

Pat's Story

How Age UK Cornwall helped me rebuild my life

Step into Wellness



“ Pat had reached a point in her life where she did not want to be here anymore”

“Age UK Cornwall Services has supported Pat to improve her wellbeing and confidence”



We are proud to share Pat's Story; this story demonstrates how compassion, encouragement and working together with people in need can solve almost any problem.

This story was received as we celebrate our 50th Year (Go for Gold) and highlights our ongoing commitment of Inspiring People and Communities to Age Well.

This is Pat's Story, provided by Roy, our wonderful volunteer facilitator.

Pat's Story

In March 2019, Pat became aware that she was having some difficulty with her eyesight and noticed a distortion in her sight, Pat told her son (Chris) about this problem, and he took her to an optician in Penzance.

Following an examination and subsequent X-Rays, Pat referred to Truro Ophthalmology, and following a further examination 'Wet Macular Degeneration' was diagnosed. Pat was then referred to the Penzance Ophthalmology Eye Clinic for treatment which initially included ongoing injections into the eyes every 3 to 6 weeks, gradually reducing to every 8 to 10 weeks.

A year or so before this, Pat's husband, Peter, was diagnosed with Amyloidosis, a relatively rare terminal condition that affects many organs. **After a decline in his health, Pat took on more around the home and eventually became Peter's main carer. Pat was reluctant to leave him at home unattended - this compounded further when her sight problems started.**

In March 2020, Peter had a fall, and following a short spell in hospital, it became clear that Pat could no longer manage his full-time care. Lockdown had just started, and family support was restricted, so carers provided support up to 4 times a day.

By June 2020, Peter was so unwell that he could no longer get out of bed. Sadly, on August 5th 2020, Peter passed away - this was seven hours before their 60th wedding anniversary. Pat cared for Peter throughout his illness. **Unfortunately, Pat did not look after her own wellbeing, as she was consumed by the loss of Peter.**

Covid 19 lockdown restrictions were still in place, so the funeral did not take place until 21st August 2020. On that day Pat was showering herself before getting dressed and she found a lump in her breast. She told her daughter Kate, after she had asked Pat if something was worrying her. At first, and not surprisingly, Kate assumed that her Mum had been hiding this problem because of the funeral and the grief that the family were already dealing with. Pat re-assured her that she had had no previous awareness of the lump that she had just found.



Pat's Story

How Age UK Cornwall helped me rebuild my life

Step into Wellness



Pat's Story

Kate immediately contacted the GP for an emergency appointment. This was not easy as Covid 19 restrictions were still in place. **However, following the funeral, Kate took Pat to the GP, who immediately referred her to the 'Mermaid Centre at Treliske Hospital in Truro. Within 6 days, following an examination and a mammogram at the 'Mermaid Centre', cancer of the breast was confirmed, and a 'Lumpectomy' was recommended.**

With Pat and her daughter present this recommendation was reviewed by the surgeon. Pat decided to have a 'Mastectomy' - her left breast was removed.

Throughout her husband's and her health issues, Pat had now experienced over a year of worry and anxiety - now 83-years-old, Pat had an even bigger mountain to climb..

When Pat left hospital, she began her recovery in Truro with Chris, her son and Paula, her daughter in law. Soon after, Kate, Pat's daughter, came down to Cornwall from her home in Scotland to look after Pat in her own home to help with her rehabilitation. Pat was making good progress and her independence grew each day, thanks to her dogged determination. Pat still needed some assistance after Kate had to return home, so the STEPS team came in for the next few days to assist her with washing and dressing until the wound had fully healed.

After Kate had returned home to Scotland Pat initially coped well, as Covid restrictions had eased, and the family were able to visit.

The family were keen to help support Pat and improve her physical and mental wellbeing after the operation. On top of this, Pat also had the challenge of dealing with her 'wet macular degeneration'. Her eyesight was failing, she no longer had any detailed central vision, but she did still have her field of vision which allowed her to catch sight of objects out of the corner of her eyes.

It was not long before more Covid restrictions came back again. Pat found it very hard to adjust to being on her own, particularly missing the regular family visits. Her poor eyesight meant she was unable to leave the house alone, further adding to her sense of isolation. The nights were so dark, and the days were so endless, and it wasn't long before depression overtook all of Pat's inner thoughts. **She had reached a point in her life where she 'did not want to be here anymore'. It was probably Pat's religious faith that prevented her from harming herself, but at times she hoped that she would not wake up in the morning.**

The family became more and more concerned about Pat. Kate, feeling particularly helpless being so far away in Scotland, was determined to do her bit to help find Pat the support she needed.

Kate reached out to the GP, and after an initial telephone consultation the Social Prescriber made contact with Pat, who put some community support measures in place. Kate also looked for contacts in Cornwall that may help her Mum and one of those that she did contact in January 2021 was 'Age UK Cornwall & IOS'. She sent an email to the 'Helpline' at Age UK Cornwall in Truro asking if they could offer her Mum any help in what was then a very difficult time with so many restrictions in place because of Covid.



Community Helpline: 01872 266383

 /AgeUKCornwall

 @ageukcornwall

Pat's Story

How Age UK Cornwall helped me rebuild my life

Step into Wellness



Age UK Cornwall's Support

The very next day Kate received an email from Dawn, one of our valuable helpline advisors giving her contact links for bereavement services, befriending and iSight Cornwall. Dawn also made Kate aware of our 'Active Living' services which included companionship, 'Inclusion Matters' referrals service, 'TAP' transport services, and a link to our website which included all the information about other services that we provide. Kate was so pleased to receive all this help and information that she asked Dawn if someone could contact her Mum and start the ball rolling.

At first Pat was a little unsure about embracing something so new because of the way she had been feeling. But with some encouragement from the family, she agreed to make the effort to engage with Age UK Cornwall and arrangements were made for our 'Active Living' team to visit.

The first meeting with the team had to be done at a distance because Covid restrictions were still in place. However, after listening to all that the team could provide, and the minimal cost involved, Pat was happy to proceed with weekly visits from an 'Active Living' support worker and a gardener.

At first Pat was supported by a lady called Jo, but after several months she left the organisation and was replaced by Rachael - who continues to support Pat every week. Pat has found Rachael to be such a good companion to her, as she cannot go out on her own because of her failing eyesight, and they go on shopping trips together. On alternate weeks Rachael sorts out all the little problems in the bungalow that Pat can't do on her own - Pat tells us that she does everything for her from sorting out her 'Amazon Fire' tablet to cleaning and dusting. The gardener also gives Pat a lot of support, and some plants. When he is working in the

garden, and the weather is good, he puts Pat's chair outside for her so that she can watch what's going on and they are able to engage in conversation together.

Towards the end of last year, Pat joined our 'Step into Wellness' programme - which aims to take people from where they are now to where they want to be by building confidence and engaging them in thinking about their own journey towards wellness. This programme helped Pat so much. Even though she has completed all of the sessions, Pat still maintains her link to the participants who were a part of the programme by joining us on our 'Digital Café' on Friday afternoons.



Against all the odds Pat has rebuilt her life and what we see now is a warm, happy, confident, and caring Mum surrounded by a loving family.

And to end this story we take a quote from 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse' by Charlie Mackesy:

'What is the bravest thing you have ever said?' asked the boy.

'Help' said the horse 'Asking for help isn't giving up, it's refusing to give up'