

Recovery and the Importance of Wellness

Irene's Story



"Each week is a joy - seeing how far we have all come. I love the feeling of accomplishment. Even though I am not good at accepting praise, these sessions have helped me. I get so much pleasure from building confidence within the group - watching everyone join in at their own pace."



Irene was referred to the Step into Wellness programme by her community mental health practitioner. Irene found the benefits of the programme immeasurable and wanted to share the journey she has been on.

This is Irene's Story. Written in her own words

My Journey

Following my marriage to a submariner in the Royal Navy, I moved to Cornwall from Scotland in 1982. Although I had periods of feeling homesick, having my three children, and setting roots in village life, I enjoyed many years of happy times, fun, and laughter. I trained as a nurse in Scotland and went on to work in Devon and Cornwall, loving my career.



Sadly, I was involved in a car accident and was no longer able to nurse. So, I worked as a receptionist in a local doctor's surgery, training hard and becoming a manager in 1997. I loved this role.

I am very much a people person, blessed to have worked as part of caring, listening, and supportive teams, hopefully making a difference to their working lives and patient care.

To the outside world, I was a strong, motivated woman who coped with everything thrown at her. This was not always the case as my troubles stacked - I went on to have a breakdown of my mental and physical state, and my addictive life came to the surface. **I never shared, discussed, or even asked for help when I clearly needed it. I always thought that asking for help was a weakness, so I never did.**

I was abused as a child. I lost my sister at the young age of 45 years, my father at the young age of 54 years and my mother at 85 years. When each of them died I was so deeply upset, as they were my rocks. **Again, looking back, I never discussed or dealt with my emotions, hiding in supermarkets, hanging curtains, not answering lifelong friends phone calls and letters, building emotional walls to cope with life. I became a 'functioning alcoholic'.**

I always liked a glass or two of wine, but I slowly moved to 2 bottles a night, then 1 litre or more of gin and self-isolating. My life was rock bottom, and I was drowning without a rope or rubber ring.

I was admitted to hospital twice - both times I drank when I came out. I then went on to overdose. Leaving hospital, I knew I had to change my life, or I would be dead.

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Added to this, I also faced stressful times at home, work and a merger of surgeries. I often had to deal with people who did not have my core values for life and work, therefore, I took redundancy and travelled. **I had given over 25 years of my life to this 'caring profession' where no one realised I was crying out for help, even though I could not put it into words.**

I divorced, after 37 years of marriage, from the love of my life. I asked my children to write down the consequences of my drinking to them and their families. The replies were heartbreaking. How could I do this to them, they are my life. But this was still not enough to stop me from drinking, **I pushed away my children and friends. I did not want anyone in my life. When I stopped being busy my whole world fell in. I slowly fell down the whirlpool of self-destruction with no way out, or as I thought.**



My Recovery

Oh, it looked like a long road. But now I can see, with involvement and acceptance of help, it need not be, though I know I will always be in recovery. I completed 3 weeks of detox and 10 weeks in recovery, I still felt hesitant about being on my own.

My community mental health practitioner reviewed interactive programmes to help **with my anxiety, confidence, support needs, interaction and wellness with others.** They referred me to the Age UK Cornwall 'Step into Wellness' Programme, recognising that I would benefit from becoming involved. She was so correct.

Step into Wellness and me

I received welcoming phone calls and emails, I always felt listened to and understood. We discussed; the sessions and how they ran, talked about other people involved, confidentiality, and other areas which helped me choose to take part.

"This programme has helped me to gain confidence. It has shown that I am not alone. I was listened to and supported."

Starting very slowly and just seeing where I went - knowing I could leave at any time I wanted, helped me too not feel pressured in any way. **The benefits of this programme are unmeasurable for me. Knowing that I have a set time each week; where I can listen, talk, laugh (real belly laughs), with trainers and other members is wonderful.** Having one to one time on the phone and by email also works for me - being given that opportunity of supporting each other, when needed, is essential.

Each week is a joy - seeing how far we have all come. I love the feeling of accomplishment. Even though I am not good at accepting praise, these sessions have helped me. I get so much pleasure from building confidence within the group - watching everyone join in at their own pace.

Wellness is so important to me, both physically and mentally. At my lowest point, I was in a wheelchair, I could not wash, dress, or stand up - I was broken.

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Step into Wellness and me

My mental health was poor, as I did not use the suggested exercise techniques to help me. I gave in, but with this programme now, I engage. **The tools and techniques provided work for me and have helped me so much, as I often go in at full blast, then give up. I feel achievement.**

I spent a long time feeling I had early onset-dementia, I could not remember names, places and events. I have now become relaxed enough to work through the suggestions, YouTube links, podcasts etc. to help me through this.

“The past year, I have had a lot of downs, but at last, I feel positive about my future.”

I have been so fortunate to have been considered and accepted for this programme. Using the ‘5 Steps to Wellbeing’ - Connection, the ‘Be Active’ exercises on a chair, Mindfulness, Learning & Giving and taking time for rest and recovery for my good health has helped me so much.

I feel privileged to be a part of this programme. **There are so many positives, from the ease of access; appropriately sourced content to read, watch and introduce into my life; reassurances given; but most of all, the sensitivity and recognition of those involved is outstanding.**

Everything I thought this programme would soon become, became so much more. I quickly saw that this was not just about joining a 1-hour meeting each week and understood all the hard work that goes into it, making the sessions seamless. This hour and the people involved left me feeling uplifted and happy.

The friendliness and understanding of the Facilitator and Step into Wellness Volunteer, while coping with the joys of Internet connection in Cornwall, is fantastic. The clear instructions, phone help, email support and much more, also outstanding! I could go on about the most wonderful strength this programme has helped me to gain and accept. Enabling me to accept that it is not a weakness to ask for help, it is a ‘Strength’.

Throughout my recovery, I always prayed I would not be defined as a Victim, Addict, Erratic or Mental Person. It has taken me a while, but with this help, I know I am on the right road. Because you know what? I'M Worth It and SO ARE YOU!

Find support, groups and activities

Get active

Develop positive relationships

Access specialist services and support

Give back to your community and others

Make healthy lifestyle choices

Learn new skills, enjoy new experiences

If you are curious, you want to find out more or already know this is for you, register your interest by emailing stepintowellness@ageukcornwall.org.uk or call our Community Helpline on **01872 266383**

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