

Client story: Age UK Independence Co-ordinator Claire Bellis. November 2023



This is Eric, 86, who is one of my regular patients. Referred by Locala's clinicians following a stroke about 18 months ago, Eric had also been very recently widowed. "Within a couple of weeks, my whole world had turned on its head and I had no idea what I was going to do," he said. "I didn't think anyone could understand what I was going through and couldn't see how I could be helped."

Whilst he had been a business owner and engineer, Eric now felt that his recent poor health and bereavement had laid him low. In addition to being daunted by living without his companion of sixty years, Eric had to face the challenge of the physical limitations his stroke brought. "I was a lifelong athlete," he says, "running and cycling were second nature even into my eighties, and now I couldn't put one foot in front of the other without worrying about falling down."

It was clear from the referral from my Locala physiotherapy colleagues that Eric's confidence had taken a blow. Whilst he was making good physical progress with his recovery, he was hesitant with people he didn't know well, and needed support with several things. One of the first services I offered was to undertake a benefits check to make sure that Eric was receiving the long-term health related benefits to which he would be entitled. Like many older people I work with, Eric was a bit confused about forms and application processes and was happy and grateful that I supported him to claim Attendance Allowance and to get his blue badge which is of great benefit when a family member takes him for lunch or he goes to hospital appointments.

Since we have been working together, I have seen Eric's confidence increasing week to week. I have taken him to hospital appointments, where once a young consultant admired Eric's armed forces tattoos, saying that he was currently an army reservist and inviting conversation. Eric had been a little shy with strangers, his fluency having been affected by his stroke. At that appointment, though, the spark was back, and Eric told a couple of stories and laughed and joked with the consultant, which made me smile; this was excellent progress. We also went to Eric's audiology appointment, and, new hearing aids on board, he realised that he had been feeling isolated just because he couldn't hear people. He's much more likely to feel confident in social situations now that he can participate more actively.

Whilst I help with his correspondence and make sure all of Eric's appointments are in order, my main contribution these days is to have an increasingly brisk walk around the park with him. We do this in order to make sure that Eric is having some exercise, and is regaining confidence in his own mobility; he's doing brilliantly. We often meet the Friday afternoon dog walkers and stop for a friendly chat. Every time this happens, I notice the sparkle in Eric's eye and realise how far he's come

“I have come to see you as a friend,” says Eric. “You really have helped me get back on my feet, and I look forward to seeing you. I just know that whatever problem crops up, I can ask you for advice- and we always manage to work things out, don't we?”

Client story written by Claire Bellis for Age UK. Consent for sharing provide to Age UK as per Age UK policy.