

# force matters



**DELIVERING  
ON OUR  
MISSION**

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**FORCE Matters** is the newsletter of FORCE Cancer Charity. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue. While every effort is made to ensure accuracy at the time of going to print, please accept our sincere apologies for any errors or omissions.

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# Working together brings hope when it's needed most



By Meriel Fishwick  
FORCE Chief Executive

*"I didn't plant seeds last year..."* – a client's remark during a discussion about dealing with uncertainty at a recent retreat day for people living with non-curable cancer.

When I spoke to her later, I asked if she had planted seeds this year and she replied: "Yes, I have tomato plants on my windowsill." Just that short encounter gave me a glimpse into the complexity of life which some people face beyond hearing "We can treat your cancer but there is no cure." I took part in the day as an observer and was left with an overwhelming sense of the importance of bringing people together, the kindness of strangers and the challenge for people with a life-limiting illness but undefined life expectancy. Above all, the group's openness and courage left me feeling hopeful and as Seamus Heaney said: "Hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well, but something rooted in the conviction that there is good worth working for."

Considering opportunities to collaborate is the responsibility of all charities as the sector tries to maximise finite resources. Our outreach projects at hospitals in Ottery St Mary, Okehampton and now Tiverton continue to be a great testament to the RDUH Community Team, FORCE and our volunteers. In this edition of FORCE Matters you will also see a lovely example of how our physio team have been working with colleagues in the NHS to help haematology patients with fitness information before a stem cell transplant.

There's very little that happens here at FORCE without the support of our volunteers. Hundreds of people give thousands of hours each year and their value is simply immeasurable. We have a great team of volunteers and their commitment reminds us that no-one has made it through life without someone else's help at some point. There are a number of volunteer opportunities at FORCE so if you're interested in getting involved, please get in touch.

I've had the great fortune of working with Dr Anne Hong as Chair of FORCE for most of my time with the charity before she handed over to Dr Jenny Forrest in autumn 2023. In fact, we go back such a long way that we both had perms when we first met! Anne has guided FORCE through decades of development and the inevitable changes time brings. In an article on Page 6, Anne talks about her long association with the charity in her typically self-effacing way, which belies her considerable contribution to cancer medicine and FORCE.

It's a big year for the Nello cycle ride and if you haven't dusted off your bike and tested the lycra, there's still time. Since the first Nello Century Cycle Challenge in 2000, the ride has raised nearly £1.3m for FORCE. The 25th ride will be a special day for many of us, particularly Marc Millon, who did the original Topsham to Venice ride and has been spearheading the Nello since 2000. Once more, we are hugely grateful to Mike Sanders of the Bike Shed for his incredible support and generosity over the years.

The FORCE Cancer Support Centre opened its doors for the first time on my 40th Birthday in September 2004. In the intervening 20 years there have been great milestones and of course some challenges – the greatest of which being a pandemic. On September 27th this year (please keep the date) we will be opening the doors of



the Centre to all those who have been involved with the charity over this period as well as showcasing our work to healthcare professionals and other colleagues. It will be an opportunity to celebrate all that's been achieved and look to the future and the exciting plans laid out in our new strategy.

I will be casting off as CEO at the end of October and feel enormously grateful for my 34 years at FORCE. The charity is in good heart and it's the right time for a new leader to come in and work with our exceptional team of staff, volunteers and supporters. Please keep the FORCE flag flying – I will miss you all very much. ●

## 20 years of our wonderful Centre

This autumn marks a significant milestone in the history of FORCE Cancer Charity.

Our Support and Information Centre has been welcoming local people affected by cancer for 20 years. It opened its door for the first time on September 20 2004, followed by the official opening in February 2005 when the entire building was tied in a red ribbon and everyone who helped create the Centre was invited to take part in the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Since then, it has become a focal point for cancer support in Devon and place of sanctuary for thousands of people from across the county and beyond.

The Centre was built in the grounds of the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital's Wonford site after a successful appeal. The call for support to fund a purpose-built hub was launched in 2001. Three years and £900,000 later, the dream became a reality.

In its first year, there were around 9,000 visits to the new centre, nearly double the original projection. That figure rose to more than 20,000 within a relatively short space of time.

Such significantly increasing demand led to plans for a £350,000 extension to almost double the size of the centre. That vision was revealed in May 2011 and the extension was opened in December 2012. It features larger rooms for support groups and classes, spaces that can also be divided into separate quiet areas for one-to-one support.

Our Centre opens five days a week and is at the heart of our charity's operation. We're here for cancer patients, their families, friends and carers as well as healthcare professionals. We pride ourselves on creating a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere that offers a haven from the clinical environment of the hospital.



We offer one-to-one counselling, complementary therapies, relaxation classes, exercise sessions, support groups, benefits advice and an extensive library, all available free of charge. The Centre is also FORCE's administrative headquarters.

COVID reduced footfall but we have done everything possible to ensure that the people who so desperately need our support can feel comfortable and safe visiting our Centre and visitor numbers are rising to pre-pandemic level.

There have been around a **QUARTER OF A MILLION** visits to our Centre since it first opened.

This is a small snapshot of what the FORCE Centre means to people.

**Emma Ellis, FORCE Oncology Support Specialist (Lead, Support and Education Programmes):** As one of the 70 volunteers inducted all those years ago, I remember feeling the infectious excitement about the Centre opening, bringing my set of scissors to cut the ribbon which I still have a piece of. I recall thinking how big it was and before we knew it, we were making plans for the extension as it became too small to meet the need. I feel as proud and excited today to be part of FORCE and continue to be inspired by the people I work alongside, our volunteers and the patients and families we walk alongside.

**Helen Hancox:** When I had my cancer diagnosis in 2015 I hadn't heard of FORCE. My specialist nurse told me about FORCE and suggested I visit. I did with some trepidation, I shouldn't have been anxious about walking through the door. What a fantastic warm welcome I received. I had counselling sessions, complementary therapies, group sessions and also always went to the Centre prior to my appointments in the hospital. It is such a fantastic charity. Visiting the Centre is like having a warm blanket wrapped around you, it's so amazing.

**Pat Ladybird:** My treatment is at Torbay and I've only visited FORCE Cancer Charity once... it was like walking into a Big Hug!

**Annie Dale-Greaves:** It took a monumental effort to get through the door after my diagnosis. What I found was a peaceful sanctuary. Somewhere I could sit quietly, ask for advice and have a tea. I cannot thank FORCE Cancer Charity enough. Amazing.

**Jill Weeks:** They care. ●

### Save the date!

On Friday September 27 we will be opening the Centre to supporters, friends, colleagues and patients to celebrate our 20th birthday. There will be a full programme of events and stands with breakfast, a sandwich lunch and cream teas. Full details will follow in due course.

Jenny Forrest became our new chair of trustees in November 2023, taking over from Anne Hong. Jenny is a consultant clinical oncologist at Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. As well as her voluntary work as a trustee for the last 10 years, she is also a regular fundraiser for FORCE and has undertaken some amazing long distance walks in support of our charity.

# Jenny honoured to take the chair

I feel honoured to have been asked to take over from Dr Anne Hong when she stepped down from being Chair of the Trustees and start by thanking her publicly for all her work as a trustee and chair over a great many years.

In this issue we look forward to the 20-year anniversary of the FORCE Centre and reflect on all the achievements as well as looking to the future. I see first-hand how FORCE works with patients and their families supporting them to face cancer. This can be in the form of face-to-face counselling, group sessions, relaxation and complementary therapies, benefits advice, physiotherapy and exercise guidance and more. There is always a unique, individualised approach that adapts to our local patient needs. Over the last year FORCE has worked to increase the level of counselling and support available with, amongst other things, a joint appointment with the hospital of a clinical psychologist to support the team of counsellors and take on more complex patient needs.

Looking back, FORCE has, over the years, funded new, innovative equipment for cancer patients. For example, more than 30 years ago the charity funded the first High Dose Rate Brachytherapy machine in the country, which has allowed us to be at the forefront nationally and internationally in providing world class treatment for our patients. Brachytherapy is a technique whereby a radioactive bead on the end of a wire is placed directly in or against the tumour. It is used to cure cervix cancers and prostate cancers and control and improve symptoms of other cancers, such as oesophageal cancer. The initially funding and pump priming has allowed us to gain the expertise to be a national lead in the field in providing world class cancer care. As I treat gynaecological and oesophageal cancers, I directly see the long-term benefits of this all these years later.

