

# Community Stories

Penny's Story - Confronting Ableism to Ensure Inclusion - **Inclusion Matters**



***“I was feeling frustrated and isolated, I had to remind myself that my unfiltered emotions were valid, and I was worthy of so much more”***

**Penny**

**Penny's Story is provided by Amy Osborne, Age UK Cornwall's Community Wellbeing Coach. Penny was supported by the Inclusion Matters Service.**

Penny, is in her sixties, lives with partial blindness, has limited mobility and resides in a nursing home.

Penny was referred to Inclusion Matters by Adult Social Care. [Inclusion Matters](#) is a service that aims to support individuals' well-being and increase their connection within society. Several public sector and charitable organisations work together to help people by adopting a 'people first – strengths-based approach.'

## **Penny**

Despite longing to enjoy the outside world and participate in social activities, the events provided by the nursing home were not accessible to Penny. Unfortunately, this meant that she spent time alone in her room. Ignoring and avoiding can be a tactic used by disabled people to manage situations they believe are inaccessible or unsafe. However, Penny was feeling increasingly isolated and lonely - she wanted our help.

Penny's isolation was also affecting her mental health.

***“Even though I live in a nursing home and there are people around me, it can be hard to have a conversation due to time limits. I also miss opportunities to connect with the outside world.”***

Support came from Amy, a Community Wellbeing Coach, who made the initial call and spoke to Penny. *“I contacted Penny, explained my role, and got to know her. We built a trusting relationship quite quickly over the phone, and she divulged her medical conditions - they were affecting her mental and physical health. The most important thing I could do was listen and give Penny the time she needed.”*

Initially, Amy suggested telephone befriending. [MHA Communities Cornwall](#) includes a befriending service for people over sixty.

Dedicated, caring volunteers visit people in their homes or check in with them through phone calls to offer support and friendship. The scheme also provides social groups, newsletters, information, and signposting. Penny agreed that this would suit her and be a positive solution to increase social inclusion - subsequently, we made a referral together.



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## The Follow Up

Amy scheduled a telephone catch-up and chatted about Penny's previous hobbies. She missed nature, reading and music - one of her great loves.

Penny was pleased to discover a [BLIS \(Blind in Song\) Singers Choir](#) was located just ten minutes from her home. Joining the choir appealed, but she was worried that transport could be an obstacle due to her electric wheelchair. Amy reassured Penny, explaining that [Age UK Cornwall and TAP \(Transport Access People\)](#) could support her needs - Amy also recommended iSight Cornwall's Walking Buddy Service. The latter was the perfect option to get back into nature with the expansive grounds of the nursing home and Spring around the corner.

*"All I want is to breathe fresh air and feel the sun on my skin."*

As Penny was desperate to read letters from her loved ones independently, together, we made a referral to [iSight Cornwall](#) - for a complimentary one-to-one appointment with an Assistive Technology Officer to help support her reading.



## The Result

With the introduction of these services, there was an immediate improvement in Penny's wellbeing.

The assistive technology visit resulted in Penny using a stand-alone text reader, which helped her read her letters. Penny has also been matched with an iSight Cornwall walking buddy and is now more empowered.

Telephone befriending, had such a significant impact that Penny requested to receive calls more often.

A new activities coordinator at the nursing home developed a more inclusive approach - making events and activities fully accessible for all.

The timing was perfect for Penny's nursing home, as it wanted to grow its thinking beyond ableism. We know that people with disabilities are playing on uneven ground, and in modern society everybody deserves greater independence, choice and control. This first step meant that the nursing home are now focused on being more inclusive and will work with partners, like Age UK Cornwall, to ensure they continue to support individuals and ask an important question, 'what matters to you?'

*"Ultimately, the bond of all companionship is conversation."*

Oscar Wilde

This story was published by Hannah Nielsen & Lee Davies, Age UK Cornwall - please contact [lee.davies@ageukcornwall.org.uk](mailto:lee.davies@ageukcornwall.org.uk) for any enquiries.