

## **Grant's story**

Recovering alcoholic Grant Ellis suffers from schizophrenia. One of Independent Living West Country's first clients, he's found their support invaluable over the years, especially during the recent coronavirus pandemic.

As a former doorman, Grant used to be full of confidence, working in night clubs in London and dealing directly with members of the public. In recent years though his life has changed - quite dramatically - with the onset of schizophrenia and acute paranoia.

His condition means that he's scared of other people, fearing that they might do him harm. So, to cope, he turns to alcohol - which doesn't mix well with his medication - giving him confidence, but also leading to altercations. Debilitating in many respects, his mental illness has left him scared to leave his house, confident only to use his corner shop.

Following the closure on MIND in Devon in 2018, Marie Tolly, former Exeter and East Devon manager for the charity, swept Grant up, setting up Independent Living West Country (ILWC) overnight to help those in danger of being abandoned.

With the help to ILWC, Grant has been on his personal journey to greater independence aided by, Stuart Tolly, who has been helping him cope throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

"In addition to his mental health conditions," says Stuart, "Grant has to contend with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). As soon as Covid-19 hit, we knew that we had to protect and shield him.

"In the early days, he would stay up all night watching the news, which only fuelled his paranoia, so we made sure that we talked to him virtually every day on the phone. We also conducted socially distanced visits to check on his wellbeing, dropping off shopping, medication and taking him out on short, social distanced walks, as well as doing weights and exercise with him.

“Having a history of self-harm due to his schizophrenia and paranoia, our goal was to make Grant feel as safe and happy as possible in what are very unusual times.”

Having worked with Grant for over two years, Stuart has built up an incredibly strong bond with him.

“With Stuart by my side, I feel safe,” says Grant. “If he says take it easy, you don’t need to rush, that calms me down. I trust him. He helps me sort out my letters, bills and medication and takes me out shopping - something that I simply couldn’t do before because I thought people were out to get me. With the support of Stuart and his colleagues my life has changed for the better.”

Grant adds: “Throughout coronavirus they’ve been brilliant. With my paranoia and the level of anxiety that I was experiencing, I realised that I needed additional support on top of that paid for by Devon Country Council. So, with the support of my sister, I’ve increased the number of hours they provide to me.

“Thanks to ILWC I now have structure to my life, companionship and support. I feel safe, my mind is put at rest, and I know that nothing can happen to me.

“Throughout, they’ve been professional, providing mutual trust and all the support I need. They give me a reason to care and make me feel secure even when they’re not here.

“And they’re always there at the end of the phone when I need them.

“With Stuart’s support I’ve not had a drink since March. I’ve even been out shopping for a pair of glasses, and I’ve been on a trip to the supermarket. With him by my side, I can do anything. He gives me confidence and, as a result, I feel more independent.”

If you, a friend, patient or family member is struggling with acute mental health conditions in lockdown, requiring in-home support to cope with the challenges of daily life, please call Independent Living West Country on 01392 467007 for details of how we can help. [www.independentlivingsw.co.uk](http://www.independentlivingsw.co.uk)