible!).

For anyone who keeps track of the weather, 5 October was a thoroughly wet and miserable day but off we went, trudging along the tow path to Lisburn and back again into Belfast and proving that there is indeed a point after which you can't get any wetter! It wasn't fast and it certainly wasn't pretty – and yes, I did walk the last 5 miles (which thankfully coincided with the rain easing up) – but a marathon's a marathon, right?





Chris Conway

Chief Executive, Translink



When the lockdown was first announced my first priority was to keep everyone safe; family, friends and colleagues and also to keep vital public transport services running.

Teams and Zoom were essential business tools during this time but they quickly became social tools and although it felt a bit odd at the beginning I eventually started to look forward to a 'virtual' get together with friends, including a glass of wine of course, or a Zoom quiz night.

But the thing that really kept me going was witnessing the tremendous spirit shown by colleagues, little things such as the group of colleagues who took the time to work out who lived alone during the lockdown and took turns to give them a call and when restrictions eased invited them out for a socially distanced walk or the train conductor who lived apart from his wife and new born baby during the lockdown so that he didn't put them at risk while delivering a front line service.

These stories kept me going as much as anything else!





Cheryl Lamont CBE

Chief Executive, Probation Board for NI

People first

PBNI's response has focused, with paramount importance placed, on keeping our staff, service users and wider society safe, whilst at the same time supporting emotional and physical wellbeing.

Myself as CEO and Senior leaders have ensured that staff are given timely and relevant information and tools so that they can work safely at this time. I have also very much focused on making sure staff are supported through a range of wellbeing resources.

Throughout the recovery process we have worked closely with staff and union representatives. We have engaged and listened to feedback on every step of the journey. We communicate with staff, through a 'Monday message' and more often as we need to. I record a regular Podcast in the absence of being able to interact face to face.

These Podcasts have been engaging, and motivated by wishing to reach out to our staff, to make sure they know, and importantly hopefully feel, that they are supported and looked after.

In October 2020 we held a staff event focusing on building resilience and good mental health. PBNI psychologists shared information and tips on how to stay well and we heard from a psychiatric nurse on how to deal with anxiety and stress. We have provided podcasts and information sheets on meditation, mindfulness, nutrition and other practical ways to enhance wellbeing.

As the pandemic has progressed, and we have continued to live and work through these difficult times, we have focused on ensuring staff are both physically and emotionally well. We are encouraging staff in the run up to Christmas to take time and off and rest.

This is a marathon, not a sprint and we will be continuing to prioritise staff wellbeing in the months ahead.

Heather Moorhead

Chief Executive, NI Confederation for Health and Social Care



Preventing the blurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr of one week into another, I took up wild swimming. What an amazing part of the week.

Not only do I get to safely meet new people, I am outside and after a swim on a Sunday morning at Helens Bay, you definitely know you are ALIVE!!

Go on try it – you will be amazed, it is not as bad as you might think – even last Sunday when it was very sunny, but the outside temperature was 3C.

You feel on a high all day. (I thought I would spare you the photo of me in my cossy – this is my fab new dry robe!)



Anne Dickson*

Executive Director, Chief Executives' Forum



"There are good books that are only for adults....but there are no good books which are only for children" WH Auden

2020 found me dipping into a wonderful book my seven-year-old son received last Christmas – The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and the Horse. Every page of Charlie Mackesy's beautifully written and illustrated work contains a gem, and feels as if it was written for the unsettling events that 2020 would bring:

"Sometimes just getting up and carrying on is brave and magnificent"

"When the big things feel out of control...focus on what you love right under your nose"

"Being kind to yourself is one of the greatest kindnesses"

"We can only see our outsides, but nearly everything happens on the inside"

My seemingly endless days spent on Zoom were broken up with visits to our local parks with my two sons Luke and Conor, where we discovered the wonders of tree climbing and stick collecting! Thank you to Belfast City Council for the amazing parks that were our lifeline in 2020, in particular Cherryvale, for which we can now provide the definitive account of the very best trees to climb. And an even bigger thanks to all our teachers and education staff - the safe return to real live classrooms in September was a particular highlight of 2020!

I couldn't have made it through 2020 without the support of the CEF Board, our outgoing and incoming Chairs, Stephen Peover and David Sterling, my amazing colleagues Pamela Carson and Ross Quinn, and my wonderful husband Keith.

Thank you all, and here's to a very different 2021.





David Sterling

Chair, Chief Executives' Forum

Chair's Reflections of 2020

It's been a year for superlatives: Brexit, the biggest change of policy direction by the UK Government in 60 years; Covid-19, the worst global pandemic in 100 years and we're now facing the deepest fall in economic output in 300 years. Together, these have posed unique and unprecedented challenges for all public sector leaders.

I'm very proud at the way we've risen to these challenges. Who could fail to be inspired by the courage, tenacity and sheer professionalism of the front-line workers who've had to deal with Covid-19. Yet behind the front-line there has been an army of people working to support our health service and provide assistance to our businesses and the most vulnerable in society. It's been a magnificent effort all round.

But it's not been without cost. Our organisational and personal resilience has been tested like never before. And the pressure is unlikely to reduce much soon. Several things have helped me to cope:

- Not sweating the small stuff: the pandemic has reminded me that we can take nothing for granted and that what is really important in life is time spent with family and friends. I've stopped agonising about the petty irritations in life which really don't matter.
- Taking exercise: I bought a Garmin watch two years ago which tracks all sorts of things. I've now walked 10,000 steps a day for 573 consecutive days in wind, rain and snow. This obsession has done wonders for my physical and mental well-being. It also records my golf stats, but we'll not go into that.
- Seeing the beauty that surrounds us: I have a number of regular walks but I set myself the challenge of trying to see something new every day. And who knew that two bird feeders would attract such an amazing variety of birds to our garden. We have such rich biodiversity. The first step to cherishing and protecting it is to see and understand it.

Lastly, a guilty pleasure. On my retirement a colleague gave me a bottle of Talisker – I can now firmly predict that single-malt is the new Gin!

Merry Christmas everyone, and let's look forward to a better year.

Here to help..



Public Health Agency Website & Resources



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte
Mánnystrie O Poustie



CONNECT YOU ARE NOT ALONE None of us have been here before and we are all a little afraid SEEK HELP	BE ACTIVE LOOK AFTER YOURSELF PHYSICALLY EAT WELL DRINK WATER MOVE YOUR BODY SLEEP	TAKE NOTICE YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK STOP, BREATHE & then THINK Pause, take a moment to be still Stop, breathe - this too will pass	KEEP LEARNING EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE We will all learn new things about ourselves, about each other, about how we work, about how we play, about how we live	GIVE KINDNESS WILL HELP US THROUGH Look after each other & Look after yourself
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Supporting the Well-being Needs of our Health & Social Care Staff during Covid-19: A Framework for Leaders & Managers



Have a Merry Christmas
and a happy and safe 2021!



David, Anne, Pamela & Ross