

Rebecca's Story

Rebecca Kevern, Gardening Service Lead for Age UK Cornwall & The Isles of Scilly, tells us how her role and service has changed since COVID-19 and how she's helping people within the community.

What is your job like?

On a typical working day, my time was split between office work and being out in the community. I travelled across Cornwall, visiting clients and completing their assessments or meeting our gardeners. Other days I would be based in the office, completing admin work or doing check-in calls. You could often find me coordinating the service at my desk within the Care Team at Age UK Cornwall's Truro offices.



How has this situation impacted the Gardening Service?

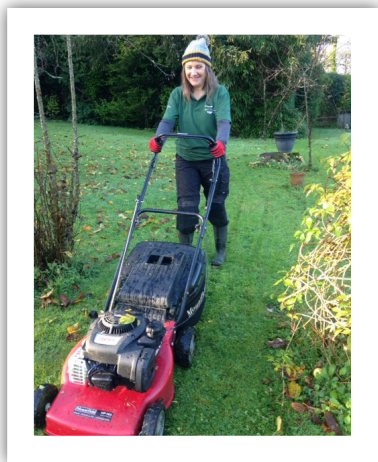
As COVID-19 increased its hold over the country, the team has adapted (and continues to evolve) how we support the older population in Cornwall. I have been

impressed and inspired every day with the tenacity and positivity of the teams, to create new or altered vital services, and the impact this has for the people we help.

This difficult period has given our team time to reflect on the services we deliver and how we make our service better for everyone involved. Like never before, this new world has highlighted the complexities of isolation and loneliness in local communities. We hope that people may understand more about how some of our older population endure loneliness daily.

I believe that it is essential that our services strive to tackle social isolation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. We can do this by adapting, reviewing and continually improving the way we work within this new way of life.

Our gardening team have been very supportive and have quickly adapted to their roles and the new strict health and safety procedures. We understand that people's gardens are extremely important to individuals. Now more than ever, as the country is in lockdown, the garden has become a sacred place for people to enjoy the outdoors. However, we can only provide a service if it is 100% safe to do so for both customer and gardener. Our wonderful gardeners have even been helping to do some shopping visits and reporting back to us who they feel need extra support.



How has your role changed?

At this time, I found I have the capacity, within my working day, to help with other practical support in the community. I have been supporting the TAP (Transport Access People) team to drive people to and from their vital medical appointments. These journeys have highlighted the generous work that our TAP volunteers do every single day.

I am in awe of some drivers who leave their homes at 5:30 am to get a patient to their early dialysis appointment and finish later in the evening to ensure people return safely home – this is all done with a smile and pride in their role within our organisation. I could not be prouder to support this team of professional and kind volunteer drivers.

Recently, we took a call from a local pharmacy who were struggling with the huge task of delivering prescriptions to their isolated patients. Together, with

Bernice (another wonderful Volunteer) and group called A Band of Brothers (sought by Volunteer Cornwall) we have been providing daily support, delivering prescriptions in and around the Redruth area. We have been using our Electric Vehicles to do our rounds, which has been a pleasure for me as they have a great sat-nav and a working radio! It can be a challenge to find some beautiful tucked away properties, within rural Cornwall, with only a broken gate post or a tree as a navigation tool!

Delivering these prescriptions has also given us the freedom to check the welfare of some people who may not have had any other support. **It gives us the opportunity to check they are receiving their shopping and are okay. It has been heart-warming to hear how their neighbours and communities have rallied to support them during this difficult time.** From these visits, I have identified a few people who have struggled with shopping, so I am now helping them to make sure they get the essentials.



"I was so scared when this happened, I was very worried that I would not have anybody to ask to help with my shopping. It's such a relief you are helping. I look forward to you coming now!"

I have seen a change in the people I have visited for the last few weeks. I can see they are struggling with the lack of human contact, missing their families and their friends. I feel they want me to chat a little longer or are becoming quite teary and emotional. I truly believe that it is up to all of us to think creatively and help our friends, neighbours & loved ones throughout this crisis – **I now have first-hand experience of the difference you could make.**

"This week, once I've dropped off the shopping, I am making the time to have a tea from my flask and a chat through a window or two – making sure I am sitting a good two metres away in the garden!"

To date, Rebecca has helped over 250 people receive prescriptions and shopping services across Cornwall.

How we can help

Age UK Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly has developed a COVID-19 support space. If you or someone you know needs help, or if you'd like to support your local community. Please visit www.cornwall-link.co.uk

Cornwall Link is complemented by our Community Helpline. If you would like to speak to someone or need additional support, please call **01872 266383**.

If you need help getting to your medical appointments. Please call our TAP helpline on **01872 223388**.

If you have any questions about this community story, please get in touch with Lee Davies - lee@ageukcornwall.org.uk