



## THIS IS THE WAY

As I sit down to write my last column as the President of PSI, I must admit I have such a mixed bag of feelings about 2020, as I am sure you all do. The event I was most looking forward to this year was our Annual Conference.

As Megan Gaffney noted in her inaugural address, we hoped so much to have a physical conference it bordered on denial of reality. I think that was driven by such a sense of the loss that everyone experienced this year, the loss of what could have been but was not. After periods of lockdown and isolation the possibility of us all getting together in person for our Annual Conference, especially in our 50th year, had so much extra significance. But it was not to be. Instead, we, like many others, made the decision to go virtual. This was not without its anxieties – could we pull it off in time, would anyone bother with yet another Zoom event, would the contrast to our usual conference be too great and would put people off? In the end over 500 people registered for our virtual Annual Conference and we had fantastic engagement over the two days. I particularly enjoyed presenting the three member awards to three outstanding nominees and recognising publicly, the 10 years of dedication that Lisa Stafford, Head of Communications, has given to PSI. It also gave me great pleasure to be able to share the proceeds of registration fees for the Conference with three great charities: Dublin Simon Community, Women's Aid and the Irish Cancer Society.

I have had many people get in touch and commiserate with me, expressing how disappointed they were for me that taking on the Presidency during our 50th year coincided with a global pandemic. While I will admit there were moments during the year where I felt a sense of loss of what could have been, I tried instead to focus on what could be. Primarily I felt an innate responsibility to use my voice and that of PSI to try and be an agent for positive change. This has not been to everyone's liking. This is the way.

I believe pursuing equity and fairness should be what all psychologists devote their energy to. I will not apologise for fighting for equity, I do not regret it, I would do the same all over again. The only thing I regret is that the hope I had to deliver equity of funding for all professional training programmes has not yet been achieved, but I hope we have brought light to the issue amongst ourselves and wider afield. The author Alan Cohen said "Do not wait until the conditions are perfect to begin. Beginning makes the conditions perfect." I hope what we have achieved in 2020 is a beginning of better things to come.

A mention of Zoom can bring talk of Zoom fatigue; however, what I found in 2020 was that Zoom was the platform by which we could make PSI more accessible to members who, by virtue of geography, finances, health, anxiety or any other reason, might not have joined us otherwise. In a post-COVID-19 world I feel PSI as an organisation will have learned from our experiences this year and that future training events, talks and AGMs will and should include a virtual option. In 2021 we will leave our premises in Grantham House, as we continue the search that began this year for a new place to call home. I am confident that the plans for any new home will include a significant capital investment to upgrade our technological capabilities, which will enable PSI to continue to be more accessible to our members.

As my presidency draws to a close, I would like to consider the words of Jonathan Lockwood Huie who said, "Celebrate endings – for they precede new beginnings." I want to celebrate how as an organisation we have grown, developed and matured over the 50 years of our history; to celebrate and thank our founding members Séamus McLoone, Críona Garvey and the late Thérèse Brady; to celebrate the life and work of those who have gone before us, in particular Professor Aidan Moran. I want to thank each and every one of our members who contributed their time, energy and expertise to the collective fight against COVID-19 this year; the Division of Educational Psychology who produced such detailed guidance on returning to school in September, the Science & Public Policy Committee who worked so hard on the guidance document, *Maximising the Benefits of a COVID-19 Vaccine: Getting the Psychology Right*. I could fill this issue of *The Irish Psychologist* with the countless examples of members stepping up this year. Everything that each and everyone of you has contributed this year is recognised and appreciated. Thank you.

*"Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies."*

Andy Dufresne

This is how I would like to sign off in 2020, with hope; hope that things can and will be better, that as individuals, and as a collective, we can be the agents of change that facilitate hope. In the immortal words of Forrest Gump, maybe this is how we facilitate hope, if there's anything you need, I won't be far away! Let us continue to commit to be there for each other and 2021 will be a better place.

*"I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floatin' around accidental-like on a breeze, but I, I think maybe it's both. Maybe both is happenin' at the same time. I miss you Jenny. If there's anything you need. I won't be far away."*

Forrest Gump

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