



“I felt lonely and depressed”

Sarah, from Potters Bar, suffered a stroke age 58 and this started a spiral that ended with her isolated and alone in a town she didn't know.

Sarah was an independent active person, and foster carer to three teenagers. In March 2018 she had had a headache for a few days but put it down to stress and had an early night with some painkillers. When she woke up in the morning she knew she wasn't right but luckily quickly called her sister-in-law who was a registered nurse. Her sister-in-law at once recognised the early symptoms of stroke (slurred speech and a drop of one side of her face) and called an ambulance.

The next thing Sarah can remember is waking with a bandage round her head in hospital. She had been taken to Queens Square, the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, as she had had a haemorrhagic stroke and undergone surgery. She started intense rehabilitation but suffered several seizures, setting her back further. Following a long period of convalescence in hospital and then rehabilitation in Langley House, Sarah was finally discharged home to Borehamwood with carers and ongoing therapy.

Sarah now found that even small every day tasks were a challenge and was reliant on others to assist her with all her daily tasks. However, she was referred to Headway Hertfordshire and started attending the local Borehamwood Support Group which provided her with help and advice.

Due to her long stay in hospital Sarah's foster children were placed in alternative care and Sarah lost her income. This led to her being evicted from her home and she had several moves to temporary accommodation and before finally being placed in a bungalow in Potters Bar.

Potters Bar was entirely alien to Sarah; she did not know anyone in the town. She felt alone, isolated and unable to go out. She found communication difficult and only had her mobile phone; during lockdown, she struggled to attend the Headway Hertfordshire online support groups with this small device. Reflecting on this time Sarah said, *'I felt so depressed sitting at home doing nothing. Once my cleaning was done, I had nothing to do, apart from eat and go back to bed.'* *'I gained weight as I had no exercise, I felt lonely and depressed.'*

Luckily Headway Hertfordshire stepped in and used some funds to loan Sarah a laptop. They also secured her a place on a Computer Skills course that she could do online. This provided the motivation she needed. Sarah completed the Digital skills course to help her navigate the new device; saying *'I can now search the web, send and receive emails, use zoom and complete forms!'* She also used the device to try online hobby courses and could now attend Headway Hertfordshire zoom calls as well as enjoying online calls with friends and family. More recently, Sarah has been

using the laptop to search for voluntary work and has now made an application for a voluntary role in her local high street shop.

Sarah said having the laptop made her feel so much more connected – she is now able to communicate with others and enjoyed the structure of the weekly groups and courses she was doing online. She said, *'I feel connected again and not so isolated, the loneliness has lifted.'*