

8. It's a really great thing

I heard about Archway because we had a social worker at the time and because I decided we were getting too insular. We were looking for some way to get some extra contact. John's parents (husband) had just died so we had lost that contact too and Archway found a volunteer who came to visit us, and still is coming to visit us. At the moment she's not because of the pandemic, but I hope that will pick up again. We were feeling isolated because we had really close contacts with John's parents and my parents were in Germany at the time, so they were quite a long way away.

I had psychiatric problems and was assigned a social worker to help find a way to get normalised again. I don't have one at the moment because I'm actually really well, so I'm convinced that having contact with people in Archway, and with Clare our volunteer, has actually helped that. I've been treated for mental health problems for a long time, but the diagnosis was never fixed. In the last five years they've come up with the name 'paranoid schizophrenia' but with the medication I'm actually okay.

At the moment, I take the dog out every day. If I didn't have to take her out, I wouldn't get out at all I think. We got to the point where we decided that even to go out shopping wouldn't be a good option because we would be better off ordering online. That means we are really comfortable but we haven't got any reason to go out really because everything in the last year has really happened via online contact. Meanwhile, my parents have also died. We've got friends but they all live further afield and because of lockdown they've obviously all been stranded at home like we have so they can't come.

Clare phones every fortnight so we get to hear all the stories from the children and whatever else is going on. There's not much happening in our lives so it's quite nice to have some other perspective. It's a really great thing to do really and I'm ever so grateful to her to put up the time that she does. I've also really enjoyed reading the Archway newsletters that have been coming for the last year because it's quite nice to have the volunteers being introduced to you.

I think lockdown was difficult for everyone and John misses not being able to go to the football. I do a bit of patchwork and I have actually started to learn Swedish because we've got a few Swedish friends – just in case we end up going over there again which is a bit unlikely at the moment but at some point, it might be. On the whole, I think we've coped quite well with lockdown but I still think it's really nice to have had Clare to have had all these conversations with because we really wait for the Tuesday when it's her day. I know Clare is a volunteer and in that way she's not a friend, but she is a friend in lots of ways and has become so because she's been coming for several years now. We are both physically disabled as well as other mental health problems so there are a few odd things that she's done for us as well, when she was here as a volunteer, where we would have struggled to do that.

I think it's a really great thing that not only did we get in touch with Archway but we ended up with a volunteer that was able to visit us as well. It was quite different before because she wasn't just available on the phone but of course, now she only can be on the phone it's a great thing too.