

## **JUNE ROBINSON SIZE 7**

Audio Producer: David Waters

Hi. My name is June. I work for Age UK Portsmouth, we're part of the Living Well project. I'm a personal independence coordinator. That's abbreviated to PIC worker. We have people referred to us from the doctors, usually people who have got two long term medical conditions. They're over fifty and they've had the odd visit to hospital over the past year. It's our job to kind of go out into the community. See these people, see if there's any support or anything we can give them, just to improve their wellbeing, and help them access their health care a little bit better as well. We go out and visit them in their home and just find out about that person's life. What makes them tick, find out about their family, find out about their friends, who comes in to visit them. What are their health conditions and how is it stopping them doing things, to see if there's any support we can give them or, if they have any goals that they want to achieve, we can help them achieve their goals.

The aim is if their wellbeing has improved and it has a knock on effect on their health, then that takes the strain off the health service. Building up a rapport is a big thing in this job, because you come across all sorts of people, you've got to kind of be caring and show compassion and empathy. I think you have to have the chitter chatter personality you know, because the doctor and the district nurse and the carers that pop in they don't have time to do all the chitter chatting and the building of the rapport, whereas in our job we don't really have a time limit. We can spend time with that person, talk to them, find out what makes them tick, their background, their family, their friends, and more often than not they will tell you all about themselves, they want to talk and share everything, in fact they'll probably tell us more things than they would their close family.

As you might be able to tell from my accent I'm a northern bird, I'm from Cumbria, I'm from a little town called Appleby, where really I think my heart really still belongs, up there, maybe one day I'll go back when I'm older and wiser. One week after my seventeenth birthday I ran off and joined the Navy and then came down to Portsmouth and then I spent three years in that Women's Royal Naval Service and, of course, you meet a sailor, and then you get married and I have got two children as well, so they were brought up down here. Portsmouth is a busy, busy city and most people don't realise that Portsmouth is the most densely populated city in the UK. So I would say Portsmouth is a big, big melting pot.

Our project has been going just about fourteen months at the moment and I would imagine over the time I've probably supported about sixty to eighty people with all sorts of different goals and different ambitions and different types of things they want to achieve. I had a lady I went to see yesterday, she's fifty eight and she's never been able to read or write and when she was at school she was always labelled as the stupid child, because, way back then, dyslexia wasn't invented so to speak. So we sourced a free reading and writing group in town and yesterday she was just beaming and she's just the star pupil. Her confidence and her self esteem had just blown through the roof and her daughter and family just saw such a different person.

My number one success story that I'm really proud about is Sean. Sean was referred to us from his GP and I phoned him up and said "Would you like me to come out and see you?" and on the other end I had a grumpy reply, "Yeah OK, I don't know what you can do." So I got to his house. Knock knock knock on his door - there greeting me was quite a scary figure, tattooed from head to foot. I'm thinking "Oh right. OK." He said "I'm in a shared house, we'll have to go up stairs to my bedroom," which was a bit scary, going up to a man's bedroom, sitting on his bed because it was the only place that was available to sit, and there he was, Mr Tattoo Man and I was kind of biting my nails, thinking "I don't think I should be in this position." Anyway, we started to talk and you should never judge a book by its cover. His story was, the year before he was made redundant and

as a consequence of that his relationship fell apart and he ended up being homeless. The social services and everything had managed to find him a place in a shared house but he was really, really down, really, really depressed, suffering from anxiety, he was taking all this medication to kind of overcome this and he was just bottling everything up, keeping everything to himself - too proud to ask for any help. And after talking about his position, we got to the nitty gritty on, well, what support can I give you Sean? How can I improve your wellbeing? And anyway, he said "Well I want a job." I says "Right. OK, well let's have a think." So I thought, "Well, one way to get a job is you could start off by volunteering." And he used to be a long distance lorry driver, and I said "Well what about a driving volunteering job?" because in Portsmouth we have a service where they're always looking for volunteer drivers. He says "Yes, I'd be up for that."

So we tootle off around and I warn "Don't judge a book by its cover because John is a lovely guy even though he's tattooed from head to foot. Please don't judge him by his looks. And in no time at all, he was out on his own, volunteer driver on the buses and dropping off the all dayers, picking up and taking them here and everywhere. Within two weeks of him volunteering and he had such positive feedback from these clients that when a full time vacancy arose, a paid full time vacancy arose, they didn't have any hesitation in taking him on and she gave him the job and he's been there ever since and I think that was probably about eight months ago. It's just done his self-esteem and confidence the world of good and his clientele love him to bits as well, you know, they think he's fantastic. He's got old ladies giving him bunches of flowers and things and not only that he's actually come off his medication, the mental health support worker that he had has signed him off completely. He's just a completely different person. It's just such a fantastic feeling when something like that happens and that was my big success.

The most bizarre request I've had in this job is from a chap, he was in his eighties. He had sexual desires you see, he wanted me to try and find some way that I could organise somebody to sexually relieve. In the end we had to resort to good old Mr Google and we downloaded some pictures of some apparatus that one could use to relieve one's sexual frustrations. So I took them round to him and gave them to him and I just said "Just make sure you don't leave these out when the carer comes around, all right!" I think because I was on the same wavelength as him and nothing phased me sort of thing, he just asked me.

And then we got people ninety plus you know, at the older end of the spectrum, often just want to be friends. Somebody just to pop around and just be a friend and speak to them and have a chat. Some people, they don't have any family or if they did have family they've all passed away by the time you're ninety three. You haven't got many friends left, all the friends that you had in your forties, fifties and growing up, they've all passed away before you, so their friendship circle has disappeared completely. You can't help but feel sad when you listen to some of these stories. Quite often I've shed a tear when I've been talking to people and listening to them and they have shed a tear as well, you know, because they get very sad. One lady who I've been to see quite a lot actually, her husband died last year and they had been together for sixty-six years. They'd always done everything together. I don't think they'd spent a night apart. So she is just absolutely heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken about it no matter what you do. She's never going to get over that. You just got to listen to her, you know, it's OK to be sad, you got to let her grieve, let her be sad. Let her go through it and put a little bit of positivity in.

I'm a big softy as well and you get emotionally involved, but you do have to try and cut it off when you know five o'clock tools down, out the door sort of thing, but that doesn't stop you thinking about people. And thinking, you know, what's Mrs So-and-so doing on her own tonight? what's she having for her tea? and this sort of thing. It's very difficult sometimes, yeah. I try to contribute, feel like I'm doing something worthwhile, which is why I stumbled on this job really. It makes you feel like you're making a difference to some people, you know, helping them in some way. I mean I'm no Mother Teresa. So don't look at me like that! It's just that feeling that you want to help people and you want them to get the best out of life that they possibly can.