

## The Fountain Quay Ladies

Interloch Community Transport provides a broad range of services and support. A picture of this was captured in conversations with a group of Interloch member's living at Fountain Quay. Fountain Quay is a sheltered housing facility on the seafront of Kirn, on the outskirts of Dunoon, and I visited with Interloch's Operations Officer, Cat, in February to hear from the "Fountain Quay Ladies" about their experiences. They all had different stories about the difference Interloch makes to their lives, but there were several common threads. One was the unique blend of transport and care that the service offers, and how it's tailored to their needs. That might mean support boarding the minibus, help going round the supermarket or putting the shopping away, or making sure members can complete the paperwork needed to recover their travel costs after a hospital appointment. I heard comments like "I don't know what I'd do otherwise" and "we'd be lost without them, we really would" from everyone I spoke to.

Another point that kept coming up was the importance of the relationship they have with the drivers and office staff. It's clear that this makes a big difference not just to their independence, but to their wellbeing. It's about knowing people as individuals – their names and their specific needs – but also being able to have a laugh and a joke.

Several people also mentioned how Interloch allows them to go about daily tasks or keep up social connections so that they are less reliant on friends or family.

**Betty** and **Rena** use Interloch to attend a fortnightly Stroke Club at a church in Dunoon. Both have problems with vision due to macular degeneration, and Betty's mobility is limited by osteoporosis in her knees. She can get around using a Rollator within Fountain Quay but needs a wheelchair and ramp when venturing out. As well as the cost of taxis being prohibitive, Betty and Rena both mentioned their struggle to get in and out of them. The doors are too heavy for them to open themselves, but what they find upsetting is that taxi drivers usually won't help unless you ask. In contrast, Rena, Betty and others mentioned the lengths Interloch's drivers will go to help them board, make them comfortable, and details like fastening their seatbelts if they struggle with arthritis or holding their handbag so they can get on and off for themselves.

When we got to visit, we find Rena has popped out to the hall to see where we've got to. Bright and chirpy, you'd hardly believe she is 95, and less still that she is almost completely blind. She has lived at Fountain Quay for 20 years and is very comfortable there, but with her eyesight deteriorating, she can't do the tapestries and crafts she used to enjoy. She describes herself as a shy person, and says that Stroke Club gets her out and about. She also appreciates the independence Interloch offers by taking her round the supermarket for her regular shop. The driver also brings her shopping up the stairs for her, noting that "I can still put it away myself".

**Joan**, [78] also emphasises how Interloch's specialist service helps her stay independent and play a full part in family life. Joan lost both her legs due to vascular problems and diabetes, but with her electric wheelchair and adaptations to her flat, she can do most things for herself.

The service means she can continue to play a full part in family life, including a trip across to Ayr last year for her son's wedding. She also helps her widowed son with childcare, using the minibus to collect her young grand-daughter to come and stay over with her at Fountain Quay.

Interloch's drivers also make everyday tasks easier, such as shopping or going for an eye test. They know what she can do herself and what she needs help with, and will put groceries through the checkout and help her put them away at home. Joan enjoys the chat and banter. "They are wonderful. So helpful in everything they do" she says, adding with a cheeky grin: "but they know about my diabetes and they'll pull me up if they see me buying sweeties!"

**Fiona** [79] also mentions how nice it is that the drivers will have a blether with her – "not that awful silence". She uses the bus for hospital appointments and says the drivers make it "like a day out", adding that "they would stop to pick something up from the shops if you asked".

Fiona moved into Fountain Quay three years ago. She was in hospital for a hip replacement when her husband died very suddenly. Without any family nearby, she found it very difficult to manage and things were made worse but recurrent problems with her new hip. She says having Interloch on hand makes her feel less isolated and more independent. She particularly values the flexibility, mentioning a time when she had to book and then cancel an appointment at short notice – "no problem at all. What would we do without them?" she asks. "We love them to bits".

The extra support and knowledge offered by the staff comes up in conversation with several of the ladies. Fiona mentions that driver Campbell recently took her to an appointment for a bone density scan, where he stayed with her throughout and helped her complete the forms needed to claim back her travel costs. These can be significant because most hospital appointments involve a ferry trip to Greenock or Paisley. Also, the claims departments are often hidden away within large, unfamiliar hospital buildings so help of this kind is also invaluable for people with limited mobility or visual problems.

Another resident, **Frances** [72], has dyslexia and says it's a huge help to have someone navigate the paperwork for her. Frances and Rena both mention that they "often forget things". Again, the practical help of having someone making sure you get to the right department or waiting area has a big impact on their wellbeing. "They're brilliant. It definitely makes a difference to your mental health", Frances says. She describes the benefits of this reassurance to her relationships with family. They would help out, she says, but she's aware that they have work commitments and "it's nice not to have to impose on them", or feel like you need to fit in with what they're doing. She laughs: "I'm too independent and I won't be told what to do!" Betty, too, mentions how Interloch reduces her reliance on family. By using the service "mostly for social connections" she says she's able to make save family visits for nice things like going out for a meal together.