

# Power of Friends

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN/WINTER 2022

Friends of the  
cancer centre



YEARS  
of care and support

**“If sharing my story saves a life it will be worth it.”**

Emma Cooper shares her experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer and why she is proud to support our Breast Bud campaign



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### In Focus

A look at the small but powerful ways your support is making a difference



# £103,375

in financial support provided to patients since January this year

The cost of living crisis is having a real impact on families across Northern Ireland, including those already facing challenges brought about by a cancer diagnosis. So far this year, we have already provided over £100,000 in grants to 354 families and we anticipate more cancer patients will be in need of our support in the coming months. We are committed to helping people through these challenges and we will continue to work with the social work teams to ensure that we are here for patients and their families when they need us most.

## *How you can avail of our support*

Friends of the Cancer Centre's financial grants are currently available to patients attending the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre in Belfast and the North West Cancer Centre in Derry/Londonderry. If you are in need of support, ask your treatment team to contact the hospital's social work team who will be able to apply to Friends of the Cancer Centre for financial support on your behalf.



A warm welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter, which is full of ways in which your friendship and support is making a difference to local people affected by cancer.

In this edition we are really proud to share stories from some of the amazing people who have been supported by our work. As many of you will know, an important part of our work in recent years has been cancer awareness and in particular, highlighting the importance of self-checks through our Breast Bud and Talking Balls campaigns. In this edition we are delighted to introduce you to Emma Cooper, one of the wonderful people helping to raise awareness by sharing her story. Not only that, but you can also read about the vital support our Urology Clinical Nurse Specialist is providing to Alastair Mackay following his kidney cancer diagnosis.

Everything we do is only made possible thanks to people like you who donate, fundraise and raise awareness of the charity. I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported the charity, particularly through the challenges of the past few years. Over the coming months we have lots of ways for you to get involved, including our Festive Fundraising and a chance to win some amazing prizes in our Christmas Raffle.

Your support and friendship is central to everything we do and on behalf of everyone at Friends of the Cancer Centre and our patients, thank you for being a friend.

**Colleen Shaw**  
Chief Executive

## Winter Ball

On the 12th November 2022, friends and supporters of the charity will come together for the charity's Winter Ball at Titanic, Belfast.

The gala ball, which was originally planned to take place in 2020 to coincide with our 35th year, will be an opportunity to mark over three decades of supporting families impacted by cancer. It will also be an opportunity to raise vital funds to ensure the work of the charity continues for many more years to come.

The great news is you can join us on the night from the comfort of your own home, by getting involved in our live online auction. We have a host of amazing prizes up for grabs, so keep an eye on our website and social media in the coming weeks to find out more.





Emma Cooper

*"If sharing my story can save one life it will be worth it."*

In June 2020, at just 41 years old, Emma Cooper from Bangor was diagnosed with breast cancer. The diagnosis came as a shock, but Emma is now determined to share her experience in the hope that it will help others. Today, Emma is proudly supporting our Breast Bud campaign which is encouraging people across Northern Ireland to get into the habit of checking their breasts and chest regularly with the help of the charity's self-check hanger, which has a step-by-step guide on how to check yourself in just a few minutes. This is Emma's story.

"My husband, Peter, told me that he felt a lump in my breast, but I didn't take much notice. Cancer hadn't even crossed my mind as I was a busy mum, working two jobs at the time. That was six months before my cancer diagnosis.

Peter mentioned the lump again and he thought it had grown quite significantly, so I agreed to get checked out. I went to my GP who wanted to refer me for further investigation. All of this was happening at the height of COVID-19, which meant that I had to attend the appointment on my own whilst Peter waited in the car. When they asked if I had anyone with me, I knew that the news would not be good.

"When I was told I had breast cancer, I went into shock. Peter and I went home after the appointment and when I woke the next day, it felt like life had changed and would most likely never feel the same again. However, everything moved quickly after that and I had a left sided mastectomy on 3rd July 2020.

"During my cancer journey, my mum was also diagnosed with breast cancer. When I told my mum that one of the signs I'd had was puckering of the skin on my breast, she had noticed the same thing but had put it down to getting older. So in a way, Peter saved my life by talking openly with me about discovering a lump and I may have saved my mum's life, by telling her about the symptoms I had. That's

why I was so keen to get involved with Friends of the Cancer Centre's Breast Bud campaign. If by talking about my cancer diagnosis and sharing my story we can save one life, it will be worth it.

