

Summer 2026

Stroke News

For everyone affected by stroke

'Time is a healer'

Ten years after a life-changing stroke, Louise is using her experiences to help others

This issue:

- Coping with the wait for mental health support
- Getting funding for mobility equipment
- Research into improving sleep to boost stroke recovery

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Editor's letter



The emotional impact of stroke can be overwhelming for survivors and their loved ones. But as this issue's stories show, seeking support and connecting with others can help you move forward.

Cover star, Louise, had a devastating stroke at just 20. Ten years on, she reflects on the trauma of her stroke, finding comfort through connecting with other young survivors, and why she's determined to help others feel seen and understood (page 8).

We also hear from Jeremy, (page 20), who explains how trying a new hobby helped him

overcome anxiety and regain his confidence. Shannon (page 24) shares the emotional challenges of becoming her mum's carer, and why asking for help made all the difference to her mental health.

Seven-year-old Louie and his family (page 28), tell us how they're navigating the challenges of childhood stroke together. And our Stroke Support Helpline Team answer questions about coping with the wait for mental health support (page 14).

Enjoy this issue, and please keep sharing your stories with us.

Christine Webster, Editor

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Over to you

I thought I'd write to extol the benefits of letter writing.

In the first fifteen years of this century, I've been resuscitated from a cardiac arrest and had two brain bleeds. My speech has suffered. However, for many years now I have, each day, written a letter.

This has not only brought me some good pen friends but

has also, I believe, helped me to communicate verbally.

I find the relatively slow and unpressurised world of 'old-fashioned' letter writing an all-round beneficial pastime.

I wanted to share this in case it benefits others struggling with communication.

Sonia

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Find your local services, clubs and groups: stroke.org.uk/support

Join our Online Community: onlinecommunity.stroke.org.uk

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Do you have something to share?



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From our Chief Executive

Anyone of any age can have a stroke, and its impact is traumatic.

Having the right rehabilitation and emotional support is vital to recovery. Yet time and again, we hear from stroke survivors and their families who feel abandoned after leaving hospital without the support they need. This has to change.

Every day, we're here to help through our Stroke Support Helpline, local services, stroke support groups and Online Community (stroke.org.uk/support). Over the next two years, we're committed to expanding our emotional support so more people can access help to process what's happened to them and engage with their recovery.

We're also working with decision-makers, to improve access to high-quality rehabilitation. Your experiences are key to this. As we discuss on page 16, by campaigning with us and sharing your stories, you're helping to make the stroke community impossible to ignore.

Improving awareness of stroke is also vital in helping more people to access emotional support. Recently, we proudly worked with the Coronation Street team on an authentic storyline focusing on a young stroke survivor with unusual stroke symptoms. We hope that by showing that stroke can happen at any age and portraying the realities of recovery with honesty and care, we'll enable more people to recognise a stroke and better understand the challenges of recovery.

Juliet Bouverie OBE

Helping others to feel seen

Louise was just 20 when she had a devastating stroke. Now, 10 years later, she's helping to make sure other young stroke survivors feel seen and understood.

In 2016, Louise was working as a legal secretary in Wigan, hoping to train as a solicitor. Then one morning in June, she woke up feeling really unwell.

'I vomited a couple of times, then later, while I was at my friend's house, the whole room started spinning,' she says. 'I was so dizzy, my coordination went and the left side of my face felt numb.

'I said – although I never thought it would be true – that I felt like I was having a stroke. I thought I was being ridiculous, so I asked my friend not to phone an ambulance.'

The next morning, Louise woke to find she couldn't feel the toes on her left foot. She went to see her GP, who said it was probably just a reaction to something. But that night, her symptoms escalated dramatically.

'I genuinely thought I was going to die,' remembers Louise. 'I had a severe pain in my head – like it was going to explode. I lived with my sister, so tried to shout for her. She found me covered in vomit and tried to stand me up, but I'd completely lost the use of my legs, so she called an ambulance.'

Despite being unable to see, speak, or walk, paramedics mistook her symptoms for the effects of drugs or alcohol, and didn't take her to hospital. Only after her sister called 999 again was Louise finally taken in. An MRI confirmed she'd had a stroke – three days earlier.

'I said – although I never thought it would be true – that I felt like I was having a stroke.'



Doctors later discovered that it was caused by a hole in her heart, which has since been repaired.

'I feel like I wasn't taken seriously because I was so young,' says Louise. 'I've since learned how important time is when you have a stroke, and I get so upset because I feel like I was completely failed.'

Louise spent three weeks in Wigan Hospital receiving physiotherapy, but once discharged, she received very little follow-up support. Struggling with trauma, anxiety and depression, Louise went to stay with her parents in Ireland to recuperate.

'The stroke had a massive impact on my mental health. It wasn't my fault, but I felt so ashamed and embarrassed. I didn't know if I'd ever get back to normal. I just wanted to hide away from the world.'

'I went on antidepressants for a while and was referred for NHS counselling. It helped to speak to someone I didn't know about how I felt. My family and

friends were supportive, but nobody truly understood me. My grandad had had a stroke at 50, and I remember asking him, 'How do you get better?' I just wanted someone who had been through it to tell me that everything would be ok.'

Searching for help, Louise discovered our Online Community. 'I got so much support from the stroke survivors I met online,' says Louise. 'I found people my age who'd had strokes too. That was massive for me. It helped me to realise I wasn't strange – it does happen to other young people and they were going through the same things.'

'The fatigue was hard to deal with. But talking to other survivors helped me to realise that it's common, and I wasn't imagining it. It validated everything I was feeling.'

Ten years on, Louise has worked hard to build a new life for herself.

'Before my stroke, I was always out with friends. But now I can't



Louise with her husband, son and daughter – her 'biggest achievements'

stand being in crowds. My coordination and balance have never been the same, and I still suffer with fatigue. But I don't let this stop me from living my life.

