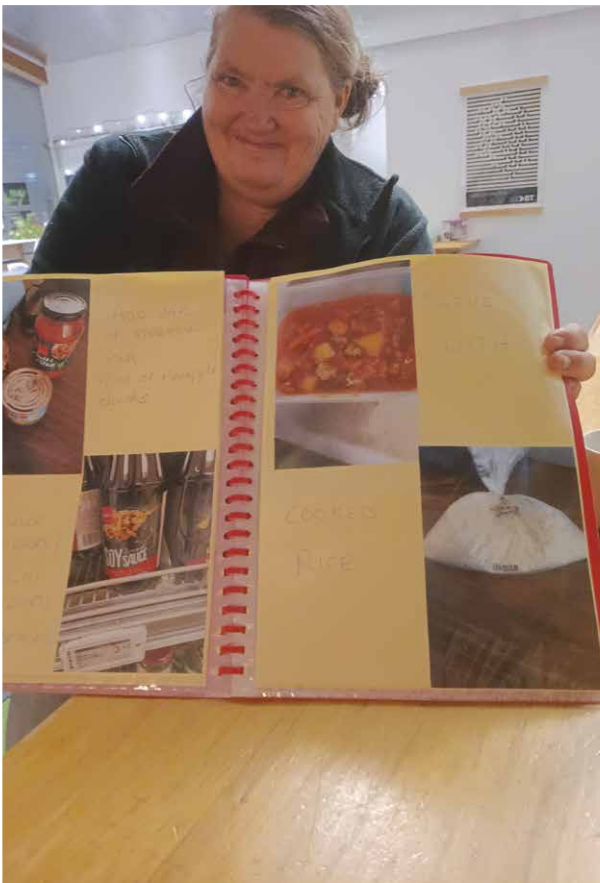


Iris's story

“Iris has had people tell her that she’s no good at things, for much of her life. It takes time for a person to be able to build themselves back up when that’s been your experience. I would love to see Iris believe in herself and have the skills needed to deal with what life throws at her. She can be an independent woman, so it’s our job to bring that self-belief to the surface,”

– Jeanne.



Westport-based Iris, now in her 60s, has spent much of her life being taken care of by others. She lives with a learning disability, which impacts her literacy and ability to understand some information.

Loren Cropp has known Iris for around five years, first having worked as a support worker for her daughter – who is also disabled – and later as a community support coordinator for Iris herself.

She describes Iris as a *“kind, generous, and honest person who really loves her family.”* She also explains how she dotes on her two adult children and three beloved grandchildren.

Iris with her visual cookbook.

Iris agrees that the time she spends with her family is a highlight and that her grandkids inject something special into her daily life – *“they’re neat fun,”* she says.

Her husband Kevin has spent all their married life managing their household, including cooking, budgeting, and day-to-day tasks. *“He is her everything,”* says Loren. It was while Loren was working with Iris’ daughter that she began to suspect Iris might have her own unidentified support needs.

“We organised for Iris to have an assessment via Lifelinks [the local Needs Assessment and Coordination Service (NASC)] and they put together a package for support aimed at building Iris’ independence.”

While Iris had lived most of her life without any formal disability support, Kevin’s declining health made the need for Iris to learn to manage things for herself all that more essential.

Iris takes time to build trust and relationships with new people, so the Westport team organised for two support workers, Jeanne and Sharron – with Loren occasionally pulled in as needed – to get to know her and what she wanted to get out of their time together. ▶



Jeanne.



Loren Cropp.

◀ Jeanne has worked with Iris for a couple of months now and saw her most important role as building her trust. She also describes Iris as a caring person, with a good sense of humour reserved for those who know her best.

“Change is challenging for Iris, and she can get anxious with new people and things, so establishing a relationship with her was my initial focus. I wanted to look holistically at how I could best support her, so we did a lot of talking initially so we could get to know each other and then figure out how we could best work together,” explains Jeanne.

“I get nervous meeting new people and I find it hard when things change,” says Iris. *“I like Loren and Sharron and Jeanne – we get on well. I know them now and I like doing things with them,”* she says.

Iris – who says the things she enjoys most are “cooking, making diamond art, jigsaw puzzles, and crochet” – identified that she wanted to build her confidence at cooking as it wasn’t something she’s ever been able to do at home. Jeanne approached the Westport Community House, who kindly agreed to let Jeanne and Iris use the kitchen.

Iris’ impairment makes reading or remembering recipes a challenge, so Jeanne came up with the idea of creating a visual cookbook to make the information accessible. Iris was interested and keen to give it a go.

“We practice cooking simple, budget-friendly meals together that Iris can recreate at home. So, we’ll take a picture of each of the steps and the ingredients, with easy-to-follow written instructions. It’s given Iris the confidence to test the ideas out, which is fantastic.”

Iris’ favourite recipe to cook and share has been sweet and sour pork. Homemade pizzas have also gone down very well with her family.

As well as continuing their work learning new recipes, Loren has planted the seed of potential literacy courses for Iris – something Iris is considering, providing they can find the right tutor to suit her.



Iris' time with her CCS Disability Action support workers is more than just a chance to upskill. They're also an important opportunity for Iris to focus on herself and what makes her happy.

To this end, Iris and Jeanne visit Iris' friend Melva each week in a local rest home. Melva was a parent help/teacher at Iris' daughter's Playcentre and the two have remained in touch ever since. It's a friendship that has lasted around 30 years. *"Iris is very loyal – it means a lot for Melva to see Iris each week,"* says Jeanne.

Iris gets a lot out of these visits too, describing 'nana Melva' – as her kids call her – as her most important friend.

Jeanne is seeing a slow, but noticeable shift in Iris' confidence because of their time together.

"Iris has had people tell her that she's no good at things, for much of her life. It takes time for a person to be able to build themselves back up when that's been your experience. I would love to see Iris believe in herself and have the skills needed to deal with what life throws at her. She can be an independent woman, so it's our job to bring that self-belief to the surface," says Jeanne.

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