

# Combating Loneliness through Animal Therapy

## Pat's Story - Community Wellbeing



Our Community Wellbeing Coaches work within communities to empower and support those who have Health and Wellbeing needs, enabling them to gain better access to services that meet their needs and wants.

Our aim is to work with local services and community groups to develop a coordinated approach that will enrich and transform lives.

*This story, was written by Hazel, Age UK Cornwall's Community Wellbeing Coach.*

*It is a perfect example which highlights the importance of the approach above.*

### Pat

Pat is a very independent and sociable person. Pat grew up in London, and after leaving school to start work, Pat became very good friends with a colleague. As this friendship flourished, Pat got to know the family too. Pat's friend, and her husband (Barry), decided to move to Cornwall, but the two ladies stayed in touch.

**In 1977, Pat was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. This illness reduced Pat's mobility - but Pat never let that stop her from enjoying life. Pat would regularly visit MS support groups near where she lived in London**

Sadly, Pat's friend passed away, but Pat kept in touch with her friend's husband, Barry. A little later, Barry invited Pat to visit him in Cornwall for a holiday. Pat really enjoyed her holiday and fell in love with Cornwall. She decided not to return to London.

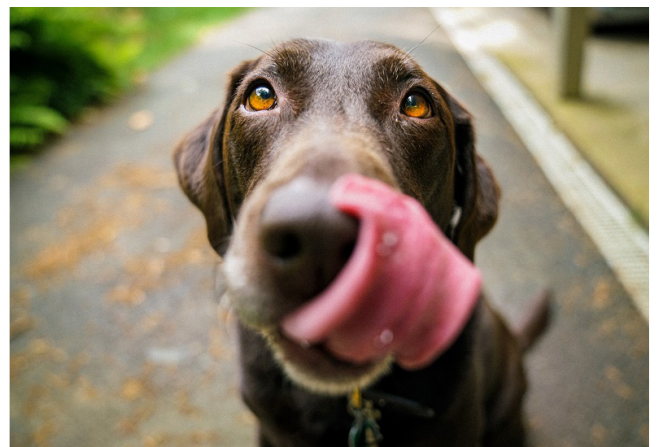
**Pat and Barry became very good friends and eventually married. They enjoyed a good life together and had much in common. They both had a passion for animals, in particular, dogs. Pat enjoyed the company of a Yorkshire Terrier and Barry had a Collie.**

Unfortunately, Pat suffered a stroke, which affected her peripheral vision, and Barry was diagnosed with dementia. Sadly, Barry had to move to a care home. **Pat not able to visit very often - as she has no transport - but Barry and Pat speak on the phone everyday. Pat misses Barry dearly and feels socially isolated. Pat feels lonely, and her loneliness has exacerbated following the impact of Covid 19.**

### Making Connections

A referral was received to Age UK Cornwall's Community Wellbeing Team. It was very important that we listen to Pat first, finding out 'what matters to you?' - this would enable us to find the right solutions to reduce her isolation and loneliness.

Initially, we identified several groups and activities, and although encouraged, Pat did not seem too keen. However, following a home visit where we talked about pets, Pat mentioned that all she really wanted was a dog for companionship. **Unfortunately, Pat's application to re-home a dog failed. Pat, falls from time to time and she is unable to get out to walk a dog and provide the exercise a dog needs to live an active life.**



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### **Finding Pat a Pet to Love**

Hazel, the Community Wellbeing Coach, had further conversations with alternative Re-homing Centres that might be willing to consider Pat. We also spoke to the Cinnamon Trust to review whether a volunteer dog walker could support Pat.

**When we next spoke to Pat, she had had a change of heart and felt that a cat would be more appropriate. Pat had cared for cats in the past and the only condition was that the cat would be comfortable to enjoy sitting on a lap and being loved.**

Hazel phoned Cats Protection and spoke with the manager, who said she would be happy to re-home a cat to Pat. Pat could not access the forms digitally and didn't use the internet, so Hazel supported Pat to fill out the re-homing forms and printed out more information on the cats available.

**The next hurdle was how we would get Pat out to meet the cats. After several conversations with the manager at Cat Protection it was agreed they could bring a cat out if Pat, if she was happy to choose one from the website.**

### **Misty & Pat**

Hazel and Pat looked through the list and there was a lovely older girl called Misty. Misty had stunning eyes, one blue and one green, and the description stated that Misty wanted nothing more than a friendly lap to sit on. Pat and Misty would make the perfect pair.

Now, we just had to seek permission from Cornwall Council for Pat to own a pet, arrange for a cat flap to be fitted, and buy food, litter and a litter tray.

**Pat was so happy and motivated by the thought of getting the companion she longed for.**

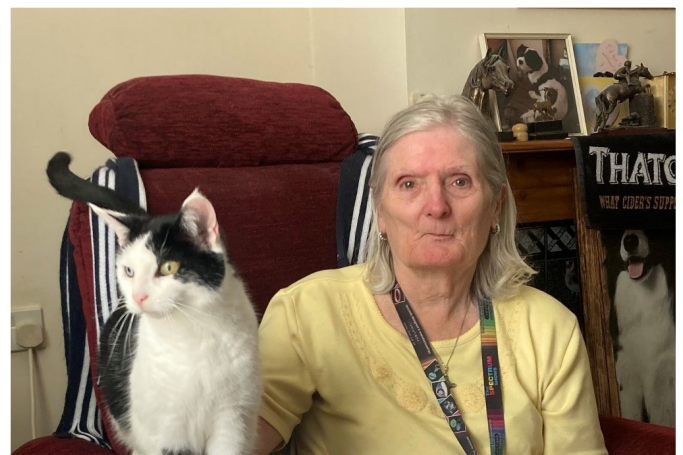
Pat and Hazel have kept in regular contact, and at each stage, Pat would update what she had done in readiness for Misty's arrival.

**There was one last hurdle to overcome - the re-homing fee. Pat did not have a cheque book, and Cats Protection did not have a card reader. Pat contacted her village shop to see if they supported a cash-back scheme, but unfortunately not. This caused further anxiety for Pat, who, was now concerned that Misty wouldn't arrive.**

Hazel asked whether Pat could get into her vehicle and put the wheelchair in the back. Together, they could go to the post office for Pat and withdraw the money. Pat agreed - a plan was in place. Fortunately, the next day, Pat spoke to the shopkeeper again, who agreed to sort out some cash for Pat. **Everything was good to go!**

**The following Monday, Hazel and Cats Protection visited Pat and a handover was successful - Pat is now the proud owner of Misty the cat.**

*Misty settled in straight away, loving her new forever home and Pat's lap to sit on.*



*If you would like support or help, please call our Helpline on **01872 266383** or **email@ageukcornwall.org.uk***