More recently pump priming support has allowed the development over the last five years of an outreach centre at Ottery St Mary, funding chemotherapy nurses to be able to bring chemotherapy delivery in to the community. The centre is now open, delivering treatments and outpatient clinics daily, Monday to Friday, as well as enabling FORCE volunteers to support patients



locally. This year we have seen the funding of cold cap equipment to try to prevent hair loss of patients undergoing chemotherapy in Exeter and in Ottery St Mary. FORCE is also now back at Okehampton on a Wednesday and Tiverton on Mondays, providing further support in the community.

Throughout the years, as alluded to above, FORCE has had to adapt to differing needs. For example, FORCE introducing video and telephone support during COVID and then adapting again as restrictions lifted, opening the Centre as soon as rules allowed to offer patients much needed direct human contact. A hybrid service continues, dependent on individual wishes, accounting for the geography of Devon, but the vast majority of services are face-to-face.

Thank you to all the staff and volunteers at FORCE for all they do and thank you to all who, by their donations and fundraising activities, help us to continue to offer this invaluable resource to patients and their families. LET'S FACE CANCER TOGETHER. ●

**Exeter  
Respect  
Festival 2024**  
ALL DIFFERENT, ALL EQUAL

**FORCE WILL BE REPRESENTED** at the Exeter Respect Festival at Belmont Park on Saturday June 8 and Sunday June 9.

It is the city's annual celebration of diversity that aims to engage the wider community in saying no to racism and all forms of prejudice under the banner: All Different, All Equal

FORCE will be there this summer to develop relationships with different communities and identify where there may be gaps in our services.



# We're back ...and Tiverton makes three!

**F**ORCE has finally completed a significant hat-trick in our mission to restore support to more communities across Devon. We are now back at Tiverton Hospital every Monday from 11am to 5pm.

It's the final link in re-establishing FORCE outreach services following the success of our return to community hospitals in Ottery St Mary and Okehampton.

COVID ravaged our ability to provide a range of face-to-face services across the county as necessary restrictions at hospitals created barriers we were unable to overcome.

We continued to offer telephone and video support to people who couldn't make it to our main Support and Information Centre in Exeter during the pandemic and beyond.

But we know that, for many, there is no substitute for direct contact and that is why we have worked hard to take more of our services closer to the people who need them.

FORCE Support Services Manager Alex Moseley said: "We are so pleased that we are now able to open our outreach service in Tiverton.

We have heard of the difference it makes to have a centre close to where people live for many reasons, but particularly in terms of ease of access and the cost of getting to an appointment.

"This is the third outreach service that we have established since the pandemic, following on from Okehampton and Ottery St May, and we'd like to thank the Community Lottery Fund for its support and also our partners within the local Trust for making this possible.

"Our outreach counsellors, physiotherapists and complementary therapists are looking forward to welcoming the people of Tiverton to the service – after they have received a warm welcome and a cuppa from our amazing team of volunteers!"

At the moment all three outreach centres offer appointment-only services – counselling, complementary therapies and physio and exercise clinics. Group support is also offered when possible.

At Okehampton, where FORCE operates on a Wednesday between 10am and 4pm, we work with Citizens Advice and Macmillan to provide advice on claiming benefits. There is a possibility of establishing the same partnership in Tiverton. ●

## Volunteers are key to FORCE services running smoothly in our outreach locations

**R**e-opening at Tiverton was dependent on finding a group of selfless individuals prepared to give up their time to help others in their community.

Just as in Ottery and Okehampton, that wasn't a problem!

One of those on Team FORCE at Tiverton Hospital is Sarah Churchward Reay, who knows better than most how valuable our support can be.

She lost both parents to bowel cancer and her sister is living – and living well – with incurable cancer.

Sarah has supported her family through their diagnosis and treatment and acknowledges the part FORCE has played in helping them and her.

"FORCE is a wonderful charity. You think the Centre will be clinical and full of people looking dismal and woeful but the minute you walk through the door, it's like there's a massive hug around you.

"As horrible as the cancer journey is, FORCE has absolutely nailed how to help you deal with it. They certainly helped me. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to give something back. It's good to be on the other side of the counter, giving others someone to moan at or laugh with."

Sarah moved to Tiverton from Lancashire 12 years ago after visiting a comedy club in the town where her sister lived.

Not only did she and her then fiancé, now husband, Mike switch from the North West to the South West but her parents came too.

"It was the best thing I ever did. I adore it here. We don't make a lot but I love our way of life," she said.

The family is clearly not averse to risk and change. Sister Rachel and her husband, Mark, sold their home in Tiverton and moved first into a converted horsebox – called Booby Do – and now live on a narrowboat.

They were prompted to make a radical lifestyle shift after Rachel was first treated for breast cancer eight years ago and received a



diagnosis of incurable secondary disease in February 2021.

Sarah often accompanies her sister for tests and treatment in Exeter and Ottery.

She runs an independent bakery in Westex – Sarah's Kitchen – and supports FORCE whenever and however she can.

"We come across a lot of customers who are having treatment themselves or they've been through it or they're supporting someone with cancer. We always tell them about FORCE and what's available in Exeter. It'll be nice to let them know they can now get support in Tiverton," she said. ●

Dr Anne Hong has been a FORCE trustee for more than three decades. She stood down as chairman of the board in November and we asked her to reflect on her time at the helm.

# A proud reflection on the incredible growth of FORCE

**You became a FORCE trustee on September 1, 1992. What made you want to become involved?**

In 1988, years before I came to Exeter, I saw Dr Chris Rowland (one of FORCE’s founders) presenting the pioneering work of the HOPE (Home Oncology Programme, Exeter) project at a prestigious, academic, international conference. This research programme of continuous ambulatory infusional home-based chemotherapy was innovative, ground-breaking, scientifically sound, evidence-based, compassionate and practical. It made a new treatment available to Exeter cancer patients which improved their quality of life, enabling them to continue with “normal” life, work and activity whilst receiving chemotherapy treatment. From here, FORCE was born. This was one of the reasons I applied to join the Exeter Oncology team.

**How has the charity grown and developed in the decades since then?**

Beyond imagination. From small beginnings – a few enthusiastic, dedicated, inspirational individuals with a desire to improve and make innovative treatments available for cancer patients, enhance the quality of their lives, underpin with evidence-based research, raise funds to make these goals possible, from a tiny office at the corner of the RDEH site – to multi-skilled teams operating from the supporter-funded FORCE Cancer Support and Information Centre

and in outreach centres in our communities beyond Exeter. Our Centre is the hub, housing our key operational teams, providing wide-ranging support services for individuals, carers, families.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of?**

Yes – our loyal, dedicated supporters who span many decades and generations, our volunteers, friends, operational and professional teams and trustees, without whom we could not have served our beneficiaries so well and still do to this day. I am proud that FORCE has stayed true to its roots yet adapted and evolved to meet the needs of the time, as new understanding, knowledge, treatment and technologies have changed the landscape of possibilities for the lives of cancer patients.

**What makes FORCE so significant in the care and support of cancer patients and their families?**

The personal touch. In a world and healthcare system which can seem impersonal, dominated by technology and automation, FORCE brings the human face of compassionate care, the understanding heart, the listening ears, the perceptive eyes, the comforting hand. We are accessible, doors open to address multi-layered needs as best we can, free of charge, to support and enhance cancer journeys, individually and collectively, enable each to mobilise their own strengths and inner resources.



**What are your hopes for the future of FORCE?**

That one day FORCE may no longer be needed!

**You are still involved with the charity – how and why?**

Yes, as a trustee and volunteer. FORCE has and continues to give so much to so many and seeing the evidence, hearing and reading the personal stories and testimonials is heartwarming enough a reward for me. ●

## THE FORCE LOGO Down memory lane...

FORCE Vice-Patron David Cantle has had a wander down memory lane to look at the origins of our charity’s logo.

He told FORCE Matters: “The first edition of the logo clearly illustrates that the letters had dots to indicate they were abbreviations for Friends of the Oncology and Radiotherapy Centre, Exeter. In other words, force was a mnemonic (a pronounceable word made out of the first letters of the name or phrase – sometimes called an acronym). The early logo had a Big C, the name used widely in days gone by to replace the word cancer. We maintained the Big C shape but used it to advertise what FORCE is – a cancer charity. Three wavy lines struck through the Big C represent radiotherapy waves used to treat cancer. Nowadays the three lines have been replaced by one in deference to the more accurate and precise treatment available.”