"Mum and I ended up having radiotherapy treatment together. My mum was more worried about me and naturally I was more worried about her. I was also extremely worried about the impact of my diagnosis on my children Ollie (10), Jack (15) and my stepson, Ross (16). Ollie did not like the word cancer, so together we came up with an alternative name and called it 'Tiny Dancer'. It worked for us and didn't sound as scary.

"After surgery, my oncologist recommended that I receive chemotherapy, which I found much harder than the radiotherapy. I was always known for my blonde hair, so it was extremely difficult shaving my hair off.

"At one stage, I was hospitalised in the Cancer Centre at Belfast City Hospital due to a mouth infection, which was a side effect of my chemotherapy treatment. It was at this time that I became more aware of Friends of the Cancer Centre and the impact its work has on patients. Friends of the Cancer Centre

provided me with a financial grant and more recently, I've learned that the charity funds a Breast Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist and a Secondary Breast Cancer Nurse. I believe it is so important that women have access to this vital care, and it is great to know that Friends of the Cancer Centre is here for people like me and thousands of others living with a breast cancer diagnosis.

"Two years on, I am still receiving treatment. My current medication has put me into the menopause which is tough. The other thing I find really hard is the visible reminder that I have cancer, as there are scars where my left breast used to be. It has been a tough ride, but I feel like I've tackled it head on and I wanted to show some resilience to my kids. Don't get me wrong, I have some bad moments but I'm very lucky to have a great family around me.

"Despite how difficult the past few years have been, I am determined that something positive comes from it all. Being part of Friends of the Cancer Centre's Breast Bud campaign has given me a way to use my experience to help others. To anyone reading this, please get one of the charity's self-check hangers and start checking yourself."

## Here for you when you need it most

As well as encouraging people to be more breast aware, we are also incredibly proud to fund two nurses who are dedicated to supporting breast cancer patients. Our Breast Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist, Elaine Shaw, and our Secondary Breast Cancer Nurse, Gemma Potter, are the only nurses of their kind in Northern Ireland. They act as a vital lynchpin between the various teams involved in a patient's care and are a valuable source of information and support for women as they go through treatment.



Gemma Potter



Elaine Shaw

## Meet the Board

### We are delighted to introduce you to the new Chairman of Friends of the Cancer Centre, Brian Cave.

Brian took up the position of Chair earlier this year, having previously served as a Trustee for five years. In this time, Brian has been a vital asset to the charity, bringing with him many years of expertise in risk management. Brian is now taking on a new role and along with our other volunteer board members, is working to ensure that the money you donate is put to the best possible use to support families impacted by cancer.

Commenting on why the charity is a cause close to his heart, Brian said:



Brian Cave

"I am really delighted and honoured to be Chair of Friends of the Cancer Centre. Like so many people reading this, I have a very personal connection to the charity. I lost my wife, Ruth, to bladder cancer in 2016 and during her treatment at the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre, we became one of the many families benefitting from the charity's vital work.

"Nobody really wants to walk through the doors of the Cancer Centre and I expected it to be quite a sad place. In reality, it was warm, friendly and full of smiling faces which immediately put us at ease at a really worrying time. During our time at the hospital, we were struck by the sea of yellow which you see throughout the hospital, which highlighted the amazing ways in which Friends of the Cancer Centre was supporting us and many others.

"After Ruth passed away, I contacted the charity to see if there was an opportunity to get involved and perhaps share some of my professional experience working in risk management. I was then delighted to become a board member and today, I am really honoured to be Chair of a charity that has become an integral part of cancer services locally.

"I would like to pass on my very best to the charity's previous Chair, Geoff Hill, who has left very big shoes to fill. I would also like to give my heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports the charity. Recent years have been the most challenging for the charity, with COVID-19 impacting on all aspects of our work. However, it did not derail us and throughout it all I'm really proud that the charity was able to continue its vital work. The impact of the pandemic has now set in motion a new challenge in the form of the cost of living crisis, which will undoubtedly bring more obstacles for the charity. However, I know that with your continued friendship we will be able to carry on with our work and be here for families when they need it most."

## Allen & Overy join Team Friends

Thank you to our wonderful corporate partners who have helped raise over £215,000 in the last year.