'My biggest achievement since my stroke is having my two beautiful children. When I was really poorly, I didn't know if this would be possible, so I'm very thankful.'

'I also changed my career. I went into supporting adults with learning disabilities

and now work for the local authority in adult social care.

'The stroke was a massive trauma, and I still get emotional about it. Looking back, I feel sorry for that young girl and everything she went through. But over the years, counselling has helped me to come to terms with it.'

'I also find getting out in nature helps. I love going for walks – being surrounded by greenery gives me peace. I feel positive now – like I've got my ambition back.'



Whatever you're facing in the aftermath of a stroke, we're here for you. Contact us on **0303 3033 100**, helpline@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/support

Recently, Louise has been working with us to help the producers and writers of ITV's *Coronation Street* with their current stroke storyline, making sure it reflects the reality of what it's like to be a young stroke survivor. She's also worked closely with actor, Sydney Martin, who plays a 19-year-old stroke survivor on the show.

'It's been amazing to share my story and what it was like after my stroke – especially that recovery isn't a quick fix. It's long, tough and really changes you.'

'Corrie have been so passionate about getting it right, which is

vital. Viewers need to understand that strokes don't just happen to elderly people. I think other young stroke survivors will watch it and feel seen.

'To stroke survivors: things can get better. It's a cliché, but time is a healer. Don't put too much pressure on yourself and celebrate the small wins.'

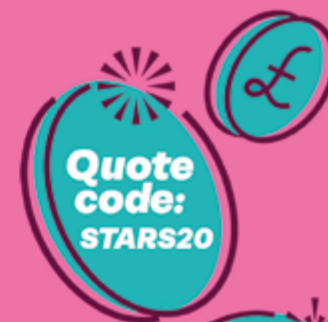
'After my stroke, I lost the ability to swallow. The first time I was able to take a drink of fizzy pop again, I was deliriously happy. Little things are massive in your recovery. Keep going and stay strong because you will get there.'

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Coping with the wait for mental health support

Seeking mental health support after a stroke can help you process what has happened and find ways to manage the emotional impact of this life-changing condition.

Reaching out for help is a big step. Unfortunately, support isn't always available immediately, particularly if you're accessing NHS (or HSC in Northern Ireland) mental health services.

Kim from our Stroke Support Helpline answers some common questions to support you while you wait.

Q How long will I have to wait?

NHS/HSC waiting times can vary from a few weeks to several months, depending on where you live, the type of therapy you need and demand for services.

Waiting for therapy can feel frustrating, lonely or overwhelming, but it's important to remember that your need for support is valid. Long waiting lists reflect pressure on services – not the importance of your wellbeing.

Q What if my mental health gets worse?

If you need immediate help to keep yourself or someone else safe, call 999 or go to A&E. Mental health emergencies should be taken as seriously as physical ones.

If you need urgent support but your life isn't at risk, contact NHS 111 (or Phone First in NI) for help.

Q What can I do to help me cope while I wait?

✓ **Prepare for your first session** – Thinking about what you'd like to discuss can help you feel more confident when therapy begins. You could make notes about how your stroke has affected your emotions, relationships or daily life, and write down any questions for your therapist.



If you have a question or need to talk, our Stroke Support Helpline is here for you. Contact us on **0303 3033 100** or **helpline@stroke.org.uk**



Be kind to yourself –

This can be difficult when you're struggling, but small, regular acts of self-care can make a difference. Gentle physical activity, spending time outdoors, practising relaxation or mindfulness and doing enjoyable hobbies can help you feel calmer and more in control. Keeping a regular sleep routine and eating well are also important. Focus on what feels realistic and achievable for you.



✓ **Explore other sources of support** – Mental health books, podcasts and apps can provide advice and coping tools. Visit Mind's app library to find safe, trustworthy apps: **mind.orchahealth.com**

Go to **nhs.uk/every-mind-matters** for NHS self-help resources. And check your local community hubs or visit online directory **hubofhope.co.uk** to find information about charity or community mental health services in your area.



Talk to others

You don't have to cope alone. Sharing your feelings with someone you trust can ease isolation.

Speaking to people who understand stroke first-hand can also help you feel heard and supported. Visit **stroke.org.uk/support** to find support by phone, online or through your local stroke support group.

Campaigning for stroke around the UK

From election commitments, to holding decision-makers to account and turning Parliament purple, here's how you're supporting us to make stroke a priority across the UK.

Wales:

Wales has a new political landscape, with Plaid Cymru forming a minority government. This means different parties need to work together more closely, making it especially important that stroke remains a priority for everyone.

Thanks to your support, we're in a strong position to do this. Plaid Cymru's leader has already committed to supporting our three priorities for improving stroke care in Wales (go to stroke.org.uk/Wales for details).

We're continuing to work with the Welsh Government and NHS leaders to improve stroke services. Together with clinical experts and people affected by stroke, we're helping to



update the Quality Statement for Stroke. This is an opportunity to turn national ambitions into real improvements in stroke support.

As a new Senedd begins, we'll keep working with politicians from all parties to make sure the needs of people affected by stroke are heard. By sharing experiences and speaking up for change, supporters like you are helping to build a better future for stroke care in Wales.

Scotland:

Thanks to your support with our campaigning ahead of the May elections, stroke will be higher on the political agenda in the new Scottish Parliament than ever before.

The Scottish National Party (SNP), Scottish Greens, Scottish Labour, and Scottish Liberal Democrats committed to delivering a national 24/7 thrombectomy service in their election manifestos. With strong cross-party backing, there's a real opportunity for this to be achieved during the next five years.

Scottish Labour and Scottish Greens have also committed to improving rehabilitation, while the SNP has promised support for Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland's (CHSS) rollout of new stroke rehabilitation gyms.

This encouraging focus on stroke is down to the collective efforts of us, CHSS, and supporters whose experiences show why change is needed. But manifesto commitments don't guarantee delivery, so we must keep holding politicians and government to their promises.