David and his wife, Jean, were guests at a Buckingham Palace Garden Party to mark their outstanding services to charity and the community in Devon.





# FORCE offers a pre-loved wig service

**F**ORCE has launched a new service that offers pre-loved wigs at affordable prices. We have a wide selection of wigs available to view on our website, all donated by patients who no longer need them. The suggested minimum donation for each one is £30. You can view our selection at <https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/force-pre-loved-wig-service/> where you can reserve up to six wigs.

We have divided the full range into four sections – blonde, brown, red and grey – but please be aware that colours may not be exactly as depicted.

You will need to fill in the attached form on the website for each one with your contact details and we will get in touch to arrange an appointment at the FORCE Cancer Charity Support and Information Centre in Exeter.

The service is being run by two FORCE volunteers, Sharon Burton and Sally Gallagher. They have had basic training to give them the additional skills they need to offer patients a free, 30-minute wig fitting appointment. These slots will be available on Mondays at the FORCE Support and Information Centre.

Experienced stylist Teresa Wood, who already volunteers with Look Good Feel Better and the Little Princess Trust, gave up her time free of charge to provide accredited training in basic wig fitting, trimming and alterations in readiness for the launch of the service. She worked with Sharon, Sally and FORCE Support Services Administrator Shelley Boulton, who came up with the idea of offering pre-loved wigs.

“When you sit with a recently diagnosed patient and see how distraught they are because they have been told their treatment will cause hair loss, then the patient apologises because they can’t afford the prescription charge for a wig but the thought of having no hair terrifies them, it makes you feel helpless,” said Shelley.

“Anyone facing hair loss from their treatment should not have to decide if they can afford to have hair, but sadly for many people this is where we are. With rising costs all around us it comes as no surprise that the appliance prescription charge is going up again this year. I knew we had to do something to make having a wig more accessible for everyone,



Wig-fitting volunteers Sally Gallagher and Sharon Burton

hence the idea of the FORCE pre-loved wig scheme was born.”

Sharon said: “I feel very passionate about our new service as it will help our patients to feel more confident on their journey.”

Sally added: “During the last year volunteering at FORCE I have met lots of people affected by cancer in so many different ways, so by offering the Pre-Loved Wig Service I hope we can offer support and give confidence to people to help them get through their day to day lives living with cancer.”

The new service has been welcomed by patients, including two who volunteered as guinea pigs for the training session.

Melanie Hayward said: “It’s excellent and wonderful that these wigs can be reused. There’s a really good choice and the staff are really friendly and know what they are talking about. There’s a good range of styles and colours and you can really have fun with. I would highly recommend this service.”

Emma added: “It was really nice to try on different wigs in completely different styles. The price is so reasonable that it gives you the options rather than feeling under pressure to choose just one.” ●

## What does the FORCE Get Active programme have in common with national treasure Dame Judy Dench?

Answer: they are both fans of an alternative exercise opportunity for cancer patients.

South West Fishing For Life is a fly-fishing organisation for women and men with one thing in common – breast cancer. The gentle movement of casting has been proven to help with recovery and wellbeing after treatment. SWFFL has groups around the country including at Blakewell Fishery near Barnstaple, Kennick Reservoir on the edge of Dartmoor and Wimbleball Lake on Exmoor. Groups meet monthly and have qualified coaches to teach people to fish, all for free.

Dame Judi and her partner David Mills were visiting family near Wimbleball last summer and were special guests at SWFFL’s 15th anniversary celebration. “I was so pleased to be with such a wonderful, courageous and inspirational group of people,” she said.

The feedback from people who have learnt to fish with SWFFL reinforces its reputation. Jennie described it as: “A soul finding experience.” Jane added: “SWFFL was my lifesaver after diagnosis and treatment for breast cancer. Through SWFFL I became me again and not a cancer patient! I learned new skills and made many lovely new friends.”

For more information go to [www.southwestfishingforlife.org.uk](http://www.southwestfishingforlife.org.uk) or call secretary Gillian Payne on 01398 371244.

Dame Judi Dench and the trustees cutting a 15th anniversary cake



# New programme of support for people living with non-curable cancer

**F**ORCE has increased its support for people living with a diagnosis of non-curable cancer.

An ever-growing number of people are living for longer with cancers that cannot be cured. We hear how challenging it can be to make the most of living with that diagnosis, alongside managing a range of physical and psychological effects from cancer and its treatment.

We also understand how isolating and lonely it can feel for people with cancer, even if they are well supported by family and friends.

Over the last six months we have explored what support has been missing for people who have had a non-curable diagnosis. A pilot retreat day last October 2023 was a tremendous success and feedback has guided our plans to offer more help to a patient group for whom there is very little dedicated support available.

We have created an innovative programme of ongoing support that includes one-to-one counselling, a special support group and retreat days.

“We asked the people who came to our pilot day what they would like us to offer in future and the overwhelming response was more retreat days and a dedicated support group, both of which will give them the opportunity to connect with others in a similar situation,” said Emma Ellis, FORCE’s lead on support and education programmes.

The retreat days at Buckfast Abbey are now offered twice a year in Spring and Autumn and people can attend once. The second was held in April and a third is scheduled for October.

We have also now launched an open support group, held on the first Tuesday of every month at the FORCE Support and Information Centre and guided by experienced members of staff. The group offers another avenue for people to meet in a safe and supported environment and there is no limit to the number of sessions you can attend. From July 2024 we plan to offer a second group on the first Monday of each month at the FORCE Centre.

Emma explained: “We are committed to bringing people together with others who understand what they are going through. There was a unique energy in the room among the people who came to the first new support group in March. They were able to sit with the reality of living with non-curable cancer and say things they couldn’t to friends and family and didn’t want to leave the bubble. There was a clear relief at being in a safe space where they could say what they wanted without having to protect anyone.” ●

To find out more about the group, contact the FORCE Information Team on **01392 406151** or [support@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:support@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



## Sue and Charli attended our second retreat day and shared the positives they took from the experience.

“Made me realise (I need) to try learning to live life more positively instead of spending days with negative thoughts. It was a wonderful day and I came away feeling so comfortable having attended after I had worried how it would make me feel and how I would cope. It made me realise I am not alone and sharing with others what they have experienced and their coping strategies was a real help. Thank you so much to the team, they were amazing.”

### Sue Galt

“To meet people in a similar situation. To gain advice and support. To face my situation rather than denying it.”

### Charli Lee



**LET'S FACE  
CANCER  
TOGETHER**

**WE ARE FUNDRAISING** to help make support for people with non-curable cancers a regular part of the services offered by FORCE.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who has donated to our Let's Face Cancer Together campaign.

You can support it by texting **FACE** followed by the amount you want to give to 70450. Texts will cost the donation amount plus one standard network rate message, and you'll be opting into

hearing more from us. If you would like to donate but don't wish to hear more from us, please text **FACENOINFO** instead.

Alternatively, go to <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/letsfacecancertogether>

**STOP PRESS: The Lord Mayor of Exeter is supporting our campaign. Go to page 19 for more details.**



# New opportunities to join relaxation group

We have launched a new Relaxation and Anxiety Management (RAM) course. The group is for patients and carers and runs weekly at the FORCE Support and Information Centre on Wednesdays from 12-1pm.

There is a rolling programme of four sessions on the course but you can join at any point in the programme. Each session is limited to 10 people and you will need to book a place each week but if the course is full, you will be offered a slot on the following week's session. You will also be able to repeat the course a second time.

Learning how to relax can be a valuable aid to coping with a cancer diagnosis.

#### Relaxation can:

- Relieve tiredness and stress
- Help manage anxiety
- Enhance coping ability
- Contribute to a sense of wellbeing and peace

It's for anyone affected by cancer who would like to:

- Learn relaxation techniques
- Meet other patients and carers
- Have time out for themselves

You don't need special clothes or equipment but it is a good idea to wear loose, comfortable clothing.

If you are interested, call our information team on 01392 406151 for more details and to request an assessment. A member of the RAM team will contact you to chat through the programme to make sure it's right for you.

"This programme replaces the previous offering of three courses a year that meant only 30 people could access the service. The new format should enable many more people to get the support they need more quickly," said Emma Ellis, FORCE Oncology Support Specialist (Lead, Support and Education Programmes).

