

Harry's Story



When support moves online, having someone to talk things through matters

When services become harder to access

Harry has always been careful with money. He has never lived an extravagant life and has always made sure he only spent what he had. For many years, he managed well on his state pension and a small private pension from his working life, using savings to cover anything extra.

“I’ve never been flush,” Harry says. “I’ve always just been careful. You learn to live within what you’ve got.”

For a long time, that approach worked. But as time went on, things became harder. Prices rose, everyday costs increased and Harry’s savings began to run down more quickly than he expected.

“I was just living off savings, really,” he says. “And as you know, they dwindle.

Everything costs more now. Food, bills, the lot.”

At the same time, Harry was dealing with health issues that made life more complicated. He was unable to drive due to cataracts. Like many older people, he found paperwork and official correspondence difficult to manage, particularly when it involved unfamiliar language or long forms.

“Give me a set of tools and I’m a different man,” Harry says. “I used to run building sites. But forms and official letters, that sort of language, it’s hard to take in.”

As more essential services and benefit applications moved online, Harry found it increasingly difficult to access the support he might be entitled to. Many systems relied on digital forms, automated phone lines or instructions to go online.



“You ring up and all you get is a machine,” he says. “Or they tell you to go online. For people like me, that’s not straightforward.”

Harry had attended computer classes in the past and had tried to learn the basics, but it never felt comfortable or easy. Without confidence online, and with fewer options to speak to a real person, getting help felt out of reach.

Like many older people, Harry also believed that support was only available to those who were struggling far more than he was.

“I didn’t think I was entitled to anything,” he says. “I thought you had to have nothing to get help. So I just carried on.”

Human support in a digital world

Harry's situation changed after a conversation with someone he knew. She suggested that he might be entitled to some support and encouraged him to speak to Age UK East Sussex. She gave him a phone number and urged him to call.

That call was a turning point.

Instead of being directed to a website or an automated system, Harry spoke to a real person.

Someone listened to him and took the time to understand his situation.

"They went through everything properly," Harry says. "I told them everything, right down to the penny. It wasn't about hiding anything. It was about getting the right advice."

Through Age UK East Sussex's Information and Advice team, Harry received support to look at his finances and understand what help might be available. This included assistance with benefit applications that would have been difficult to complete without digital access or support.

Harry was later supported by Kelly, who continues to help him with paperwork, forms and letters from organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions. "Since I got involved, Kelly's done virtually everything I needed," Harry says. "If I get a

letter through, I take it in or show her. She explains it to me."

Kelly keeps a record of Harry's paperwork and correspondence, which provides reassurance if anything changes in the future.

"She puts it all on file," he says. "So if something comes up later, it's all there."

For Harry, this support goes beyond practical help. It removes anxiety and replaces it with trust.

"I know if she tells me to do something, it's the right thing," he says. "That makes all the difference."

Age UK East Sussex provided support in a way that worked for Harry. By phone, in person and at his pace. There was no pressure to go online or manage systems that felt overwhelming.

More freedom and peace of mind

The support Harry receives has had a real impact on his life. Financially, it has eased pressure and made everyday decisions less stressful.

“It gives you that little bit extra,” he says.

“Before, if I wanted to go somewhere or do something special, I had to watch every penny.”

That freedom has helped Harry stay connected. Social contact and community are central to his wellbeing, particularly after losing his beloved wife, Doreen.

“She was the best thing that ever happened to me,” he says with a smile. “Apart from my boys, of course.”

Harry is deeply involved in his local community. He meets friends regularly, volunteers his time, helps organise raffles and supports others around him. These connections help him stay active and positive.

“It’s about friendship,” he says. “You go somewhere, people know you, they talk to you. That matters.”

The reassurance that comes from knowing help is available is just as important as the financial support.

“If I didn’t have Age UK, especially with paperwork and pensions, I’d probably be in the muck,” Harry says honestly.

Age UK East Sussex has become part of Harry’s routine. He visits regularly, not just for advice, but because it feels welcoming and human.

“There’s always someone there,” he says. “You’re not just a number.”

Harry now encourages friends and people he meets to contact Age UK East Sussex if they are struggling.

“I’ve introduced two or three people,” he says. “They’ve all been really pleased. One of my mates got everything sorted just over the phone.”

Harry’s story highlights what digital exclusion often looks like in real life. It is not always about the internet itself, but about systems that assume everyone can access information online, understand complex forms and navigate automated processes without support.

For older people like Harry, these barriers can mean missing out on help they are entitled to. By offering clear, patient and person centred support, Age UK East Sussex helps bridge the gap between digital systems and real lives.

Harry’s experience shows why accessible support is essential as services move online