Stroke survivor, Chris, shares his experiences at Holyrood

Almost half of newly elected MSPs are new to Parliament, giving us an opportunity to help them understand the realities of life after stroke and get them working on much-needed changes. Your voices are invaluable in this – join our campaign to make stroke a priority in Scotland.



Campaigners supporting a 24/7 thrombectomy service

Northern Ireland:

In May, stroke survivors and campaigners gathered at Stormont to mark 500 days since the Northern Ireland Department of Health missed its commitment to deliver a 24/7 thrombectomy service. Thrombectomy is one of the most effective emergency treatments for stroke. But in Northern Ireland, the service is still only available between 8.00am and 5.00pm, meaning around 140 people each year are estimated to miss out.

People affected by stroke shared their experiences and highlighted the difference timely treatment can make. Some spoke about how thrombectomy helped

their recovery, while others described the impact of not being able to access it when it was needed.

The Health Minister told those gathered that expanding thrombectomy to a 24/7 service remains a priority, but that funding still needs to be agreed.

Our team in Northern Ireland will continue to work with politicians and decision-makers to secure confirmed funding and clear timescales needed to deliver this vital service.

Together, we will keep speaking up to make sure everyone who needs thrombectomy can access it, whatever time of day they have a stroke.



Uma Kumaran MP during Prime Minister's Questions

England:

Thanks to your support, we marked Stroke Awareness Month in May by making Parliament purple.

Our campaigners encouraged MPs to support Make May Purple by sharing stroke information on social media, wearing purple and Stroke Association badges, and speaking up for better stroke care.

During Prime Minister's Questions on 20 May, stroke parliamentary champion, Uma Kumaran MP, wearing a Stroke Association badge, shared her family's experience of stroke

and asked what the government is doing to improve stroke care.

She was joined by MPs from across Parliament, including former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, who also showed their support by wearing Stroke Association badges.

We're now following up with MPs so they continue to champion improvements in treatment, rehabilitation and support.

Thank you to everyone who contacted their MP to highlight stroke as a cause and make sure the voices of people affected by stroke are heard.



Help us to deliver life-changing improvements for people affected by stroke. Email campaigns@stroke.org.uk to receive campaign updates and opportunities to get involved where you live.

Recovering my confidence

When Jeremy had a stroke at 51, the physical effects were only part of the challenge. Although he was left with weakness in his left arm and hand, it was the emotional impact that proved harder to overcome.

Before his stroke in February 2024, Jeremy led an active, sociable life. He loved walking, running and golf, followed Coventry City with his two sons, and was always organising get-togethers with family and friends.

'I loved making people laugh and enjoyed being around people,' he says.

After his stroke, fatigue, brain fog and anxiety made everyday situations feel overwhelming. 'I struggle to process information and find socialising in busy pubs or restaurants unbearable. I can't cope with the noise of different conversations, glasses and cutlery clattering.

'I went through a really low period. I was frustrated because I didn't feel like my old self. I started avoiding people and made excuses not to meet family and friends.

'The loss of confidence hit me hard. I used to be independent and could cope in any situation, but suddenly I hesitated to do things that had once felt effortless.

'There were times I wondered, 'Why me?' I felt angry and bitter for a while. It was hard to accept I wasn't the same person anymore.'

Determined not to let those feelings define his recovery, Jeremy decided to try pickleball on a friend's recommendation.



Although nervous about walking into a sports club where he knew nobody, he pushed himself to go. 'I felt like I was starting school again,' he laughs. 'But I knew I had to get out of my comfort zone.

'They were so welcoming. There are people of all ages and abilities, all having fun. I've made so many new friends through pickleball. It gives me something to look forward to every week and, more than anything, it's helped me get my confidence back.'

Pickleball gave Jeremy a new hobby, and a gentle way to stay active, at a time when he could no longer enjoy some of the sports he loved.

'It's low-impact and the paddles are light, so it doesn't matter that my left-hand grip isn't fully back. It's improved my coordination, and socialising has helped my speech.'

Jeremy still has to manage his fatigue carefully, taking breaks when needed and allowing himself time to recover afterwards, but says the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

'It's not just about the exercise. It's about getting out of the house, meeting people, having a laugh and feeling part of something again. It gave me a purpose when I'd lost a lot of what made me feel like me.

'People see you walking around and think you're back to normal, but they don't see what's going on inside. I'm not the person I was, and I've had to accept that. Instead, I'm trying to become a new version of myself.'

His message to other stroke survivors is one of hope and patience. 'Set yourself small goals every day.

'Listen to your body and don't compare your recovery with anyone else's because everyone's journey is different. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask for support or to try something new. Stepping outside your comfort zone might feel frightening, but it could be the thing that helps you find your confidence again.'

Trying a new activity, for fun, relaxation or learning, can support your recovery and wellbeing. Visit stroke.org.uk/hobbies for information and ideas.