The FORCE website has audio and video aids to relaxation that are freely available to access. You can find them at [forcecancercharity.co.uk/videos/relaxation-anxiety-management/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/videos/relaxation-anxiety-management/) and [forcecancercharity.co.uk/audio/listen-to-an-introduction-to-relaxation-anxiety-management/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/audio/listen-to-an-introduction-to-relaxation-anxiety-management/) ●



The FORCE Relaxation and Anxiety Management Team – Marissa, Maria and Bea

## Baldy Babes prove the power of group support

A GROUP OF WOMEN who were diagnosed with breast cancer 11 years ago have formed a friendship group that has lasted for more than a decade and is still going strong.

They met at a FORCE support group for younger women with breast cancer and called themselves the Baldy Babes as most of them lost their hair during treatment.

"We met because of cancer but we come together now because of the friendships that were formed all those years ago and I think will go on for a long time to come," said Becky Handford, who organises a get together every three months or so for afternoon tea or a meal out.

They were even guests when one of the group got married.

"We wouldn't have met if it wasn't for FORCE and even though we aren't part of a group at the charity any more, the support continues," said Becky.

"It's so nice that we can catch up and talk about some of the things that still concern us. People think you move on from cancer but you still have worries from time to time and we all understand that and can talk about it.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the time we're not talking about cancer but it's nice to feel we can if we need to."

Debbie Thomas is also part of the group.

"I think it is a good idea to let people know that we are all still a strong group and have turned into the best of friends, which is so rewarding for us all. Having a support group has been a light release.



Being told that you have cancer is a moment that you will never forget. Having our little groups and get togethers has been a great help. We have supported each other in every way and a true special friendship has blossomed. Staying together has been such a boost and it's been an honour to know you lovely caring ladies," she said.

Mel May added: "We love food, drinks and cream teas! The catch-ups are not always good news every time but we have a good friendship between us all and we will all help each other if we can."

Becky summed it up by saying: "I love our get togethers and really appreciate the friendships we have - it's very special." ●

# Memories of the early days of the FORCE Centre

Jill Fry has been a FORCE volunteer since our Support Centre opened and reflects on her two decades with the charity.

When I first saw the building I thought, what a welcoming space it was, so light and airy. So different for the patients to the business of the hospital. Of course, the welcoming atmosphere came from the staff and volunteers as well. From September 2004 until COVID, I helped once a month with Look Good Feel Better. The ladies who came not only learnt lots about skin care, especially in view of the treatment they were having, but they made new friends and were amazed at the products in the bag they received. There was lots of laughter and they were able to swap stories of their experiences. The beauty consultants who came to run the sessions were so helpful and passed on so many tips.

When FORCE took over the snack bar opened in Oncology, I volunteered there every week too. Patients were pleased to have the facility and we had chats with lots of them.

Following COVID I decided not to continue with the snack bar or LGFB and instead volunteered at the Ottery St Mary Hospital outreach. It is humbling to meet patients in the various stages of their illness and their family and friends. The patients who come to Ottery find a relaxed atmosphere there and the nursing staff have more time. I hope that the FORCE volunteers contribute to that friendly atmosphere – I believe they do.

The Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton Friends of FORCE group was set up in 2006 and a small committee, assisted by some dedicated volunteers, raised much needed funds for FORCE and the various events spread the word about its work. It's always been very uplifting when standing outside Tesco or in the street holding a collecting bucket to meet someone who is very grateful to FORCE for the support they have received. It has made it all worthwhile.

It has been a privilege to be involved with the charity for 20 years. The changes have been amazing with so many more services offered to patients and their families, the outreach as well. To have been able to move on from COVID just shows what a great team of staff and trustees the charity has. I believe FORCE is unique in its field in offering so many services to cancer patients. There are many parts of the country that don't have any support for patients and their families. ●



Jill Fry (centre)

## Selfless gifts of time that mean so much

**OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE ESSENTIAL** to FORCE. Put simply, we couldn't do what we do to support thousands of local people affected by cancer without their selfless gift of time.

Our volunteers donate around 10,000 hours every year to FORCE. That's 1,250 days or 250 working weeks. Even at minimum wage, that would cost us more than £100,000 a year.

And those figures don't include the hours spent in the service of FORCE by our board of trustees, Friends of FORCE group members and the hundreds of people who turn out in all winds and weathers to support or take part in fundraising events.

As our Chief Executive Meriel Fishwick said in her introduction, the commitment of our volunteers reminds us that no-one has made it through life without someone else's help.

## Congratulations on your retirement

Retirement offers a whole new world of opportunities and the chance to try something new.

FORCE is your local cancer support charity and we are always looking for volunteers to help in a variety of roles. It is hugely rewarding and you can make a real difference to people in your community.

If you would like to find out more about volunteering with FORCE please contact our Volunteer Manager, Heather Taylor, on 01392 406154 or email [heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk)







# Moments that make it all worthwhile

FORCE volunteers have been running the snack bar at the Oncology Centre at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital for 12 years. They are the friendly faces who serve patients, visitors and staff with drinks and refreshments as well directing people to the FORCE Support Centre where appropriate. We asked some of our regular volunteers why they enjoy being involved.

**ANNA:** I've been volunteering in the FORCE snack bar for eight years and still always look forward to my shifts. At the heart of the Oncology and Radiology Department in the RD&E, it's a little oasis for patients and a convenient place for a quick fuel-stop for the hard-working staff in their busy days. Sometimes it's quiet but there are little jobs you can do to keep the place clean and inviting or just an opportunity to catch up with a good book!

It's a real pleasure to be able to provide patients with a quiet cuppa and a chat amongst the trials of ongoing treatments and be able to point them in the direction of the FORCE Centre for extra support. Some have travelled some distance for an appointment and recently a lady who had driven from Barnstaple in atrocious conditions came round the corner and exclaimed: 'Thank goodness! All the way I've been hoping you would be here – I so need a nice cup of tea!' And at that moment I was very glad I was there too. It's those moments that make it all worthwhile!

**SARAH:** My motivation is to help patients and those accompanying them who are going through a very tough time by being able to offer them a drink, a snack, a smile and sometimes a chat. I've had comments such as 'That's the best cup of tea I've ever had.' 'Thank you for giving up your time for us.' and 'That coffee will help me get through the morning.' For me that makes it so worthwhile. We don't do it for thanks but patients' comments remind us how much they value the service FORCE provides. We might not be serving the same volume as pre-Covid but every transaction means a person helped and hopefully, long term, we will see footfall increase again.

I saw an extra special benefit of the snack bar last time I was in. I had made a coffee for a man on his own who was about to start his first treatment and then for a lady who had just had her last. He was clearly quite nervous but plucked up the courage to ask her about her experience. They had a long chat and she was able to reassure him that it wouldn't be

anywhere near as bad as he anticipated. The man was so grateful to her and it just struck me that that conversation probably wouldn't have happened without the opportunity the snack bar provided.

**JACKIE:**  
Friendly  
Outstanding  
Rewarding  
Caring  
Environment

It's good to know that FORCE volunteers are making such a difference at the heart of the Oncology Centre as this feedback confirms: "My sister had a long course of radiotherapy and when I dropped her off, I used to go to your coffee shop (snack bar) while I was waiting for her. Not only was it better coffee than some of the other outlets in the hospital but it was good to spend a slightly harrowing time in a sympathetic atmosphere." ●



## WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN OUR TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS AT THE SNACK BAR?

It's open from 9.30am-4.15pm, Monday to Friday and our teams are on duty from 9am-12.45pm and 12.45pm-4.30pm, allowing time for set up and close down. Volunteers are responsible for opening and closing the snack bar, operating the till, cashing up, washing up, stock control and daily checks including cleaning and hygiene. Full training is given. If you think it might be for you, why not have a chat with our Voluntary Services Manager Heather Taylor. You can call her on **01392 406154**, email [heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk) or pop into our Support Centre in Exeter.



# Complementary therapies bring a positive change

**F**ORCE is slowly rebuilding its complementary therapies service under the guidance of team lead Kayleigh Brown. We have doubled our workforce to 10 in recent months, which means we have lots more availability with 37 hours of therapies available every week, up from just nine three years ago.

Demand is rising and we are growing our support to meet that need. We aim to get people their first appointment within four to six weeks after their first request for complementary therapies. Waiting lists have come down with more availability.

Kayleigh has ensured that a lot more treatments are offered to inpatients at the hospital. Our therapists regularly visit Yeo Ward, which specialises in caring for people receiving a range of cancer treatments, procedures and assistance with symptom control.

“Patients tell us they really appreciate a visit from our therapists. It’s a welcome distraction from all the clinical interventions they face every day,” said Kayleigh.

She has also been working hard to re-establish complementary therapies beyond our Exeter hub and the FORCE outreach locations are busy.

