Stoke Lifestyle Volunteer – NHS Ayrshire & Arran

Gordon was interviewed by Lisa Taylor from the Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme at Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Gordon Guthrie is a volunteer with the Stroke Lifestyle Group in NHS Ayrshire & Arran.

Giving up your free time to help others on an unpaid basis is the definition of volunteering, and doing this often requires a commitment over a set period of time. It struck me that Gordon is a fantastic example of a committed and passionate volunteer looking to help others, despite all the health problems he has faced over the past three years.

Prior to 2016, Gordon (61) was working as a long distance lorry driver and spent long spells away from home. In 2016 he suffered a stroke which he described as “having my world turned upside-down and as though everything had been taken away from me in an instant”. Over the past three years Gordon has gone on to have further strokes and two heart attacks. He has also recently started receiving kidney dialysis. It seems like an enormous amount of health problems for one person to have had to deal with, but Gordon remains optimistic and told me about his journey to volunteering.

Initially, following his stroke, Gordon’s speech was poor and he lost mobility in his right side. He says: “I became very depressed. I had to stop working and was unable to do anything for myself - I felt like no one could understand why I felt the way I did and I felt useless.”

Gordon’s GP referred him to physiotherapy at the Douglas Grant Rehabilitation Centre in the Ayrshire Central Hospital, Irvine, where he met Occupational Therapists Mhairi and Lynsey. Mhairi encouraged Gordon to attend the Stroke Lifestyle Group, a peer support group for people who have experienced strokes. The Stroke Lifestyle Group runs in a six week block, twice per year and attendees are encouraged to talk about how they are feeling. After some persuasion, Gordon attended the group. He says: “I couldn’t believe that other people felt the same as me and were going through the same things. I have made many friendships through this group and we meet up for coffee.”

Over time, Gordon’s mobility, speech and mental health began to improve.

Mhairi later came out to Gordon’s house, to review his home for adjustments to help his mobility. She asked if he would like to be a volunteer, supporting the Stroke Lifestyle Group and Gordon agreed. He now helps others going through the same journey as he has, and says volunteering has really improved his life.
“If it wasn’t for this group I don’t know where I would be. I would come to the group every day if I could. It makes me feel great when I see the positive change in people who attend the group, and it has made me so much more confident.”

In addition to the group, Gordon thanks Mhairi, Lynsey and especially his wife Isabel with getting him through a very difficult time in his life. His wife, who now makes cakes for the group, says that Gordon has come a very long way and she is very proud of him.

Gordon says that he never imagined he could be someone that could support and encourage others with their health and wellbeing, and that in many ways the past three years have made him a better person. Volunteering has enabled him to not just help others, but help himself.