Jeremy with his family, who have supported him during his recovery

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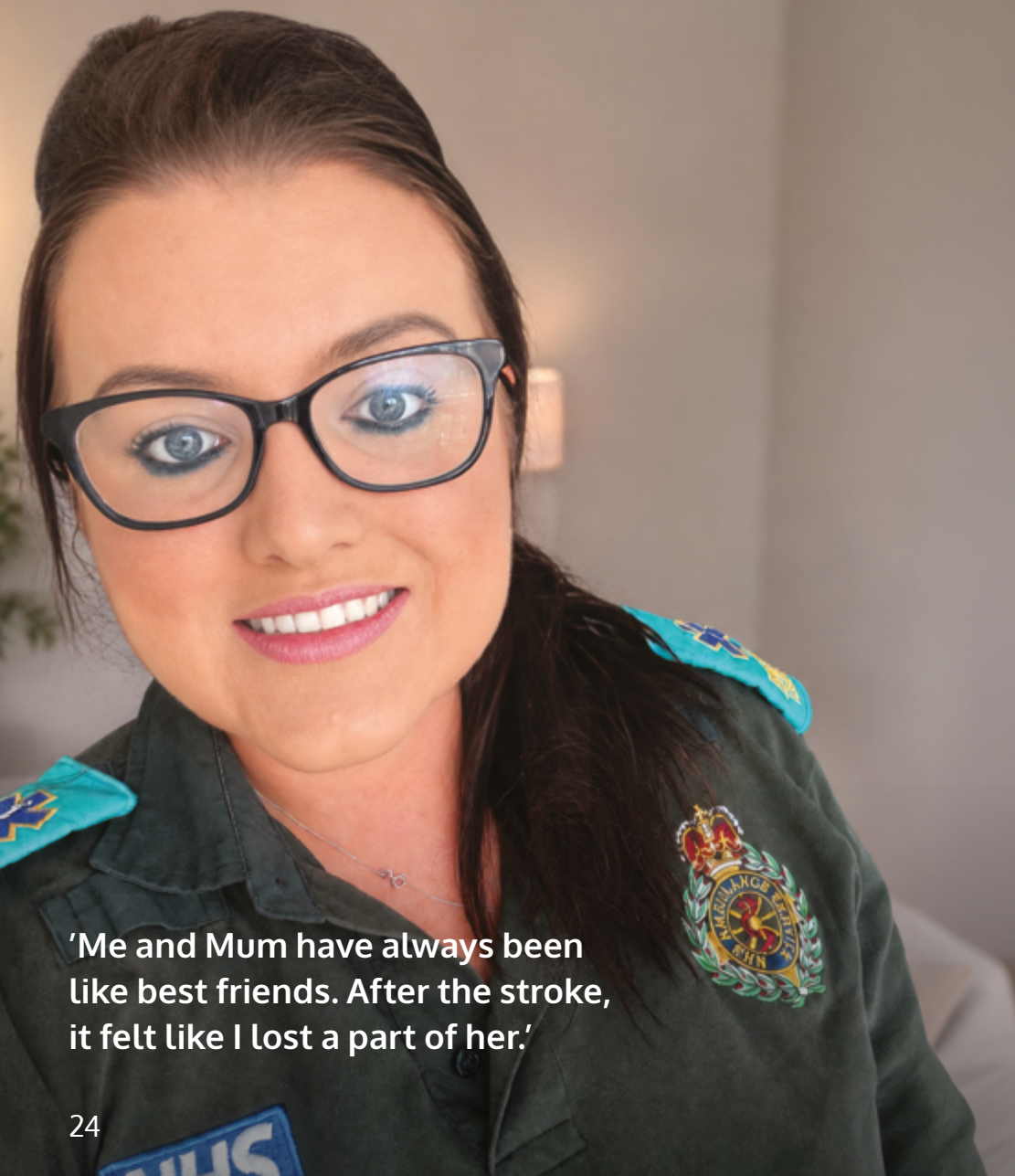
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'We all need help sometimes'



'Me and Mum have always been like best friends. After the stroke, it felt like I lost a part of her.'

Shannon was 27 and studying Paramedic Science when her mum, Sam, had a stroke in 2023.

Overnight, Sam went from being fit and active, to needing round-the-clock support. The eldest of eight children, Shannon put her life on hold to care for her mum and younger siblings.

'I took six months off work and had to drop out of university. I did everything – school runs, shopping, cleaning, helping Mum wash and dress, and taking her to appointments.

'In those first weeks, I'd hide away from Mum so I could cry because I was so heartbroken. Me and Mum have always been like best friends. After the stroke, it felt like I lost a part of her.

'I struggled a lot with my mental health but kept how I felt hidden. I never begrudged helping my family, but the worry, anxiety and anger built up over time. Mum was so healthy. Why did this happen to her? Will she ever recover? Will she have another stroke? Will I be looking after my brothers forever?'

Realising she needed help, Shannon rang our Stroke Support Helpline. 'Having someone listen and empathise during such an uncertain time brought me unexpected warmth. I sobbed a lot! The Support Line Officer was so kind and gave me the strength to carry on.

'The Stroke Association's social media pages are so friendly too. Hearing other families' stories and seeing what people achieved after stroke inspired me.'

Reaching out prompted Shannon to look for ways to manage her wellbeing. 'I did an anxiety course at work and learned breathing techniques that I use whenever anxiety builds up. They help me daily.'

Finding time for herself is also important. 'I enjoy walking our little dog, Chico. Being out in the open makes the day feel better.'

Looking back, Shannon wishes she'd asked for help sooner. 'Don't suffer in silence. Make that GP appointment, speak to a friend. Don't bottle up your feelings until you want to explode like I did.'



Shannon and her brothers have been fundraising to support other families affected by stroke

'If I'd sought help sooner, I'd have been in a better frame of mind for those who needed me most. It's not shameful to need help – we all need it sometimes.'

Shannon now works as an Emergency Ambulance Associate for the South Western Ambulance Service and is pursuing her ambitions again.

'My employer has been brilliant. If I have appointments for Mum, they'll swap my shifts. I can also take an internal route to become a paramedic whenever I'm ready. I take great pride in looking after the families of patients who've had a stroke. I relate to their situations and do what I can to support them.'

While learning to look after her mental health, Shannon continues to support Sam's recovery. 'We do walking exercises to improve Mum's balance and she can now walk short distances unaided. Mum also finds certain words difficult to say so I encourage her to repeat them to me.'

'Recovery is a slow, long road, but day by day, everything seems a little better and we're looking forward to the future.'



If you're caring for a stroke survivor, visit stroke.org.uk/caring for support, or call our Stroke Support Helpline on 0303 3033 100.

