

Donna Cullinane is 59 and lives in Ardrossan with her partner, Tam. She's a mother to two grown-up children, Scott, 25, and 21-year-old Lauren. When Donna experienced the first of two strokes, her partner's awareness of F.A.S.T. meant he quickly acted to get her medical help and she was assessed for the appropriate treatment ultimately leading to an improved outcome. Donna is a member of the Kilmarnock Young Stroke Survivors Group, a Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland peer support group.

A chance encounter with the police became a lifesaving one for Donna Cullinane.

The mother-of-two had stopped to talk to two officers about a bogus caller at her mum's house when she suddenly fell.

They helped her home where her partner Tam was waiting. Tam took one look at Donna's face and realised she was having a stroke.

He did the F.A.S.T. diagnosis – face, arm, speech, time – and then the police officer swung into action, radioing for an ambulance that rushed Donna to hospital in minutes.

Donna, said: "I know things could have been so much worse. I was treated quickly and recovered well because Tam recognised the F.A.S.T. signs of stroke. A campaign to raise public awareness of these signs can only be a good thing that helps more people like me."

Donna was 46 when she had the first of two strokes. There was no warning.

She said: "I felt a bit odd as I walked up to the police car that day, then I fell to the ground.

"They got me up and I was speaking, but I knew my words were slurred. The police officers took me home and helped me into the house.

"Tam took one look at me and realised I'd had a stroke because my entire left side was weak. He asked me to lift my arm and I couldn't. I couldn't walk properly or speak clearly.

"I was taken to Crosshouse Hospital, but at the time Crosshouse didn't have the 24-hour stroke response it does now. Staff had a phone consultation with the consultant who said I needed to be thrombolysed, so I was transferred to what was then the Southern General in Glasgow.

"Within an hour of the thrombolysis, I was able to move my arm and leg again, I was talking fine. It was incredible."

Donna had returned to work after the first stroke, but the second left her with loss of peripheral vision in both eyes, and she has since retired because of other medical issues. She still suffers from fatigue that is a common effect of stroke.

She added: "One real positive has been joining the Kilmarnock Young Stroke Survivors Group. I'd say to any stroke survivor to get involved with a Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland peer support group because only someone who has had a stroke can understand exactly what you're going through. And it's wonderful to share experiences and feel that understanding."

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