We are delighted to introduce our new partner Allen & Overy (A&O) Belfast, who joined us in May 2022. We look forward to working with the team over the next two years, raising funds and awareness. A&O Belfast opened in 2011 and is the second largest office in the A&O network by headcount, employing over 700 people. The charity is a cause close to the heart of many of the team at A&O. Pauline Wylie, Communications Manager and Chair of the Pro Bono and Community Investment (PBCI) Committee, said:

“Friends of the Cancer Centre was nominated and voted for by our staff. The charity topped the votes and struck a chord with colleagues, as sadly so many of us have been impacted by cancer, but we have also benefitted from the support provided by the charity.

“At A&O we are committed to supporting our local community, giving back and making a difference. We have set a target of raising £25,000 for Friends of the Cancer Centre over the next two years and to date we have already raised over £5,000. We kicked off our fundraising with the Take on the Tower

Abseil and we held a bake-off and coffee morning in the office at the end of July. In September an A&O team participated in the Slieve Donard Challenge. It is great to see how these fundraising events are engaging staff and helping to bring people together again, while raising much-needed funds for the charity.

“We place a great deal of value on the health and wellbeing of our people and an important aspect of the partnership will be raising awareness of breast and testicular cancer, by sharing the charity’s Breast Bud and Talking Balls self-check tools with staff.”



We are incredibly grateful to the team at Allen & Overy for their support. If you would like to find out how your company or colleagues could support Friends of the Cancer Centre, please contact Ana Wilkinson, Head of Fundraising, on 077 7568 8291 or email [info@friendsofthecancercentre.com](mailto:info@friendsofthecancercentre.com)

# Thank You to Our Fantastic Friends

A **BIG** thank you to all our wonderful friends who have been raising money for us over the last six months. We simply could not continue our vital work without you.



Donaghadee Golf Club Lady Captain's Day



Niamh Clarke



Heather Carson with the Fermanagh Fundraising Group



Ballynahinch Glentoran Supporters Club



Arlene Thompson & Rosemary Junkin



Bright Community Centre



Lower Ormeau Athletics Forum



Dundonald Football Club



The McKee Family

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

## Be Inspired

Earlier this year, Ballymena man Clive Byham took on the challenge of cycling 900km around Northern Ireland, to raise money for the charity.

The 900km he covered in his challenge had very special significance for Clive, as each kilometre represented a bed at Belfast City Hospital, where he received his treatment for Acute Myeloid Leukaemia.

Clive and his father, Michael, cycled for eight days around the entire coastline and border of Northern Ireland, setting off from the Cancer Centre at Belfast City Hospital.

Explaining the motivation behind his challenge, Clive said:

"I am grateful to have received wonderful nursing and medical care at Belfast City Hospital following my cancer diagnosis. Thanks to the generosity of the local community, we have raised over £5,700. As well as raising money, I hope to bring an awareness to as many people as possible and offer hope and encouragement to others living with cancer. I am so grateful to everyone who supported us throughout our cycle challenge and kept our spirits up. I would also encourage anyone reading this to plan their own challenge or event to help this amazing charity. We can all make a difference."



## Meet Sarah

### Our Community Fundraising Officer

Friends of the Cancer Centre relies on the generosity of the local community and we simply cannot provide the support we do, without you.

We are delighted to introduce you to our Community Fundraising Officer, Sarah Wilson, who is on hand to support you with any fundraising you may want to do for the charity. She said:

"We are always amazed and humbled by the ways in which people support the charity and the incredible challenges people undertake to show their support for others impacted by cancer. From cycle challenges and coffee mornings, to sponsored walks, golf days, or as a volunteer, there is always a way in which you can show your support.

"We are so grateful to everyone across Northern Ireland for raising money to support the charity's work. The money raised within our community will make a real difference to our work which supports patients and families across Northern Ireland."



Have you been inspired by Clive's story and our other amazing supporters? If you would like to take on your own challenge we would love to hear from you. Get in touch with Sarah by emailing [sarahwilson@friendsofthecancercentre.com](mailto:sarahwilson@friendsofthecancercentre.com) or call 078 1027 1148



Alastair with his wife Jill and daughters Caitlin, Erin and Megan.

## "There is always hope."

In 2017, Alastair Mackay was diagnosed with kidney cancer. After recovering from his initial diagnosis and treatment, two years ago the former Principal of Finaghy Primary School in Belfast learned that the cancer had spread. He is currently receiving treatment from the team at the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre and doing well. Today, Alastair is keen to share his story to give hope to other people impacted by cancer and share why Friends of the Cancer Centre has become a cause close to his heart. This is Alastair's story.