Cathy Moore is our Okehampton therapist and Marie-Anne Snowden sees clients at Ottery St Mary and Tiverton.

“It’s really lovely to see the service up and running at outreach because it means people can access therapies nearer to their home. Some people can’t travel to Exeter but by taking our services to them means we can reach more people who need us,” said Kayleigh.

Cathy joined our team to provide complementary therapies in her home town. She welcomes cancer patients and their carers to her treatment room at Okehampton Hospital every other Wednesday but as demand builds, that could increase to weekly sessions.

“I have a lovely room that doesn’t look or feel clinical. It’s nice that people can come to the hospital for something that isn’t invasive and be somewhere comfortable and relaxing where they can switch off, have some time for themselves and gain a sense of wellbeing,” said Cathy.

She brings a wealth of experience to our team after qualifying as a therapist 16 years ago. “I had acupuncture and from then on, I knew I wanted to become a therapist,” said Cathy, who had juggled a variety of jobs around raising four children.



Marie-Anne Snowden

When her youngest began secondary education, she took the chance to follow her dream, qualifying first as a reflexologist. She has since learnt massage and Indian head massage and has a private practice on the edge of Okehampton. She used her skills at Hospiscare for six years and when she heard about the chance to join the FORCE team, she didn’t hesitate to put herself forward. She’s loving the chance to serve people in her own community.

“People are so grateful that they don’t have to travel to Exeter. The atmosphere at the hospital is so friendly. The volunteers make everyone feel so relaxed and welcome.

“It’s really rewarding for me to be able to help people feel better in themselves and leave after treatment with less tension, like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders.”

Marie-Anne was a hairdresser for 30 years before retraining as a therapist, including a qualification in cancer care, and admits: “I have found my passion. I thoroughly enjoy it and I love to be able to make people who are going through such a lot feel comfortable and able to enjoy some time for themselves.”

She is based in Wellington and began with FORCE by providing weekly therapy sessions at Ottery St Mary Hospital.

“The team at Ottery is wonderful – the volunteers, counsellors, the nurses giving chemo. I’ve got to know them and we all work together to support our clients.

“The first patient I saw was unsure that she should be there. She felt guilty but I explained that it was her space, her time and she was as important as anyone else needing



Cathy Moore



support. She was nervous but she felt good afterwards and I've never forgotten her.

"Clients find Ottery so gentle. It puts people at ease. It saves them going all the way to Exeter, which can be daunting, particularly when you're not feeling well."

When the chance to join the new team at Tiverton Hospital came up, Marie-Anne didn't hesitate.

"I find it very humbling and it's great to be able to put all of my training into helping people who have been touched by cancer. They tell me that FORCE has been a turning point for them, it's a saviour and that's so good to hear. I get a lot of satisfaction from belonging to a special family. It's really rewarding to be part of a wonderful, wonderful charity."

Moira is part of our Exeter CT team, offering reflexology and Reiki at our Support Centre on a Friday afternoon. She is a vastly experienced clinical nurse specialist, now working with urology patients at Torbay Hospital after nearly 30 years at the RD&E.

She knows the value of the support FORCE offered to patients in her care and is thrilled to be working with our charity.

"It's such a joyful thing to do. To see

Moira Anderson



people come in frightened and exhausted and go away relaxed fills my soul and seems to be going down well with the patients I see."

Moira works remotely as a nurse so the face-to-face contact with people dealing with a cancer diagnosis at FORCE is immensely fulfilling.

It helps balance the challenges and frustrations of working within the NHS.

"After COVID we were offered therapies and Kayleigh gave me reflexology. It inspired me to get training. When I had to retire as

a full time nurse specialist in Exeter it was a no-brainer. Complementary therapies are all about relaxation, calm and bringing positive changes because cancer can be all about the negative.

"I love being able to offer something that can be uplifting. There is something about a therapeutic touch that can help people feel normal at a time when they may be going through gruelling treatments.

"I can help them feel better in themselves, calmer and nurtured; help them feel human and not just a number; help them regain control of their body at a time when everything is being done to them. It's empowering.

"I will always want to help such an amazing charity. I love the atmosphere, the people I work with and all the possibilities. It feeds my soul and cheers me up so much and I plan on carrying on as long as I'm physically able." ●

We still need therapists for our Centre in Exeter. If you're interested, contact Kayleigh on 01392 402086 or email [kayleigh.brown@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:kayleigh.brown@forcecancercharity.co.uk)

## Wonderful FORCE staff and volunteers

"I visited your outreach cancer hub at Ottery St Mary Hospital this morning. Your complementary therapist, Marie-Anne, was brilliant. She gave me the warmest welcome and listened carefully when she asked how I was progressing. She also gave me a lovely massage, which was so relaxing. Marion, the volunteer in the café, was warm and friendly too. After my therapy session she chatted to me about FORCE and how she and her colleagues can support me in the future. I've also been fortunate to receive advice from your physiotherapist, Louise, in the FORCE Support Centre in Exeter. She was really kind and helpful when I developed a nasty side effect of breast cancer and

suggested exercises which have reduced the symptoms.

"When I first visited the Support Centre between hospital appointments it felt like utopia! The volunteers were so welcoming and friendly and the atmosphere positive yet comfortable. It's a great feeling to know that I have a team of wonderful people to support me during my cancer journey. So many thanks to you, your staff and volunteers for all you've done."  
LAURA LOCKWOOD



## WHAT WE OFFER

Four sessions for a patient and their nominated carer. They can have:



### MASSAGE

A hands-on treatment. The therapist manipulates muscles and other soft tissue with a base oil to improve health and well-being.



### AROMATHERAPY MASSAGE

Similar to massage but, in addition, essential oils are used to suit individual requirements. Your therapist will advise you of the range available.



### REIKI

A hands-on treatment that uses light, non-manipulative touch to guide energy through the body. Clients remain fully clothed.



### REFLEXOLOGY

Therapists use their thumbs and fingers to work on the reflexes in the feet, using specialised massage techniques. Clients need remove only shoes and socks, tights or stockings.

# Bursary benefits Lizzy on every level

As part of our support for innovation to improve diagnosis, treatment and care for local cancer patients, FORCE is committed to backing education programmes. This includes a bursary, established in memory of our co-founder, Dr Chris Rowland. The scheme was paused for a year in the aftermath of the pandemic and we have committed to increase annual funding to £2,000, which supports the cost of a University of Exeter student's professional training year linked to oncology.

The latest recipient is Lizzy Sears, described by her academic tutor Dr Emma Dempster as an outstanding student who is bright, self-motivated and dedicated to a career in research.

Lizzy tells FORCE Matters about herself, her studies and how the bursary will make a huge difference to her life.

I am in my third year studying BSc Medical Sciences with a professional training year. This allows us to get a year of experience in the industry, which is really useful for future jobs and also figuring out what I want to do after uni.

I chose Exeter because of its reputation as an amazing university but also because of how beautiful Exeter is as a city. I am from a small town called Stroud in Gloucestershire so believe it or not, Exeter feels really big to me!

I have been interested in cancer research since I was very young. My parents used to joke that I would cure it one day. My family has been affected by cancer as my Nan passed away from it two days before I was born so it was quite a challenging time for them. Other family members have sadly passed from it (my godfather, my great grandma) so I really think this was what made me want to understand cancer a bit more. At uni I did a second-year module called immunopathology with a cancer pathology section. I found this so interesting and that was when I realised that I wanted a career in this field.

For my placement I am working in the RILD (the Research, Innovation, Learning and Development centre) in Exeter, looking at pancreatic neuroendocrine tumours (PNETs), which are biologically unpredictable, slow growing, endocrine pancreatic tumours. Left untreated, they can grow and may eventually metastasise (spread) to the liver and often result in death. Currently, the only cure is surgical resection but if the cancer is caught too late, it is often not possible, meaning there is no way to save the patient.

In future I would like to work on creating better cellular models for working on pancreatic cancer as this is a real challenge I have faced so far in my research and it is hard to research something if you don't have a way to do it!

**I have found my placement really interesting. I have loved being able to get into the lab and work independently. It's an opportunity you do not get at uni. It has made me realise that I would like to do a PhD, hopefully on something cancer research related.**

Outside of studying I have two part time jobs! I work at a pub in Exeter and I am also a manager for an event catering company so I spend most of my summer working at music festivals like Glastonbury. I also do a lot of events while I'm in Exeter, which involves working weekends with very long shifts. This bursary has helped me so much as I do not need to work such long hours or do as many shifts at both jobs.

