**For immediate release**

**Wednesday 29 July 2020**

**Loose Women’s Kaye Adams supports Stroke Association’s new ‘Here For You’ telephone service**

Kaye Adams, host of ITV’s Loose Women, is throwing her support behind the Stroke Association’s ‘Here for You’ telephone support service. The new Here for You service helps combat loneliness and isolation by providing stroke survivors and their carers with regular telephone support. Launched in response to the Covid 19 crisis, the charity plans to offer this vital support to more stroke survivors in Northern Ireland and also attract more volunteers to help rebuild lives after stroke.

Ursula Ferguson, Head of Stroke Support Services at the Stroke Association in Northern Ireland, said: “In Northern Ireland and right across the UK stroke survivors have told us that one of the most important things that helps them with their recovery is speaking to other stroke survivors, but also just having someone to talk to is important. We’re asking anyone rebuilding their life after stroke to contact us if they need support or just a friendly voice at the end of a phone. In NI, demand for the Here for You service has been steady but we know there are more people out there affected by stroke who need our support. I encourage anyone who feels that they might have some time to give, to consider becoming a Here for You volunteer. You don’t need to be a stroke survivor to volunteer. You’ll be helping people in the early days after their stroke or stroke survivors who may be feeling lonely or isolated and just in need of a chat”.

One in five people with long-term conditions including stroke have not left the house since mid-March(ii) and over half (58%) of clinically extremely vulnerable people are continuing to shield even as lockdown eases(iii).

The Stroke Association has set up Here for You for stroke survivors who are feeling lonely or isolated so they can talk to other stroke survivors and volunteers to help them feel connected.

Kaye Adams, whose mum had two strokes in 2018, said: “Stroke is a cruel condition that turns lives upside down in an instant. When my mum had a stroke our whole family’s lives changed forever. The thought of that happening during lockdown is just unbearable.

“I can only imagine how scary it must feel for survivors and their loved ones. Having someone to talk things through, especially as people struggle to come to terms with what’s happened to them, is vital. The Stroke Association’s new Here for You service in Northern Ireland and across the UK, offers real hope to people as they cope with the impact of stroke on their lives. That’s why I’m proud to support this amazing charity and their work”.

Stroke survivors and their carers can sign up for a half-hour phone call, weekly, for 12 weeks with a trained Stroke Association volunteer.

The coronavirus pandemic has meant that all 215 Stroke Association Groups have been unable to meet, denying stroke survivors the vital peer to peer support for over four months now. The charity is still unsure when these groups will be able to start up their face-to-face meetings again. The Here for You service offers two kinds of support:

* ‘Lived Experience’ telephone volunteers who have experienced stroke themselves and can connect with recent stroke survivors and help them talk through the challenges they are facing.
* ‘Connect and Chat’ volunteers who can talk and offer an empathetic ear to stroke survivors who are experiencing loneliness and isolation and would welcome a friendly voice for a weekly chat.

To sign up to Here for You if you’re feeling lonely, isolated and in need of a chat, or to volunteer visit the Stroke Association website: <https://www.stroke.org.uk/finding-support/here-for-you> or call the Stroke Helpline: 0303 3033 100

Volunteers are asked to make one, 30 minute phone call per week for twelve weeks and also to attend a two hour online training session delivered by the Stroke Association. Whilst people need to have experience of stroke personally or as a carer to undertake the lived experience telephone support volunteer role, the ‘Connect and Chat’ volunteer role is open to anyone regardless of stroke experience.

Harry Lester is 57 and lives in South Belfast. Harry has been volunteering for the Stroke Association for about three years and been a part of the Here for You project for over two months now. Harry had a stroke in October 2016 whilst in hospital undergoing a heart procedure.

Harry said: “After my stroke, the Stroke Association were the only charity who rang me directly. I didn’t have to contact them. I remember thinking that it was great to hear from a friendly voice who was offering help like that. That started things off for me and I wanted to volunteer with the charity after that. I’ve now been volunteering for them for about three years and when I heard about the Here for You project I knew that my experience of having a stroke would help me relate to others going through something similar.

“At the moment I’m matched with a man called Peter. I call Peter every week on a Friday morning and we have a good chat. He’s very easy to talk to and I hope he finds me the same. We both have long-term effects from stroke and Peter’s the same as me and knows to accept the way things are now and try not to get stressed when you find you aren’t able to do something the way you used to. I just have to accept that it might take me 20 minutes to slice an onion. If you constantly fret and give off to yourself, you’re going nowhere”.

“I would encourage anyone who feels they could offer there time to do something like this to just try it. Peter and I easily fill the 30 minutes with chat and most weeks we chat for a good hour. Never underestimate the power a phone call from a friendly voice can have. It’s good for you mentally and can make you feel good about yourself and the week ahead. Volunteering for the Here for You service reminds me of the phone call I got from the Stroke Association after my own stroke and the positive affect that had on me. It makes you feel a part of something at a time when you most need that”.

Peter Swan is 74, lives in Belfast and had two strokes in March 2019. Peter registered with the Stroke Association’s Here for You project in spring 2020.

Peter said: “Once lockdown started I, like others, wasn’t able to get out and do the sorts of activities I would’ve done before. When someone from the Stroke Association told me about the Here for You project, I thought it was a terrific idea. It’s always good to talk to somebody. So next thing you know I’m now talking every week to a man I didn’t know from Adam but turns out we have a lot in common as he’s had a stroke too. We talk about all sorts of things but it’s great to be able to discuss living life after a stroke with someone who knows exactly what I’m talking about. We get on well and we chat every Friday about the days we’ve had, what we’ve done and what we haven’t done. He has given me a couple of ideas of things to try in the future. I’m going to explore an opportunity to go swimming when things open up again. I just really enjoy the conversation each week and it’s definitely something I look forward to. Sometimes when you tell people that you’ve had a stroke, they don’t really know what to say. They might not even know what a stroke is. Having a regular chat with someone who can understand helps me. The weekly calls from Harry are important to me. For me, that’s something more than just for lockdown, it’s important for our stroke recovery in general”.

The languages we can offer support through our current volunteers are English, Welsh, French, German, Mandarin, Punjabi, Bengali, Hebrew, Japanese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, Swedish, Urdu, Portuguese, Somali, Hindi, Shona, Tamil, Turkish and Malayalam. Support in BSL over video call is also currently available.

For more information on how to access the service or to volunteer, please visit [www.stroke.org.uk/hereforyou](http://www.stroke.org.uk/hereforyou).

**ENDS**

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**Notes to Editor**

1. We Are Undefeatable survey, released July 2020.
2. [Coronavirus and shielding of clinically extremely vulnerable people in England: 24 June to 30 June 2020](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandshieldingofclinicallyextremelyvulnerablepeopleinengland/24juneto30june2020); Office for National Statistics, July 2020

**About the Stroke Association**

* Stroke strikes every five minutes in the UK and it changes lives in an instant.
* The Stroke Association is a charity working across the UK to support people to rebuild their lives after stroke. We believe that everyone deserves to live the best life they can after stroke. From local support services and groups, to online information and support, anyone affected by stroke can visit stroke.org.uk or call our dedicated Stroke Helpline on 0303 3033 100 to find out about support available locally.
* Our specialist support, research and campaigning are only possible with the courage and determination of the stroke community and the generosity of our supporters. With more donations and support, we can help rebuild even more lives.
* You can follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/TheStrokeAssoc), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/TheStrokeAssociation/)and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/thestrokeassociation/).