"I was first diagnosed with kidney cancer over five years ago during an ultrasound scan for a gallstone investigation. I had no symptoms at that time and no clue that I had a large tumour growing on my left kidney. Within a matter of weeks I had the kidney removed and was back at work the following month. I remained in good health for three years, however I developed an annoying dull ache between my shoulder blades. I was called for a bone scan and a subsequent full body MRI revealed a significant metastasised tumour on my upper spine and a smaller one on my neck. I knew then that the cancer cells had escaped my kidney, had been silently roaming around in my system all that time and eventually decided to take up residence on my spine. I was referred immediately to the team at the Cancer Centre in Belfast and I rapidly received an intense course of radiotherapy and an oral chemotherapy-related drug.



Alastair with his daughters at our Take on the Tower Superhero Abseil.

“For the second time, nurses, doctors, consultants and radiologists swarmed into action. Whilst they were honest with me about the gravity of my situation, at no time did they ever give me cause to give up hope. Quite the opposite in fact. The complex system of care and treatment they built around me was expertly designed to give me every chance of longer survival and a good quality of life. My tumours responded well to radiotherapy and alongside quite a large collection of other medication, I’ve been stable ever since.

“There is a long list of people whom I need to thank, but outstanding amongst them is Mel McNally, Friends of the Cancer Centre’s Urology Clinical Nurse Specialist, who has been my nurse since 2019.



Mel McNally, Friends of the Cancer Centre's Urology Clinical Nurse Specialist

“I communicate with her face-to-face, by email, by phone and by text. She is always available, no request is too small and no question is too stupid. She has encouraged me through darker days, laughed with me through brighter ones and she coordinates all my care. Mel once said to me ‘always strive not to let cancer define you’, and I took those words to heart.

“Living with cancer makes you very conscious of the limited time we all have on planet Earth. I have developed a desire to make the most of every day and to give something back. I took part in Friends of the Cancer Centre’s Take on the Tower Superhero Abseil in May this year, alongside my three daughters, to say thank you for the wonderful care I have received. I was delighted to have raised over £3,000 for the charity. I also have to thank the staff and pupils from Finaghy Primary School, where I served as Principal, who took part in a sponsored walk in 2020 which raised an amazing £11,000. I know times are hard for so many people at the moment, but I would encourage everyone to show their support for this vital local charity, as people like me rely on its work.”

## Giving hope to people with cancer

For Alastair, one of his main incentives has been to stay fit and well so that he might be eligible for the next refinement in treatment. He said:

“Cancer treatment is constantly improving and I was recently informed that there are new combination therapies being licensed which were not available to me when I began treatment. So there’s always hope.”

As well as funding the vital staff like Melanie, who support people through their diagnosis and treatment, we are also proud to support the team who are helping to develop new and improved ways to treat cancer. We are a proud partner with the Patrick G Johnston Centre for Cancer Research and the NI Cancer Trials Network. The charity has recently increased our commitment to this area of our work and over the next three years, we will be investing over £1 million to ensure that people like Alastair can benefit from the latest treatment options.



## Raising a cuppa to patients in the North West

As the charity continues to grow, so too does the support we offer families impacted by cancer across Northern Ireland.

Since it opened in 2016, we have been working closely with the team at the North West Cancer Centre in Derry/Londonderry. The latest addition to our work in the hospital is a new tea and coffee dock, which will provide patients and their loved ones attending the hospital's Sperrin Suite with complimentary refreshments.

Each week, up to 600 patients and their loved ones from across the North West attend the Sperrin Suite for cancer treatment. Many have travelled long distances for what can be a long day as they receive treatment and attend other appointments. The new tea and coffee dock is now the third opened by the charity, with two others in the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre in Belfast. The new dock will ensure that patients can avail of a welcome refreshment at what can be a very worrying time. As well as being a welcoming distraction, by offering free refreshments we hope we can also help alleviate some of the additional financial pressures that many people face through their treatment.

Commenting on how beneficial the new tea and coffee dock will be, Lesley Mitchell, Interim Assistant Director (Nursing), Cancer and Diagnostics at the North West Cancer Centre, said:

"We are delighted to open our Friends of the Cancer Centre tea and coffee dock and we know it will make a real impact on our patients and the time they spend at the hospital.