I am so grateful because I was really struggling to find a good



work-life balance. I was working a 9-5 at my unpaid placement, where I should be focusing all my efforts to make the most of this amazing opportunity, then going on to do a six-hour shift most evenings and 13-hour ones at the weekend. I soon learnt that this was not a sustainable way to live as I was constantly exhausted and had no time for other things that I enjoy.

Outside of academia I used to be a competitive dancer and have always loved dancing. The bursary has enabled me to join a team and I am going to compete again for the first time in three years! It has allowed me more time to dedicate to training and has allowed me to go back to something that I enjoy.

The bursary has also meant that I am no longer exhausted when going into my placement as I am working fewer shifts, meaning I can commit to doing more things in the lab and I feel like I am able to really make the most of what I have the opportunity to do.

I think that money should not get in the way of education so I will be forever grateful for this bursary and the opportunities it has opened up for me. ●



# FORCE pump primes important research project

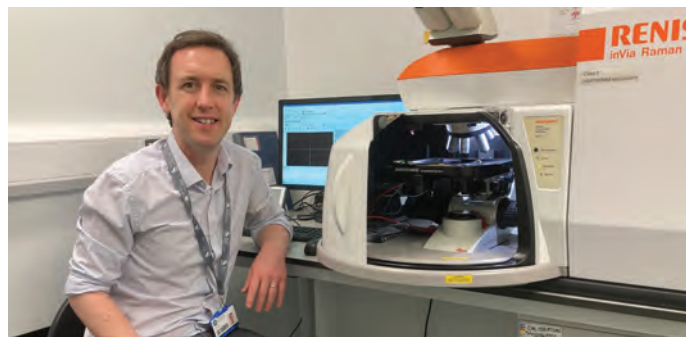
**F**ORCE has made a significant contribution to a local research project into the treatment of breast cancer. A grant of £4,465 from our charity pump primed the study that has received further funding from Cancer Research UK.

Surgeon and researcher Tom Hubbard splits his time between breast cancer research at the University of Exeter and treating patients with breast cancer at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. He explains more about his current project, which involves researchers from both the University and the hospital tissue bank.

“Breast cancer is usually treated with an operation first, followed by other treatments – radiotherapy or chemotherapy. In around 10 per cent of patients, breast cancer is treated with chemotherapy first followed by an operation. If the cancer shrinks due to chemotherapy, it allows a smaller operation to be done where a lump of breast tissue (lumpectomy) is removed rather than the whole breast (mastectomy).

“In some patients the cancer responds so well to the chemotherapy that there is no cancer left and these patients could avoid an operation altogether. However, there is no accurate way of assessing whether cancer is still there or not after chemotherapy – so all patients have an operation and some have a bigger operation than needed.

“We plan to investigate if a new technology called Raman spectroscopy can tell the difference between tissue that still has cancer and tissue that had cancer in it, but doesn’t anymore, after chemotherapy treatment. Raman spectroscopy uses light to analyse



human tissue. It can be non-invasive and is quick and safe. If Raman spectroscopy is better than current methods of monitoring response to chemotherapy it could allow us to perform more accurate and possibly smaller operations and potentially avoid an operation altogether.

“Breast cancer is the commonest cancer in the world, so we could help a large number of women get more information about their treatment response, more accurate cancer treatment, more precise operations and advance breast cancer care to a point where surgery is no longer needed for some women. The funding from FORCE has made a huge impact on the project and the whole team is very grateful for enabling us to work towards improving care for people affected by breast cancer.” ●

## SERENDIPITY LEADS TO A SOURCE OF COMFORT

**F**rances Crispin was treated for endometrial cancer after 16 years of pain with what turned out to be a completely unrelated problem.

During a robotic procedure at the RD&E to remove cancerous tissue, consultant gynaecological oncology surgeon Dr Mike Hannemann found scarring that had kinked the bowel and attached it to the abdominal wall – so he sorted it!

“He said it was serendipity. Because of the pain, the cancer was found and because the cancer had to be operated on, the reason for the pain was found. Amazingly I was totally pain free,” said Frances.

After the operation she was scheduled for radiotherapy and brachytherapy, all at a difficult time for the family. They were still grieving a beloved aunt and 11 days after her operation, Frances’ father died.

“It was a very surreal time for me. I was coming to terms with the cancer diagnosis and at the same time trying to deal with the loss of my aunt and my dad. My mum became much less independent – she urgently needs a hip replacement. We are still waiting for her operation and I now provide her with daily support.”



Friends had recommended FORCE so she came to our Support Centre after a follow-up appointment with Dr Hannemann.

“I just needed to talk with someone outside my circle of friends and family – someone with no emotional tie to me or anyone I knew. The Centre is a quiet and calming

place and registering with FORCE was simple and definitely the right thing to do at that stage.

“I made an appointment with Marissa, one of the FORCE counsellors. Such a lot had gone on in my life in the last few months and I wanted some outside perspective.

The advantage of speaking to a professional counsellor is that everything is confidential and they are able to offer advice and help on how to deal with your feelings in any given situation. You can say anything although of course they are mainly there to help with your cancer journey.

“To be honest I didn’t know what I would gain from talking to Marissa but at the end of our session I felt it had been a worthwhile, meaningful experience that had clarified my thoughts.

“The second session coincided with the end of my treatments and was just as good as the first. I hadn’t ever felt troubled by the cancer as much as I thought I would. My abdomen pain always took centre stage. Marissa helped me further clarify my thoughts and plan ahead. I’m now looking forward to the summer and getting back on my kayak and to walking the South West Coast Path.” ●

# FORCE ahead of the game in pre-hab delivery

More specialist nurses – particularly those working with rectal, upper gastrointestinal tract and breast cancer patients – are referring people to our highly respected oncology physio service for prehabilitation, or pre-hab as it is more commonly known.

Pre-hab is all about getting your body and mind ready before you have surgery or other forms of treatment. It involves simple steps to improve your physical and mental health, reduce the risk of complications and aid recovery.

It's a hot topic in cancer care and FORCE has been at the forefront of delivering pre-hab advice to patients since Louise Ballagher was appointed as our first specialist oncology physiotherapist 10 years ago.

FORCE's insight and expertise has led to collaboration with a number of projects, both local and national.

We are now involved in a programme of pre-hab for newly-diagnosed haematology patients – people with a range of blood disorders – awaiting autologous stem cell transplant.

That is a procedure in which a patient's healthy blood-forming cells are collected from the blood or bone marrow and given back to the patient after treatment.

Patients are offered a pre-treatment information session at the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

The presentation involves a stem cell specialist and dietician along with talks on the psychological and physical impacts of treatment.

Psychotherapist Dr Sarah Airdrie, who divides her time between FORCE and the Trust, and Rachel Keenan, RDUH lead physiotherapist in the Living With and Beyond Cancer team, cover those areas.

In another example of FORCE's growing collaboration with the hospital, our specialist oncology physio Becky Bailey attends the presentation to explain the benefits of exercise ahead of treatment.

"We know and research confirms that the better your physical condition before treatment, the better your ability to cope with it and the quicker you will recover. Plus, you cannot underestimate the psychological benefit of feeling fitter so we focus on creating the right exercise programme for each individual patient," said Becky.

FORCE is also collaborating on a national study to identify and map cancer surgery pre-hab services across the United Kingdom

We have provided information to the PARITY study, funded by the National Institute for Health and Social Care and carried out by a team of researchers at Lancaster University.

The two-year project is looking to address the similarities and differences in support and care provided to patients in the NHS before cancer surgery. It involves patients, carers and healthcare professionals.

Dr Greg Warren, an anaesthetic registrar at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, is helping to chart pre-hab services across South West hospitals.

He told FORCE Matters: "Louise and the team at FORCE are helping patients to achieve the best possible outcomes from their surgery. We know that by preparing

for surgery, prehabilitation can make a big difference to reducing length of stay in hospital and how well patients recover and get back on their feet.

"Collaborating with trust prehabilitation teams and community fitness instructors is helping to make prehabilitation more accessible to patients across the county.

Louise has been kind enough to allow me to capture this good work in a survey for the national PARITY (Prehabilitation for Cancer Surgery: Quality and Inequality) study which aims to map prehabilitation services across the country." ●

For more information on the PARITY study, go to <https://wp.lanacs.ac.uk/parity/about/>

Dr Greg Warren





# Get Active with FORCE



Patients don't need a referral from the hospital to access our Get Active with FORCE service – they can simply contact our team themselves on **01392 403094** or email [physio@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:physio@forcecancercharity.co.uk)

The service is so highly regarded that we are getting inquiries from an average of 12 new patients every week.