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Getting back in the game

Seven-year-old Louie was a bright, football-loving boy with endless energy and a natural talent for the game.

But during a kick-about with a family friend, he suddenly became dizzy and sick. By the time he got home, his dad, Ben, knew something was seriously wrong.

'Louie couldn't speak much when he asked me to carry him from the car,' Ben recalls. 'He couldn't control his body or hold his head up without being sick.'

Facing a long wait for an ambulance, Louie's parents drove him to their local hospital in Wakefield. There they learned that he'd had a stroke caused by a tear in a neck artery.

Louie was transferred to Leeds General Infirmary for life-saving thrombectomy



surgery and spent over two months in intensive care.

'Louie couldn't walk, talk, swallow or even see straight at first,' says Ben. 'But on day four or five, he lifted his middle finger up to his little brother. I didn't care that he was swearing – I saw it as a major step.'

'Physically, Louie's come on leaps and bounds. But although he looks fine, he's far from alright.'



'His biggest battle now is his mental health. Louie's lost his emotional control and sense of danger. He's afraid of the dark and has nightmares four or five times a week.'

He also struggles with fatigue and left-sided weakness. 'He doesn't always realise when he's tired, which makes it hard to explain when he needs to rest.'

Louie's stroke has affected the whole family. His mum, Lindsey, left work to care for him full-time, while Ben supports the family and their four boys.

'While Louie was in hospital, I had to make sure he was okay and I

never thought about myself,' says Lindsey. 'I started having panic attacks. I didn't know how to deal with something so traumatic and had to admit I needed help.'

Counselling helped Lindsey to process what had happened. Support at home and school is also helping the family to navigate difficult moments together. 'Understanding how Louie's processing and emotions work is helping us to know how to help him,' says Lindsey.

Louie's determination shines through every challenge. 'He's strong-willed, brave, and he never gives up,' says Ben proudly.



'Now he plays football with two pan-disability groups. It's amazing how far he's come.'

Despite doctors warning he might never walk or play football again, in summer 2025, Louie reached a huge milestone. At a football match organised to raise money for his physiotherapy, Louie walked unaided onto the pitch and he kicked off the game by passing the ball to his dad.

'I was so proud,' says Ben. 'Having goals has been super

important to Louie. It motivated him to work towards passing the ball. Now he plays football with two pan-disability groups. It's amazing how far he's come.

'When he was in hospital, I never imagined we'd get here. He may never play professionally, but we keep going with new goals, new dreams. At this point I wouldn't put anything past him!'

Scan the QR code to watch our new film, starring Louie, to raise awareness that a stroke can happen at any age.

If you're affected by childhood stroke, visit stroke.org.uk/stroke-in-childhood to learn more about our Childhood Stroke Support services.



Scan here

Looking to become more independent and confident by reducing falls and trips and making walking less of an effort while living with the effects of a stroke?

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*OML FES user survey 2025



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What our FES users say...

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Improving sleep to boost stroke recovery

Sleep is an important part of stroke recovery. While you're asleep, your brain repairs and re-wires itself, helping you to relearn skills like walking, speech and swallowing.



Around half of stroke survivors experience sleep problems that disrupt the deep stages of sleep that are vital for recovery. Improving sleep quality could therefore offer an exciting new way to support rehabilitation, as well as overall mood and quality of life.

This is what Stroke Association-funded researcher, Triin Ojakäär, and her team at the University of Oxford, are exploring.

'I've always been fascinated by brain plasticity – the idea that our brains have a remarkable

ability to adapt and reorganise themselves throughout our lives,' says Triin. 'They do this in response to learning and to overcome injuries such as stroke.

'Sleep is often underestimated but plays a pivotal role in recovery by supporting the formation of new connections in the brain during rehabilitation. This strengthens memory and helps you learn or re-learn skills. Disrupted sleep has been linked to slower recovery after stroke.'

Triin's work focuses on improving deep sleep after

'Sleep is often underestimated but plays a pivotal role in recovery.'



stroke, particularly a stage called slow wave sleep, which is crucial for learning and memory.

As part of her study, Triin asks participants to wear an electroencephalogram (EEG) headband that records brain activity while they sleep, as well as a headband fitted with over-ear speakers.

When the EEG detects slow wave sleep, gentle bursts of sound are delivered through the speakers in time with the brain's natural activity. Previous research has shown these

precisely timed noises can change brain activity during sleep and improve memory.

To test if this could be effective for stroke rehabilitation, Triin then asks participants to complete two memory tasks. She compares their performance and brain activity on the nights when the headset delivered sound and nights when it didn't.

'So far, I've been able to demonstrate that deep sleep brain waves are enhanced in response to the sound stimulation,' says Triin.



Visit stroke.org.uk/research to learn more about the research we fund and how to get involved in research studies.

'I'm now analysing the memory tasks. If this method is effective, we should see changes in memory performance too.'

'We're also developing a new headband that measures brain activity and delivers sound in one device. In the long term, we want to create an accessible, user-friendly therapy tool that people can use at home to improve their sleep, and boost their stroke recovery.'

'Stroke survivors are central to my research. Their experiences have been invaluable in shaping our methods and the technology we're developing, ensuring they're effective and meet their needs.'

'Volunteers from our patient and public involvement group will also be helping me to interpret the findings and summarise the results, to make sure they're accessible to the stroke community and wider public.'

After her PhD, Triin plans to run further clinical trials to test the methods and technology her team are developing, to build the evidence needed to get it into clinical practice.

'The benefits of this research could go far beyond improving memory,' says Triin. 'They could lead to new ways to enhance wellbeing, independence, and quality of life for stroke survivors and people living with similar neurological challenges.'

Supporting stroke research

We're committed to funding research to build our understanding of stroke and to improve treatment, care and quality of life for everyone affected.

If you can, please support others whose lives have been changed by stroke. You can make a donation by visiting stroke.org.uk/donating, by calling us on **0300 3300 740** or by completing the form below.

