



## Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Phase 2 understanding from experience

### **Muriel Searle, volunteer, Compassionate Inverclyde**

#### **What has continued to help keep a focus on what matters for people during the pandemic?**

I think it's more difficult to have a clear focus now compared to the start of the pandemic. In Spring it was all new. We had never experienced lockdown before or faced such restrictions in our lives. As volunteers with Compassionate Inverclyde we had to get on and find a way to keep connected and do something to make a difference to people.

We are still active in Inverclyde Royal Hospital (IRH) with some of that changed focus that emerged back in March/April. We still can't go round the wards to see if anyone needs one of our back home boxes of groceries if returning home alone from hospital. But staff do come down to get nightwear and toiletries for people who have come into the hospital on an unplanned basis. We don't have as many staff coming down – many came down to our store for the first time in Spring. But we always enjoy the chat when they do appear.

It's still important that people feel cared for when they come into hospital, that there are folk in Inverclyde who want to make sure that nobody goes without. Our jolly box scheme for Xmas is a huge operation and again, the point is to make people realise they are not forgotten and that they will have a box of goodies and a human connection.

#### **Are there changes that seem to be lasting longer term and are there things that have slid back to old ways of doing things?**

I'm thinking about life in general here. We have all had to make so many adjustments. You have to pay more attention to recognise people with their masks on, judging by their hair, their walk and so on.

Then there are the constant changes of social plans. It's hard not to get discouraged by the cancellations and disappointments. People keep finding new ways to do things. Xmas will be a challenge! My nephew will be 30 in November. His family have decided to have a garden celebration no matter what. So: candles, braziers, barbecue and an awning and immediate family only. People are finding ways. My niece had a baby this morning and that's been a great source of celebration. Life does go on.

A big change for our volunteers is that there can only be one person in the back home box store in the hospital. That is a huge adjustment because the volunteer teams were very close before and the social aspect was a big part of their weekly shift. I was very lucky that my daughter has volunteered with me the whole time due to being furloughed. She goes back full time next week so that will be me on my own in IRH for the first time.

**What difference has this made to people?**

We try to keep in touch with all the volunteers in Compassionate Inverclyde. Some are still isolating and it's been a long time now for them. You can pick up on the What's app groups that some people are struggling. I got a start when one volunteer said they felt worthless and useless at this stage. I would not have expected that person to feel like that. That set me on my back wheels a bit. We need to stay in touch with everyone as we go into Winter.

**How did this make you feel?**

I stay hopeful. I'm a very determined person and I know that I need to be busy and seeing people.

**Reflecting on your experiences what have you learned?**

My experience during the pandemic has confirmed that you always get back more than you put in.

**What difference has it made to you to tell your story as part of this project?**

I feel that telling my story - it's a bit like contributing to a time capsule. We are coming through something here. While we probably have a way to go – this will pass in time and people in the future will want to learn about how this was and how we got through it. It's good to be able to contribute to that in a small way.