

## ***7. It was absolutely precious...It was a diamond***

Since this started, Marie (Archway staff) has phoned me and Sandra has phoned me on alternate Fridays. It's a long time ago but I think it was Marie, she got Oxford Hub involved as well so I have somebody phone me on a Wednesday too, and in the first lockdown they did all my shopping for me as well. Now I'm in a bubble I can go and see my son, so that's okay but obviously, in the first lockdown I was completely and utterly by myself. That was really hard for me because I didn't see my son for over three months. I had no contact with anybody whatsoever. Not being able to see your own child is really bad, it's really hard.

Sandra came to see me every other Friday, she's a volunteer, but Marie, before all of this happened, we were just sort of getting me into maybe going to a group on a Wednesday (an Archway Supportive Social Group) which now has gone out of the window, obviously, and I don't know where to begin with that again because I've lost my confidence again so I'm not entirely sure what's going to happen with that. It's just literally been telephone contact because we haven't been able to do anything at all. It's going to take a while to get to where I was again. So really, having phone contact has sort of kept me going as much as it possibly can. So it's just been really lonely. It's just a really lonely time.

It's just been very strange not being able to see somebody's face. I was really cut off and isolated. It was quite bad and I didn't have broadband at the time either so I couldn't have face to face contact with anybody whatsoever, but I've got it now. At least I can Facetime people now and actually see people's faces because it was really hard, because previously, in that November of 2019, I had a serious heart attack as well so I was just getting back on my feet in the March, just finding my way again, so to be cut off again wasn't very pleasant really, not at all.

Sandra, she's a volunteer, she came every other Friday, just home for a cup of coffee and just a chat really 'cos I don't get out, 'cos I am agoraphobic, but I've learnt to. With my heart attack, I was told that I had to exercise. I mean I don't do anything major, I just go out for a walk around the estate to be honest, but you just have to do everything by yourself, it's really difficult; even just going for a walk, it would be nice to be able to see somebody else.

The weekly phone call was really important and Marie sorted out for somebody to phone me on a Wednesday as well so in fact, I still speak to Gill as well. It's just somebody to say 'hi' isn't it really and to see how you are going? I suffer really badly with my mental health; it takes a toll on me quite badly so just for somebody to say 'hi' and to actually go and do my shopping, especially in the first lockdown, that was an absolute godsend, there's no way in the world that I would have been able to do that myself. Marie sorted it all out. I spoke to Marie, the magic magician! Then I'd got someone phoning me saying we can do your shopping, we can get a volunteer. It made a difference, just to have somebody say 'how are you doing' and 'are you okay' and you can bend their ear.

For somebody just to phone up to say 'hi', I'm really grateful for that because they don't have to do that at the end of the day. That's really nice for somebody to take half an hour out of their day just to phone up and say 'hi', it gives you a bit of a lift. And Kate, who works for Archway, you wouldn't believe it but she came round at Christmas and gave me a present and

again at Easter just gone and honestly, I had just been feeling quite bad for a while, but to have that, it's just so nice. Nobody has ever done that for me before. It's just a real boost that someone takes two minutes out of their day just to do that, it gives you a bit of a lift. Especially a stranger as well. Family don't even do that so for somebody who doesn't even know me to do it – obviously, Sandra knows me and Marie knows me but I'm going back to Oxford Hub now with Gill and how Marie sorted that out, and for Gill to carry on doing it when she doesn't have to.

I said to Marie, I'm not able and stable enough to do it now, but I'd like to be a volunteer one day when I can get myself sorted out. That would be a goal for me; just phone somebody up if they are feeling really bad and say, 'you know, everything's alright', well, it's not alright obviously, but 'you know what, I'm here.' It's going to be a very long time before I can ever, ever think about doing something like that but I'd never heard of Archway before. Everything that I've had has been to do with medical, it's been support workers and mental health and stuff like that. I've never had somebody who's just a normal person go, 'are you alright?' and I'm like 'thanks, yeah, I'm great now.'

I don't want to make it personal, but Sandra who's my volunteer, she's got a family so all the way through this they've been at home but she's still phoned me on a Friday; it's just really amazing. I look forward to that. It hasn't been so bad since I've been in a bubble, but it was absolutely precious during the first lockdown; it was a diamond, it really was a diamond because it was really lonely, I was really lonely.