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Funds raised will go towards vital services and pioneering research to help support people affected by stroke.

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Date: / /

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Keeping in touch

We would love to send you information about the difference you can make to families affected by stroke through campaigning, volunteering, donating and through your own fundraising. Please tell us how you'd like us to stay in touch by filling in your details below.

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Finding a new pace of life

At 32, Jermaine was living life at full speed.

'I was always go, go, go – that's just who I was,' she says. 'I was healthy. I felt good. I thought I was doing everything right.'

When she began feeling unwell after an intense gym workout in September 2025, Jermaine thought she'd just pushed herself too hard. But not long after, she experienced vertigo, vomiting and an excruciating headache.

'The pain in my head hit me like thunder. Every breath hurt. I tried to drink water but couldn't swallow. I couldn't walk properly. I kept thinking, 'Why am I falling? I should be able to stand.'

She called 999. In hospital, scans revealed a clot and a tear in a neck artery, which had caused a rare brainstem stroke.

'I spent three weeks in hospital trying to process what had happened,' says Jermaine. 'I was the youngest there. I had to learn how to walk again. Someone had to clean me as I couldn't do it myself. That was really hard.'

Her greatest frustration was not being able to swallow. 'I couldn't eat or drink. I thought there'd be medication to fix it. But they said, 'You just have to wait.'

Returning home, Jermaine expected to recover quickly. Instead, she faced overwhelming fatigue and the emotional reality of stroke.

'I was always a 'I can do everything' person, but I'd try to do something like washing dishes, and I'd be wiped out. Before, I was 100%. Now I'm 60% because 40% of my brain is healing. I've had to learn when to stop.'



Needing help, Jermaine began private psychotherapy to understand her fatigue, pace her energy and process the emotional impact of stroke. She also found comfort through her local stroke support group. Listening to others' experiences gave her reassurance. 'It's good to talk to people who've been through it, even if it's not exactly the same,' she says.

As she continues her recovery, Jermaine is adapting to a new way of living. 'I'm still the same person, but I was 100 miles per hour before and now I'm 30.'

I'm going back to work with a different mindset. I'm not going to push myself into another stroke by being overly stressed.

'People say I'm unlucky, but I see it as an opportunity to build better habits and live life differently.'



Visit stroke.org.uk/support or call **0303 3033 100** to learn about our support services, including our local stroke support groups.

Getting funding for mobility equipment

If you have difficulty walking after your stroke, the right mobility equipment – like walking aids or manual or powered wheelchairs – can help you to live more independently and improve your physical and mental wellbeing.

Although some mobility aids can be expensive, you may be able to get equipment free of charge or receive help with the cost, depending on your circumstances.

Before getting a mobility aid, it's important to have an assessment by a healthcare professional, usually a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, to make sure you get equipment that's right for your needs. Your GP can arrange a referral.

Walking sticks and frames

Walking sticks and frames, including Zimmer frames and rollators, can usually be borrowed from the NHS (England, Scotland and Wales)

or HSC (Northern Ireland) for free or a small deposit. Speak to your GP, physiotherapist or hospital team. You can also buy them from mobility shops or online.

Manual and powered wheelchairs

You may be able to get a wheelchair for free through the NHS or HSC. Ask your GP, physiotherapist or hospital team to refer you to your local wheelchair service for an assessment. They'll recommend the most suitable wheelchair for your needs.

The NHS only covers equipment that meets your essential needs. If you'd like extra features or more choice, ask about a Personal Wheelchair Budget (PWB) with contribution. This allows you



Contact our Stroke Support Helpline on **0303 3033 100** or **helpline@stroke.org.uk** for more information about sourcing and funding mobility equipment.

to combine the value of the NHS recommended wheelchair with your own money or a grant, to pay for upgrades. HSC also offer a similar scheme.

Mobility scooters

Mobility scooters aren't usually available via the NHS or HSC. However, if you receive certain disability benefits, you can use some or all of your benefit payment to lease a powered wheelchair or mobility scooter through the Motability Scheme. Visit **motability.co.uk/scooters** or call **0300 456 4566** for more information.

Other sources of funding

If you can't afford a mobility aid and don't qualify for NHS/HSC or Motability funding, the following

charities may be able to help. Eligibility criteria and application processes vary and applications usually need to be made by a healthcare professional.



The Mobility Trust:
mobilitytrust.org.uk
0118 984 2588

Florence Nightingale Aid in Sickness Trust:
home.fnaist.org.uk
0207 998 8817

The Hospital Saturday Fund:
hospitalsaturdayfund.org
0207 202 1365

Turn2us grant search:
grants-search.turn2us.org.uk

'A touch of Frosty'

Congratulations to Emma, the winner of our 2026 stroke survivor Christmas card competition, with her beautiful design, 'A touch of Frosty'.

Emma, 47, had a stroke caused by a brain bleed in June 2025.

'The stroke turned my life, and that of my young family, upside down,' says Emma. 'It impacted so much of my body and mind – speech, memory, fatigue, concentration, pain. But the biggest was losing the movement in my right arm and leg.'

'I've loved drawing and painting all my life, so losing the side I paint with was devastating. There were times I doubted if I'd ever be able to paint again.'

Recovery was slow and often frustrating. But Emma worked daily on hand and arm movements, using a range of therapies, exercises and activities, such as jigsaws and Lego, to rebuild strength and control.

'At first, just being able to hold a pencil was amazing,' she says. 'But then I didn't have control of my grip, and I couldn't open my hand to let it go.'

'I struggled to draw a straight line and used primary school-style sheets to draw over dotted shapes. Most days I didn't have the energy to draw but I found small moments. My arm and hand ached, but I refused to give up because I wanted it back so much.'

'My husband kept my drawings and dated them so I could see my progress over time. Sometimes it's hard to see your progress – you always crave more, faster. It's important to stop and recognise the journey.'

