

NATIONAL VICTORIA CITY LIFE

When the yiayia next door is in lockdown: Daniel and Luke do their bit

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Daniel and Luke Mancuso know what it means to have neighbours looking out for you.

For the brothers, their neighbour Nina is like another grandmother. She cooks for them and asks them about their day, insisting that they call her yiayia, the Greek word for grandmother.

[She became famous as the "Yiayia Next Door"](#), whose love and care for Daniel and Luke helped get them through after their mother, Teresa, was killed by their father in 2013.



Nina, the Yiayia Next Door, hands food across the fence to her neighbours Luke and Daniel.
JOE ARMAO

But now they're the ones trying to be there for 76-year-old Nina.

"She's obviously been locked up in the house, it's been tough for her," says Daniel.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced Nina and her husband, Petros, to stay inside their Reservoir home for months, as the virus devastates Melbourne's older generations.

Each day, the second wave of infections brings more deaths, the vast majority of them aged over 70.

Isolation has helped keep Nina safe, however, it has removed her from the rhythms of daily life. A visit to the bustling stalls of the Preston Market has been replaced by an online supermarket delivery.

Their daughter, Helen, has moved home to help, offering her a close-up view of the relationship that has been established across the fence.



Before COVID-19 hit, Luke and Daniel Mancuso accept food from Nina from over the fence.
JOE ARMAO

"Often errands are taken care of before I get home from work," she says. Just this week, they gave Nina flowers to brighten her day. Recently, they cooked her rack of lamb using their mother's recipe.

She still loves to hand them food over the fence a couple of times a week.

But it hasn't been easy for Nina. She misses her eight-year-old grandson.

"I'm old and my husband is old, so we can't go out," she says.

"Always I'm outside, not inside, but now I've got no choice. I see nobody."

Even going to the shops to buy a present for her daughter's birthday is not allowed: "I feel guilty," she says.



The last photo of Teresa taken with her sons Luke (left) and Daniel in early 2013.

"We have to carry the load for the older people, they're the ones who can't do the little things like going out," says Luke.

As well as chatting regularly to Nina, they will go to the shops to pick up things left off her supermarket delivery or to get petrol for the lawnmower.

"We can't physically go there for a coffee, which is the stuff we miss," he says.

With Melburnians confined to their homes under stage four lockdown, Luke and Daniel believe that neighbours can offer that sense of connection that many people are missing at the moment.

Breaking the ice could simply be a note left in someone's letterbox or on the doorstep.

For someone who might like wine, they suggest starting a mini tasting club by dropping off a favourite bottle. If they have kids, it could be bag of toys or an offer to go to the shops.

And, as the boys know too well, food has an amazing way of breaking down barriers. Ask for the recipe to that dish with the delicious smell wafting over the fence.

"You don't know what could come from it, you could get food coming across the fence," says Luke.

"They might throw out the letter, you might get a friend for the rest of your life."

It's been a big year for Daniel and Luke since their full story first became public in *The Age*, particularly as family violence advocates.

They have become ambassadors for several different organisations, including the Carlton Football Club and the Australian Childhood Foundation. There was also a visit to meet Victorian Governor Linda Dessau.

Their Instagram page has grown to more than 75,000 followers. As well as sharing their own interactions with Nina, they are showcasing other acts of kindness as a way of trying to encourage others.

The brothers hope people will send them their own stories so they can feature them on their page.

Building that connection could save a life, they believe. With concerns about an increase in family violence during the pandemic, it's often neighbours who can offer a helping hand.

Luke and Daniel are still grateful for Nina calling the police when she heard a scream seven years ago, even though it wasn't enough to save their mum.

"They might be struggling, just saying to them, 'if you need anything, I'm here' goes a long way," Luke says.

"That sense of safety knowing someone that is next door."

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