



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Surrey Matters turns the spotlight on **Barry Mcillroy**, who uses his own experience of a life-changing stroke to help others rebuild their lives with Surrey charity Dyscover.

Barry Mcillroy is explaining the rules of golf to a group of friends, as they joke about their sporting successes. The atmosphere is warm and friendly, and Barry has a gift for entertaining a crowd. But this isn't a Friday night in the pub. It's one of the six discussion groups run by Dyscover, a Surrey charity that offers long-term support to people with aphasia – a communication disability most commonly caused by a stroke – where Barry is a volunteer.

The topic of this discussion is great sporting moments, and it's something Barry knows lots about, having been a keen golfer his whole life. That was just one of the many things that suddenly changed in June 2011 when the father of four, and grandfather of three, suffered a stroke. Barry lost all feeling in his right side and developed aphasia, a frustrating and isolating condition which can affect not only speech but all forms of communication, from reading and writing to the way words are understood.

"After the stroke I thought my world had finished," Barry says, recalling how he first got involved with the charity. "But after coming to Dyscover you're encouraged and you think 'hang on, no it isn't'. You can do anything you like in life.

"I came to three meetings and I was hooked. It was like a light turning on, meeting other people with the same disability. You feel you're not alone and you can move on.



"When you have aphasia it's embarrassing because you can't say what you want to say. Now I've got more confidence in myself."

This inspired Barry to become a volunteer for the organisation. He does everything from helping with group activities such as climbing and sailing, to setting up a photography course for members and advising on getting back into driving after a stroke.

Another way Barry helps Dyscover is through his impressive fundraising work, including his biggest challenge yet – training for a sponsored swimathon. "I hadn't been in the pool since the stroke," Barry explains. "I can't feel anything down my right side so trying to swim is very difficult – you can end up going round in circles or sinking. I had a target of swimming 50m, and completed it exactly two years after the stroke, raising £950. Next year, I'd like to do a 10-mile sponsored bike ride."

Barry is infectious about volunteering. "It's completely changed my life – what a joy to help other people." And thanks to volunteers like Barry, living with aphasia and rediscovering old interests is a challenge that less people have to face alone.

To find out more about the work of Dyscover, visit dyscover.org.uk.