'Through patience, persistence and positivity, I can use my right hand again. There have been bumps along the road, but now I



barely go a day without painting. I still can't get out much, so painting is my happy place where I can escape.'

Encouraged by her Stroke Support Coordinator, Emma entered our Christmas card competition. 'When I found out I'd won, I felt an amazing sense

of achievement and realised how far I'd come.

'Stroke changes your life so fast, yet recovery is slow and frustrating. There are tough days, but also great ones. It's important to look back and appreciate what you've gone through. It's a marathon, not a sprint.'



Emma's 'A touch of Frosty' design is available to buy as an e-card from our online-only Christmas shop from 6 August 2026, along with bumper packs of other printed card designs. Visit stroke.org.uk/Christmas to order yours.

Travelling with the hidden effects of stroke

While some effects of stroke may be visible, others – like emotional changes, mental health difficulties, memory or concentration problems and fatigue – are harder to see.

Hidden conditions can make travelling more complicated, especially as others may not understand why you need extra help or time to rest. However, this shouldn't stop you from enjoying a holiday. With careful planning and the right support, you can travel in a way that protects your

wellbeing and helps you get the most from your trip.

Our partners, AllClear Travel Insurance, share their top tips for travelling with the hidden effects of stroke:

Choose a holiday that suits you

This is your chance to rest and recharge, so pick a holiday that suits your mental health and energy levels. Think about what environment will help you feel at your best. For example, if you have fatigue, a short-haul break or relaxing destination may be

more manageable than a busy city break with lots of walking.

Choose accommodation that supports your needs

Make sure you have somewhere comfortable and calm to go when you need to. Check what accessible facilities are available, such as quiet areas, lifts and dining options. Contact your hotel before travelling to request any adjustments.

Prioritise rest

Plan plenty of breaks into your itinerary. Don't be afraid to slow down or change your plans if you're having a difficult day.

Organise your medication

Take enough medication to cover your whole trip, plus extra in case of delays. Keep it in your hand luggage in its original packaging and carry a letter from your GP explaining your condition and treatment. Knowing where the nearest pharmacy or hospital is at

your destination can also provide reassurance.

Ask for assistance

Airport and transport assistance is there for anyone who needs it, including people with hidden conditions. Booking support in advance can help you avoid long queues, reduce stress and save energy. Don't feel guilty about accepting help – it's there to make travelling easier.

Be open with your travel companions

Explaining how stroke affects you before you travel can help family and friends know when you might need extra rest, a quieter pace or additional support.

Get travel insurance

Before you travel, make sure you have travel insurance that covers your pre-existing medical conditions and any hidden effects of stroke, so you can travel with greater confidence and peace of mind.



Visit stroke.org.uk/holiday or call **0300 3300 740** for our 'Holidays and stroke' guide.

AllClear pay a charitable contribution up to 20% of your premium to the Stroke Association when you purchase a policy. To find out more, visit stroke.org.uk/allclear or call **0808 168 8733**.

Puzzles



Puzzles can be a fun way to exercise your mind and improve concentration, understanding and memory.

Word search

H Y D R A P O E L
R A U K U T T Y C
G D T M R R E C A
F W A E A G L H R
P O M U E D L Z A
T I G E R H Z N C
Y A T O L E C O A
J B O B C A T I L
P Y I W X N Y L J

TIGER OCELOT
LION BOBCAT
LYNX CHEETAH
JAGUAR LEOPARD
PUMA CARACAL

Across

- 1 Often (10)
- 8 Create resentment (8)
- 9 Attack (4)
- 10 Summoned up (6)
- 12 Building wing (6)
- 13 Appropriate anagram of TWELVE PLUS ONE (6,4,3)
- 16 Edible clam (6)
- 18 Stockings (6)
- 20 Alliance of nations (4)
- 21 Sticky (8)
- 23 Basic (10)