Each person gets an individual assessment and is then referred into one of the groups we run – breast recovery, yoga, Pilates, gentle exercise via Zoom or at the Isca Leisure Centre in Exeter – or to a fully qualified exercise professional at community gyms across Devon.

Those are at:

- Isca Leisure Centre and Riverside Sports Centre (Exeter)
- Lords Meadow Leisure Centre (Crediton)
- Ottery St Mary Sports Centre
- Seaton Leisure Centre
- Culm Valley Sports Centre (Cullompton)
- Exe Valley Leisure Centre (Tiverton)
- Honiton Leisure Centre
- Exmouth Leisure Centre
- Various locations in North Devon

We also provide home exercise programme for those who prefer not to attend classes or go to the gym.

**Shona Ankers**, who has been attending the exercise classes at Isca for more than a year said: "It has helped me so much with my balance and ability to get out of a chair. Louise and Rob are very experienced. You work at your pace and there is no pressure on you to do more. The group is so friendly, and everyone, although in different stages of

treatment, is so understanding of the issues we all face. We meet for coffee before the class. We laugh a lot, which is always good for the soul."

One of the positives to come out of the pandemic was the success of FORCE's online exercise group.

Our staff adapted quickly to provide as many services as possible during lockdown and beyond.

Oncology physio Louise Ballagher set up a group on Zoom and it was so successful that we were running two sessions a week.

Post COVID that has reduced to once a week under the guidance of exercise professional Sarah Dilley. She is currently on maternity leave but the group will continue in her absence.

It offers a programme of gentle exercise for people who cannot make it to the other classes that FORCE provides or those who have concerns about mixing widely due to compromised immune systems.

"This group gives our team the ability to reach more people more quickly," said Louise. "Our Zoom classes came into their own during lockdown and continue to flourish."

**Pat Ellis:** Our Zoom exercise sessions with Sarah are invaluable. After lockdown, who would have believed that we would still need them. But we do! The group is a collection of people who have been exercising each week through a Zoom call. Some have been attending since 2020. Others are more recent participants. The boost that exercise gives you, whether you are just starting, or continuing though a treatment journey, is immense. Benefits are physical and mental.

Pat Ellis



The choice to be there when life allows is brilliant. Everyone is friendly and Sarah carefully guides us through each section of the class. I'd thoroughly recommend the programme to anyone.

**Jill Salen:** I have been attending since summer 2020 after my BC treatments. Very wobbly, fatigue kicking in almost every day the classes helped me move forward. I soon found being able to do more as time moved on made me feel so good. Doing it at home, no driving made it so easy.

Being part of a group with little effort was a huge bonus. Since then I have realised how much it has helped me and continues to do so. It's so very green! No petrol or parking. I have enjoyed all the instructors, it's such a supportive, life enhancing experience. Thank you. ●

Shona Ankers



Jill Salen and daughter Becky



# We couldn't do it without you

Welcome to the fundraising section of the FORCE Matters magazine. You will see in the next few pages what another incredible year it has been for us – all thanks to our truly amazing supporters. They find so many ways to raise the money we need to secure and grow our services and we couldn't be more grateful.

I have been Head of Income Generation here at FORCE since January 2023. It has been immensely rewarding to lead such a dedicated team of fundraisers and work with so many loyal and committed supporters.

It has been a period of steady growth following some really tough times and some of the numbers we are now seeing for events is heartening. For the first time we had 300 people sign up to be part of Team FORCE at the **Great West Run** – the biggest representation by a single local charity in the event's history.

Entries for **The Nello** are looking extremely promising as we celebrate the 25th year of this iconic event with a target of getting close to its 1,500-rider capacity on June 30.

And our 2024 **Great Devon Breakfast** campaign has been a resounding success with more individuals, businesses, community groups, cafes and restaurants taking part than ever before.

We're excited to see whether we can make our popular **Cream Teas for Cancer** foodie fundraiser on July 11 equally impressive in terms of participation.

We're still a small team so we can't put on more events ourselves but we're here to support anyone who is organising a fundraiser for us. Come to us with your ideas and we can help you make them a success.

The local business community continues to back us and we really appreciate the way so many companies choose FORCE to fulfil their corporate social responsibility commitment by raising money or volunteering for us.

We cannot, of course, forget our **Friends of FORCE** groups – stalwarts who keep our charity and the people we support close to their hearts and at the forefront of their communities.

We are encouraging more people to join our FoF groups in ways that work for them. You can be flexible with the time you have available. All support is important to us and we really value it.

While growth has been encouraging, we cannot be complacent. There is still work to be done, nowhere more so than building our legion of regular givers. I can't stress enough how important this is to a charity like FORCE. Regular giving provides a secure income that offers us reassurance that we can plan for the future with a degree of certainty.

You will see more on all the things I've mentioned later in this magazine and if you'd like to hear about how you can support FORCE, please get in touch. In the meantime, I'd like to thank you all once again for your support. We couldn't do it without you.



**Olly Watts**  
FORCE Head of Income Generation ●

## Friends we can rely on

Our Friends of FORCE groups continue to show incredible support and dedication to raising awareness and much-needed funds for the charity.

Despite a challenging economic backdrop, they have contributed an incredible £32,000 between them over the past year. It's an impressive total and just as remarkable are the many and varied ways our FoF members find to raise that money.

From racing fluffy, mechanical pigs to serving bacon baps, organising bingo nights, bake sales and bucket collections, arranging cream teas, plant sales, fayres and fetes and even hosting a fascinating talk about the Red Arrows, our Friends are always finding ways to get their communities involved in supporting FORCE.

"I have been working with our Friends of FORCE groups for the past year and they continue to inspire me with their commitment to our charity and the different ways they find to fundraise for us. I can't thank them enough for all the work they do," said Ceri Bastyan, FORCE Community Fundraiser. ●



**WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS** to join our Friends of FORCE groups. If you are interested in joining one of our existing groups or you would like to consider starting a new group, please get in touch with Ceri on **01392 406153** or email [ceri.bastyan@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:ceri.bastyan@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



# Lord Mayor chooses to support FORCE for a second term

**C**llr Kevin Mitchell will serve a second term as Lord Mayor of Exeter for 2024-2025 and we are delighted that he has chosen to continue supporting FORCE as his nominated charity.

As the Lord Mayor's Charity in 2023-2024, FORCE received £15,000, raised from a variety of events. That money has been set aside for refurbishing the oncology department at the RD&E. For his second term, Cllr Mitchell has chosen to support our Let's Face Cancer Together campaign to help people living with incurable cancer.

"I loved having FORCE as my chosen charity. You do such outstanding work so it was an easy decision to stay with FORCE for my second year. I couldn't think of or justify moving to another charity," he said.

Cllr Mitchell is a clinical nurse specialist in cancer care at the RD&E and is uniquely placed to appreciate the work our charity does to support his patients. He is particularly excited about raising awareness of the work FORCE is doing for cancer patients living with an uncertain future and to making that the focal point of his fundraising.

"It's great to have a different focus for this year. Individuals with incurable cancer have very distinct needs so promoting the work FORCE is doing to support them even further is of vital importance," he said.

The Lord Mayor attended plenty of FORCE events in his first year in office – his particular favourites were The Nello and our Santa Cycle and Cruise – as well the many dates in his official diary, including monthly coffee mornings at The Guildhall, concerts and services at the cathedral and a variety of community functions. He is looking forward to another full programme and even more opportunities to promote FORCE.

"We are extremely grateful for everything the Lord Mayor has done to raise awareness of the work FORCE does to support local people dealing with a cancer diagnosis. His passion for our charity is fantastic and we are proud to be his chosen charity for the next 12 months," said Olly Watts, FORCE Head of Income Generation. ●



See Page 8 for more on our Let's Face Cancer Together campaign and FORCE's support for people living with incurable cancer.

Cllr Kevin Mitchell pictured below with FORCE staff and volunteers and (left) ready for the Santa Cycle



The Stevenson brothers

## RESINS TO BE CHEERFUL

**A MASSIVE THANK YOU** to Scott and Cameron Stevenson from Oltco, who resurfaced the patio area in front of the conservatory at the FORCE Support and Information Centre conservatory and very generously did this work for free!

