

# Step into Wellness - What it meant for me

Hazel's Story



*"Please can we have more meetings, once a month isn't enough for me! It's the best thing that's happened to me in years."*

**Hazel**



## Reaching out to Age UK Cornwall

*Hazel joined Age UK Cornwall's 'Step into Wellness' (SiW) programme in early 2021. Hazel had just gone through the first lockdown alone - and over some time, Hazel became increasingly anxious, had little support and felt more vulnerable as the situation exacerbated.*

*Hazel has shared her journey and experiences of SiW - highlighting the impact the programme has had on her mental health.*

*This is Hazel's story, written in her own words.*

## Hazel's Journey

I am a survivor of mental and physical abuse, which lasted from 2000 to when my late partner committed suicide in 2005. I had a breakdown in 2008, yet despite this, I thought I'd managed my anxiety and depression quite well.

When the Pandemic hit, and lockdown arrived, it didn't make a lot of difference to my lifestyle. I had no physical contact with anyone anyway and little support, apart from the usual things like shopping trips and health appointments.

I lived alone and enjoyed my own company - keeping busy with my garden, pets and online activities. I had raised a lot of money for charity on Twitter, for animal charities, Red Nose Day and Children In Need and had built up quite a network of friends. **Some of whom had visited me in Cornwall during the summer months. But on the whole, my life was pretty solitary.**

With the onset of COVID, those Summer visits

from online friends stopped and I was back to being a hermit again. But this time it was different.

I no longer had the choice to go out, even if I wanted to. I couldn't even go to the shops or the beach. **In the beginning, when restrictions were tightened and we didn't know what we do now, it was all very frightening and many people became even more isolated.**

It was at this time that I noticed that I was becoming increasingly anxious and frightened. So, for the first time in years, I felt vulnerable and alone, with no-one to turn to. My husband and I had no children and all my relatives had passed away. This was something I had (sort of) come to terms with in the past, but now, with the lockdown, I felt more aware of my own situation. From my anxiety to my depression, everything seemed magnified - I didn't want to slip back into those dark days I went through after the abuse. So I contacted Age UK Cornwall.



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### Hearing me

I explained my situation to a very kind lady on the Helpline and burst into tears. The lady was helpful and understanding - she said she would pass my details to a few of her colleagues and talk to mental health organisations to find something that would help me through and build up my confidence again.

After the initial conversation with the Helpline, I was contacted by several mental health organisations. MIND introduced me to a zoom cafe meeting - but it just wasn't for me. I didn't need help to get over what I had been through, and I didn't want to discuss it! Anything that would bring those awful memories back would have been challenging. Everyone manages negative memories differently. It had taken me years to put them behind me and lock them away - this helped me live a reasonably 'normal' life.

**There were other suggested meetings but they all covered the same sort of things - until someone invited me to the Step Into Wellness sessions.**

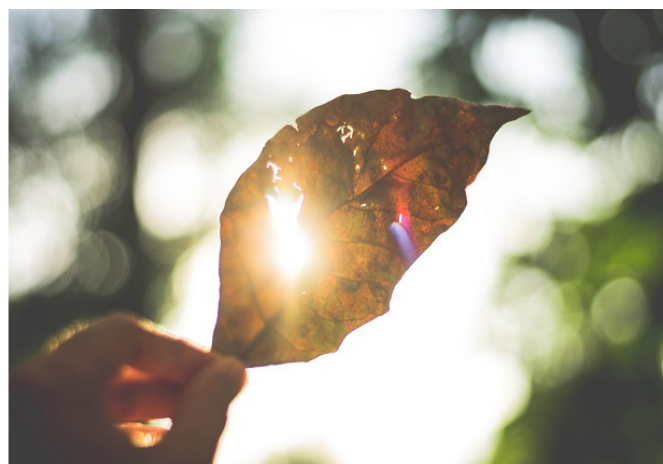
*"It was just what I was looking for and just what I wanted."*

No-one had to talk about anything they didn't want to, nothing was pushed onto me to discuss, it was casual and relaxed. I found I was coming out of myself again and enjoying talking to people. All the ladies who ran the course, and the volunteers, were so nice. We became more like friends, so meeting up was something I really looked forward to. **My self-confidence has improved so much and I can't wait for the next meeting. I just wish they had been more frequent.** I think I speak for some people when I say, individuals with mental health problems like me do not always need counselling, we just want to talk to people like 'normal' people. And this is what I had with Step Into Wellness.

### What's next?

I have signed up for the next course starting soon, and I cannot wait! As I said earlier, I wish it was more frequent. And now that meeting in person is more of a possibility, **I look forward to meeting all the friends I've made during the course - I know this will enrich my life so much.**

I truly believe, as someone who has struggled with mental health problems for a long time, that Step Into Wellness is the kind of course that people like me, or similar to me, can benefit from. **It makes you feel better, it helps you shrug off those dark days that can creep up and give you a sunny outlook again.**



*"I've gone from thinking what's the point in anything and feeling as if I'm just waiting to die (yes really) to someone who now thinks she is not ready to go anytime soon as there are lots of things to look forward to."*

**Doing these sessions and completing this course, well, it has proven that even us lame ducks can help someone. Together, we now share our daily problems and our daily joys, without delving into the past and raking up old wounds.** Please can we have more meetings, once a month isn't enough for me! It's the best thing that has happened to me in years! **Hazel's story**