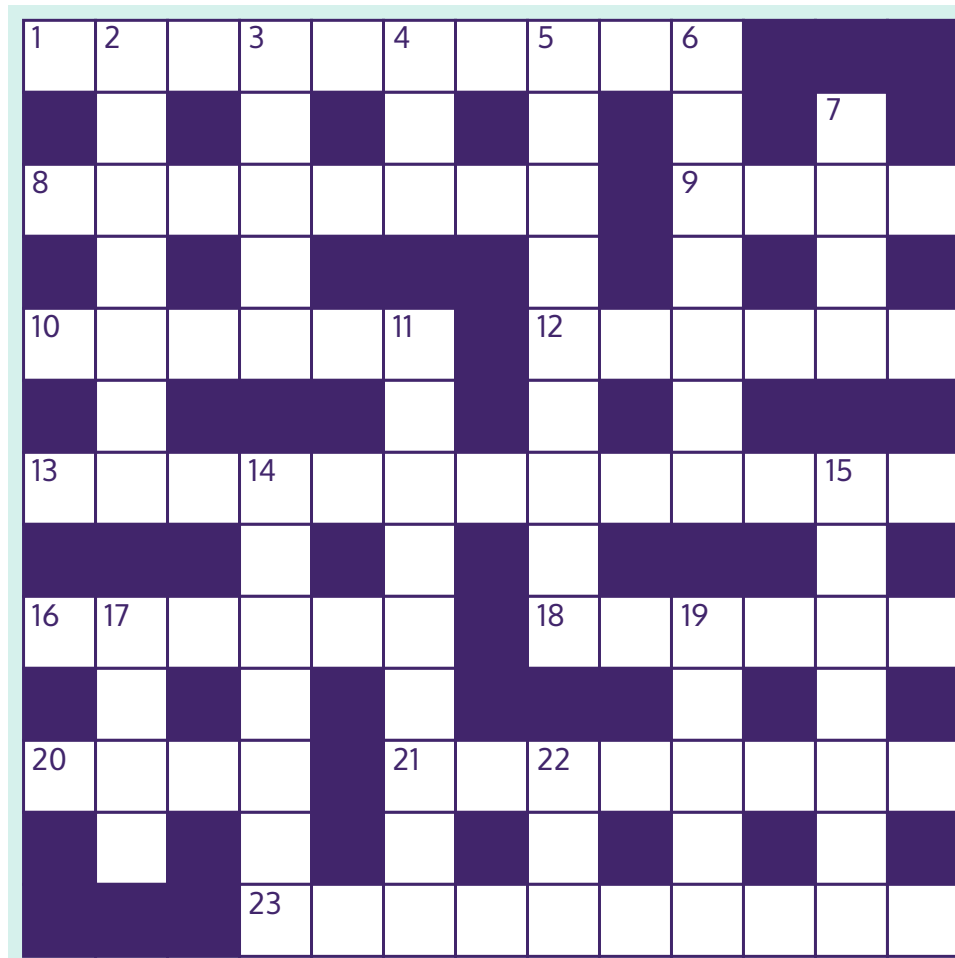
Lottery

For your chance to win £1,000, play the Stroke Association Weekly Lottery. Find out more at lottery.stroke.org.uk

Solutions
see page 50

Down

- 2 Extraction (7)
- 3 Intelligent (5)
- 4 Newt (3)
- 5 Waterproof sheet (9)
- 6 Item of male underwear (1-6)
- 7 Unlucky influence (4)
- 11 Belittle (9)
- 14 Conveyance (7)
- 15 Persuade (3,4)
- 17 Unattractive (4)
- 19 Hungarian composer (5)
- 22 Shade (3)



With thanks to The Times/News Syndication who granted us rights to this crossword.

Finding strength through support

When a stroke happens, we're here with support for stroke survivors and their families. But we can only continue to provide vital support with your help. A huge thank you to everyone who has gone the extra mile to fundraise, volunteer and campaign with us. Your efforts mean we can reach even more people who need us.



For Ed

Friends Adam, Alistair, James, Mark, PJ and Rob returned to Oxford, where they met at university, to take on the Oxford Half Marathon in memory of their friend, Ed. Together they raised over £5,100. Thank you!



CWP Energy

A huge thank you to the team from CWP Energy in Cheshire, who conquered the demanding 20km Lang Mynd Trail Walk, and raised a whopping £42,000. We're incredibly grateful for your support.



Find out what events we've got coming up on page 50 or visit stroke.org.uk/donating to donate.

How does your donation help?



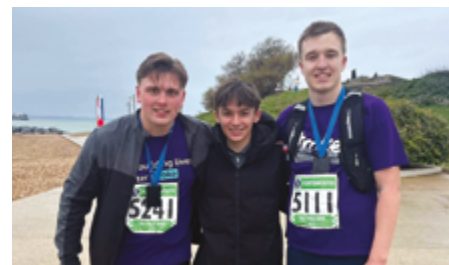
£10 supports our Stroke Support Helpline to answer a call from someone who urgently needs support after a life-changing stroke.



£25 could be part of a hardship grant for a stroke survivor who is struggling to pay for basics like food and clothing.



£50 could help us be there for children and families through our Childhood Stroke Support.



Jake and Lewis

Incredible Jake and Lewis pushed through the pain of the Portsmouth Coastal Waterside 50k Ultra Marathon, to raise over £2,800. They were inspired by Jake's brother-in-law, Finley, who had a stroke aged 15. 'It was great to raise funds and awareness of stroke – especially within children,' says Jake.



Volunteer spotlight

Jeff was Chair of the Positive Strokes Middlesbrough support group for eight years. He also shared his expertise in our stroke group volunteers' involvement group, helping to shape the Stroke Group Network and championing volunteers' voices.

Known for saying, 'Keep sliding down rainbows,' Jeff brought positivity and encouragement to many affected by stroke. His kindness and commitment reflect the difference volunteers across the UK make every day.

Jeff sadly passed away earlier this year. He's deeply missed by his group and everyone at the Stroke Association who had the privilege of working with him.

Use your experiences to help others: stroke.org.uk/shape-our-work. For bereavement support, visit stroke.org.uk/grief

Join Team Stroke

Get involved and fundraise at home, or join us at exciting events around the UK:



Thames Moonlight 10

11 September 2026

Join Team Stroke for this scenic evening 10km or 10 mile walk through London. Sign up to fundraise for us, and get 25% off your registration fee: events.stroke.org.uk/Thames26



Brighton Marathon

4 April 2027

Looking for your next challenge? With its amazing crowds and sweeping sea views, sign up now at events.stroke.org.uk/Brighton2027 to run for and support people affected by stroke.

Manchester Marathon

18 April 2027

Or how about joining us to experience the incredible Mancunian support at the UK's second largest marathon? Visit events.stroke.org.uk/MM27 to find out more.

Visit events.stroke.org.uk for more ways to get involved in our work.

Crossword solution

Across: 1 Frequently, 8 Embitter, 9 Raid, 10 Evoked, 12 Annexe, 13 Eleven plus two, 16 Quahog, 18 Nylons, 20 Bloc, 21 Adhesive, 23 Elementary

Down: 2 Removal, 3 Quick, 4 Eft, 5 Tarpaulin, 6 Y-Fronts, 7 Jinx, 11 Denigrate, 14 Vehicle, 15 Win over, 17 Ugly, 19 Liszt, 22 Hue

H	Y	D	R	A	P	O	E	L
R	A	U	K	U	T	T	Y	C
G	D	T	M	R	R	E	C	A
F	W	A	E	A	G	L	H	R
P	O	M	U	E	D	L	Z	A
T	I	G	E	R	H	Z	N	C
Y	A	T	O	L	E	C	O	A
J	B	O	B	C	A	T	I	L
P	Y	I	W	X	N	Y	L	J

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