

12 YEARS OF LONELINESS

A few ill thought out words helped plunge Tony Satchwell into more than a decade of loneliness.

When he lost his partner of 45 years, 12 years ago, a well-meaning acquaintance suggested that the 67-year-old should go into a home for the remainder of his life.

Others, when he questioned why he was not seeing as much of people as he once had told him to buck up and stop feeling sorry for himself because they had their own lives to lead.

It left the once outward going former florist afraid to ask for help and left him unable to go into cafés, bars and restaurants by himself for fear of being thought of as the sad, lonely old man sat by himself.

It wasn't until he plucked up the courage to speak to someone about his plight that things began to change and once again it was words that made all the difference.



Former florist Tony, is now a regular at several local groups, after meeting with Age UK Torbay's Wellbeing Coordinators

He often walked past the Age UK Torbay offices in Dendy Road, in Paignton on his daily solo trip to the shops, but convinced himself that they were for older, sadder, lonelier people than himself.

"I do not know where I got it from, but I was sure they were there to help other people, they were not there for the likes of me," he remembers with a wry smile, "How wrong could I be?"

He still fights back the tears as he recalls that first encounter when he walked in, and in his own words blurted out: *'I am very, very lonely, and I don't know what to do..'*

"I was afraid how they would react, that they might

dismiss me and look down their noses. How wrong could I be?"

He was greeted with a friendly smile and an attentive welcome and within a day one of the wellbeing coordinators, Shaun Calloway rang and said the few simple words that changed everything for him:

'Let me come to see you and talk face to face.'

"It meant that someone was interested in me. They were prepared to come to my home and take an interest in me. That changed my life."

Tony, 79, who lives in a flat off Cecil Road in Paignton rarely saw anyone and friends that

had been regular visitors to his former cottage home with partner Vince stopped calling.

A handful stayed in touch, others became intermittent, and some stopped altogether. On most days, the only people he saw were the ones in the street as he made his way into town on his daily shopping trips, but none were on speaking terms.

"I have always forced myself to go out, but at the end of the day, it is me in the flat alone. Winter is the worst when the light fades, and shutters come down, and it is only afternoon."

But since meeting Shaun, the light has come back into his life, and he is making new friends, so much so that one group he goes to based at the Dunboyne Court in St. Marychurch is due to go on holiday in November.

"Vince and I used to go on seven or eight holidays a year towards the end of his life, mostly in the UK and mostly on coaches, but that stopped after I lost him 12-years-ago," said Tony.

"A holiday by yourself is one where you take your loneliness with you. If you are lonely, you are lonely

wherever you are. There were too many memories and no-one to share the experiences with."

No more. He has helped organise the hotel stay in Bournemouth and can't wait:

"I am absolutely thrilled. So much has happened in the last few months; it is all a bit unbelievable."

And now Tony has a few words of his own to share with anyone who is experiencing what he went through:

"I am telling everyone about Age UK Torbay. About how everyone I have met there is devoted to their work, I can't speak highly enough of them."

"I lost 12 years because I was too stubborn to walk into Age UK Torbay and use the words, 'I am lonely.' Instead, I listened to others who said my life was over."

With two lunch groups a month, several coffee groups and a holiday in prospect, Tony is living proof that life is far from over. He still can't walk into a bar or café by himself, but he doesn't need to – Shaun is still there by his side, or he meets up with others

and walks in with them instead.

"Shaun has been simply amazing, giving me time, taking me places and being there for me. I simply can't thank him and all the Age UK Torbay staff enough."

If you would like to contact the Age UK Torbay wellbeing coordinators, call **01803 555181** or email wellbeingcoordinator.torbay@nhs.net

If you want to know more about what is going on in your area contact your Ageing Well community builder by ringing **01803 212638** or email ageingwell@torbaycdt.org.uk

