

Christine and John's Story

Progress is slow and steady, but for Chris, each and every success is life-changing. She can now make her own cup of tea, and she can also use the toilet independently.

Someone in the UK has a stroke every five minutes. Chris had a stroke when she was 69. After 5 months in hospital she came home in time for her 70th birthday party. But her life couldn't have been more changed.

Before her stroke Chris was enjoying recent retirement from a fulfilling career as a secondary school teacher. She had taught an impressive mix of languages and maths.

100,000 strokes happen each year in the UK and the number of people between the age of 20 and 65 is increasing annually - this has stretched NHS resource. John felt sure Chris's recovery and rehabilitation would make more progress at home. But the Chris that came home was a very different person to the person she had been. Unable to walk, talk, barely moving independently at all, and with a nasal tube for feeding, Chris was now totally dependent on John.

After coming home from hospital, Chris was given six months of Community Rehabilitation programme; this involved regular visits from an Occupational Therapist, a Physiotherapist and a little support from Speech and Language Therapist. After the six month programme, very little support was available. Yet Chris was still completely dependent on John, with no hope for improving and gaining back her voice and mobility.

Chris and John knew nothing about Conductive Education (CE) at the time. Now three years later, John says that if Chris wasn't having CE, there would be nothing — no support at all for her. They travel from Coventry to NICE — Centre for Movement Disorders in Birmingham twice a week (generally entailing two hours of travelling per visit) — for a speech session on Mondays and a movement based programme on Wednesdays.

When they first arrived at NICE, John helped Chris into her wheelchair, and pushed her through the front door. Now Chris walks from the car to the building. In fact they rarely take the wheelchair out at all.

The sessions are 90 minutes long and very physical. There are just three or four other participants, and two conductors (Conductors undertake a degree-level qualification). Each person gets targeted support and is pushed to achieve as much as they can. Chris greatly benefits from the camaraderie she feels with the other people who have had a similar life-changing experience as her. Likewise, John, waiting in the cosy environment of the waiting room/come kitchen, takes encouragement and shares advice with other carers.



Christine and John's Story continued...

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"It is now more than three years since Chris had her stroke. After a prolonged hospital stay Chris is at home and has made huge strides in mobility and communication to a large extent due to the support that we've had from NICE's services. Chris now walks much more both independently and with support. She uses the microwave, makes tea and toast and works around the kitchen at her own pace. At the end of a day it is a real pleasure to see Chris balance a cup of tea and a glass of wine from a sitting position in the wheelchair as she heads for an hour or two of television before bed."

"I'm a parent of a little girl who attends the School Group at NICE. I met with John and Chris after one of Chris' Conductive Education sessions. I was struck by the way Chris and John communicated. I can't imagine how much patience it must take for each of them to adapt to their life now. It was very humbling being with them and I felt privileged to hear their story — their quiet strength and quiet determination was overwhelming. Chris was very tired after her session, which made talking even more arduous than normal. Despite that, and the journey home ahead of them, they were willing to talk to me about Chris' stroke and how positive they feel about Conductive Education. We all know how hard it is to be open about difficult experiences — I am very grateful to both Chris and John for sharing their story and hope that it leads other people in need of support to find NICE too."