"As a team, we understand that coming to the hospital is a very worrying and anxious time and we endeavour to find ways to make patients and their loved ones as comfortable as we can. Being able to offer a cup of tea is a small but really important part of our wider patient care and we would like to thank Friends of the Cancer Centre, and everyone who supports this vital local charity, for funding the project."



As a charity, we are proud to work with the team at the North West Cancer Centre and provide support, which ranges from a complimentary cup of tea to a much needed financial grant. Most recently, we have also agreed funding for three new posts in radiotherapy and nursing. These posts will provide vital treatment and care for patients when they need it most.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HOW WE ARE SUPPORTING PATIENTS IN THE NORTH WEST ON OUR WEBSITE



## We're Talking Balls

**to get more men checking their testicles regularly.**

Our patron, rugby player Iain Henderson, is proudly supporting our Talking Balls campaign which is raising awareness of testicular cancer and encouraging more men across Northern Ireland to check their testicles regularly.

Not sure how to check? Our Talking Balls self-check card has a step-by-step guide on how you can check yourself. You'll also get our Talking Balls stress ball, the perfect reminder to get checking!

You can order yours online at [www.friendsofthecancercentre.com](http://www.friendsofthecancercentre.com)  
or call 028 9069 9393.

**If your sports club, community group or place of work would like our self-check tools please contact us.**



Help us support local families this Christmas by getting involved in our Festive Fundraising activities.

You can get involved in lots of ways including taking part in a Wear Something Festive Day, supporting our Wish Upon a Star Appeal or purchasing our Christmas cards and virtual gifts. Whatever way you decide to support us this festive season, it will make a difference to local families.



Wear Something Festive



Christmas Cards



Wish Upon A Star

**Planning a Festive Fundraising event of your own?**  
Get in touch with our fundraising team today to help plan your event.

# In Focus

As a charity, our work is extensive and from funding vital additional members of staff, to investing in research, everything we do makes a difference to patients. As our work is so extensive, there are some projects we have funded and supported that you might not be aware of. That's why we wanted to shine a light on the other powerful and important ways your support has made a difference over the past year.

Refurbishment of the relatives rooms on Ward 2A and 2B in the Cancer Centre.



Funding to purchase an ECG machine for the radiotherapy department to help staff deliver safe and effective care.



Purchase of 10 wall mounted observation monitors to help care for stem cell transplant patients and those in need of advanced care on Ward 10 North.



Providing the occupational therapy team with 16 pressure reducing cushions to help patients recover at home.



3 recliner chairs for the day room on Ward 2B, which will give patients and families a more comfortable space on the hospital ward.



Purchase of 2 exercise bikes for patients on Ward 10 North undergoing a stem cell transplant, to enable them to exercise and maintain mobility whilst unable to leave their room during isolation.



# Christmas Raffle

## 1<sup>st</sup> PRIZE

43" Flat screen TV

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PRIZE

£100 Tesco voucher

## 3<sup>rd</sup> PRIZE

Perfume hamper



Help us raise £10,000 to support local families.

Our exciting Christmas Raffle gives you the chance to **WIN** some fabulous prizes while supporting the charity's vital work. The prizes have been kindly donated so all of the money raised from the raffle will be used to make a difference to local families.



Tickets cost £1 each.

Raffle draw takes place on Wednesday 14th December 2022. Please return your tickets in the freepost envelope provided and make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Cancer Centre'. We can also take card payments by telephone on (028) 9069 9393, or you can enter online by visiting our website.

Please call our office if you require additional tickets or if you could help by selling them to your family and friends.

#### Legal information:

Each raffle entry is £1. The raffle will be drawn on Wednesday 14th December 2022 at 4pm. You must be 16 years or over to purchase or sell a raffle ticket. Underage gambling is an offence. Licensed and regulated by Belfast City Council. Website: [www.belfastcity.gov.uk](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk). Promoter: Colleen Shaw. Full terms and conditions can be obtained from the Promoter at the charity address below.

Friends of the Cancer Centre, NI Cancer Centre, Belfast City Hospital, Lisburn Road, BT9 7AB  
T: 028 9069 9393 E: [info@friendsofthecancercentre.com](mailto:info@friendsofthecancercentre.com) W: [www.friendsofthecancercentre.com](http://www.friendsofthecancercentre.com)

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