The brothers had already revived an area to the rear of the Centre with a special, low-maintenance resin, made using a mix of stone, aggregates and recycled waste plastic.

They kindly did that job at a big discount and when Galvin Short, who looks after our gardens, got in touch again they were only too happy to help.

Scott and Cameron gave up a Saturday morning and provided all the materials, saving FORCE more than £2,000.

"We got to spend some time at FORCE and we were really moved by the charity and what you do," said Scott. "It's such a lovely, safe place for people to go and everyone is so friendly. We lost our grandfather to cancer so it's a cause close to our hearts. This felt like the right way to give something back and it's one of our favourite jobs we've done."

Cameron lives in Cranbrook and Scott is based in Cornwall. They cover the whole of Devon, building their business after taking on the Oltco franchise four years ago. ●



Before...  
...and after





# Navigating financial challenges

It's hard to believe that we are four years on from the start of the pandemic and at the beginning of another financial year. The Finance Team has been busy preparing for the annual audit, reflecting on the achievements of 2023/24, while looking ahead to the new year and beyond as part of our strategic planning process.

It is so exciting to be back delivering our services in the community with Tiverton restarting as our third FORCE@ location. The successful reintroduction of outreach in Ottery St Mary and Okehampton over the last couple of years has been made possible through the three-year grant from National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). The grant has helped to fund not only outreach but also our Role Specific Volunteer programme, enabling the development of the Support and Education service, which has been so well received.

The volatility of legacy income will be highlighted once again in the 2023/24 accounts. Last year we reported a near record income of just under £630,000 from gifts in wills and this, together with the NLCF grant and cost savings, resulted in a surplus of £593,000. For 2023/24, we have received just over £160,000 from gifts in wills. Even with an adjustment for amounts notified but not yet received,

we will not come close to the budgeted £400,000. These fluctuations make budgeting tricky but emphasise the difference that a gift in your will can make to the services we can deliver. However small the gift, remembering FORCE in your will has such an impact for those we help and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who makes this pledge.

With ambitious plans to meet increasing demand for our services, we are budgeting for further deficits during the two years of our next strategic plan. The Trustees acknowledge the challenges the Income Generation Team face in implementing plans, given the current economic climate and the time needed to develop new staff. While our reserves support these realistic plans, we need your help to return to a balanced budget and grow our income before the NLCF grant runs out. We are so fortunate to have such loyal supporters and would like to thank you for all that you do to help us achieve these plans.



**Julia Pitts**  
FORCE Chief Finance Officer ●

“I joined FORCE in September 2023 as Finance Manager. I have spent much of my career in finance- focused roles and qualified as a Chartered Management Accountant in 2022. Having worked in various organisations, I have realised that I am passionate about working somewhere which has people at the core of its mission and FORCE is definitely such a place!



“I’m enjoying learning about FORCE and the amazing work that we do and I’m excited to use my skills and experience to enhance the great support service offered to the wider charity by the Finance Team. I’m also looking forward to helping out at various events; after my first experience of our events at the Santa Cycle in November, I’m sure that the Nello in June will be another great day.

“Outside of work, I am a keen parkrunner and enjoy taking part in as many different events as possible across the country on a Saturday morning. I have been working back up to half-marathon distance with the Bristol Half Marathon in May as my target!”

**Sarah Moffat**

## Can he kick it? YES HE CAN!

**SEVEN-YEAR-OLD WEST HAM FAN JACKSON WILLIAMS** played 50 hours of football for FORCE in his school holidays and raised an amazing £516.21. His achievement was mentioned in assembly at his primary school in Cranbrook.

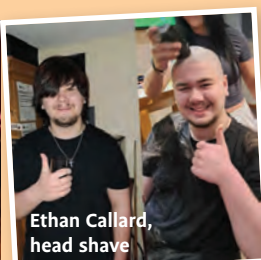
Jackson was chatting with mum, Sian from our finance team, about what happens when people get cancer and how the money raised when he helped deliver our Cream Teas for Cancer goodies around Cranbrook would help support people who have been diagnosed and their families.

He then said: “I want to do something to raise money.”

After brainstorming lots of ideas, he came up with a football challenge and reports: “I liked it and I would do it again!”



**Emma Healey and fitness group**



**Ethan Callard, head shave**



**Ukelele Club**



**Nick and Angela Golden Wedding**



# Victoria has a personal reason for supporting Classics Galore!

Save the dates! **Classics Galore! is back for 2024.**  
**The concert is at the University of Exeter's Great Hall on Saturday November 9 and tickets go on sale on Monday July 15.**

**THE COMPERE FOR THIS YEAR'S SHOW** is Victoria Graham, who has been a presenter at BBC Spotlight, the most watched TV news programme in the South West, for more than 15 years.

From behind the camera to in front of it, Victoria has been in the media industry for more than 25 years — location scouting in Hollywood, directing at ITV, BBC weather presenting, shopping television in the US and anchoring an African news channel. Her knowledge of the industry is wide.

Victoria has a very personal reason for supporting Classics Galore!

"Family means everything to me. I am one of four sisters, we are incredibly close and along with my mum we have always been known as the Graham girls. Anything that happens to one of us, affects all of us — cancer is one of those things.

"Two of my sisters have been diagnosed with it and my father died from bowel cancer eight years ago. You never imagine it's going to happen to you or someone you love — but it does. Cancer isn't just a personal journey but touches the lives of all those who give their love and support. That's why I am thrilled to be supporting FORCE. Any organisation which can help to raise and keep money for research and support locally is vital — which is why I am supporting FORCE this November.

"Music has played a huge part in my life. As a pianist and a cellist, I have played in orchestras and love being a part of something big — and anyone who knows me knows I like making noise! I hope the FORCE Cancer Charity Classics Galore! concert will raise the roof, raise lots of money and lift the spirits of all those who are dealing with cancer or supporting loved ones."

Telling people's stories is another of Victoria's passions, which is why she decided to train as a celebrant. From the beginning of someone's journey to the end, Victoria writes and delivers wedding and funeral ceremonies across the region.

"It's the most rewarding and privileged job I have ever done — to write someone's life story. My inspiration is my dad. Whatever the circumstances, life should be celebrated."

Classics Galore! is Exeter's very own Last Night of the Proms. It was established in 2007 and held every two years until the pandemic forced the postponement of the 2021 event until November 2022. That event raised an incredible £19,500, taking the overall total from eight concerts to more than £130,000 for FORCE.

More than 200 musicians and singers will again fill the stage this autumn to delight the audience with a wonderful mix of pieces that will be familiar to many. There will be everything from the Hallelujah Chorus to the theme from Superman with a rousing singalong finale in true Proms tradition, featuring Pomp and Circumstance and Rule Britannia!

The specially chosen Classics Galore! orchestra, Ottery St Mary Choral Society, St David's Players and the Lymptone Band will all be performing and stunning soprano soloist Cheryl Enever has also confirmed her return for 2024.

Classics Galore! was established by cancer patient Dick Passmore, who lived and worked in Exeter all his life, and his wife Posy. Sadly, Dick died in early 2019 but he has left an amazing legacy. ●

Ticket prices range from £12 to £30 and can be booked online via the FORCE website — <https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/classicsgalore/>



# Amazing Amy a big race winner

A record-breaking 300 runners signed up for Team FORCE at this year's Great West Run and we're on course to raise an incredible £50,000 from Exeter's annual half marathon. That money will make a significant impact on our support for local cancer patients and their families.

Nobody knows that better than Exeter mum-of-three Amy Green, who entered the race to raise as much as she could as a thank you to FORCE. Amy was diagnosed with Stage 3 bowel cancer in 2022 at the age of 38.

"I was in shock as I'd originally been told it wasn't cancer. I went in for one operation and when I woke up, I was told it was a tumour. The hardest bit was having to tell the children. They were 16, 14 and nine at the time and they were able to understand and ask lots of questions. I didn't hide anything from them," she said.

Amy was fitted with a stoma bag, which she nicknamed Poui Vitton – a play on Louis Vuitton to reflect her love of designer handbags. She admits it was a struggle to come to terms with the stoma, even though she was told it could be reversible.

"I was struggling and trying to get my head around the stoma bag. It was awful. I thought I would never be able to wear a bikini again or do exercise. I thought it would hold me back."

The colorectal nurses at the RDUH told her about FORCE and she came to our Support Centre for massage, reflexology, acupuncture and counselling.

"Paul (FORCE oncology support specialist) and I really hit it off. I felt so at ease every time I came here. I could talk about whatever I wanted. I felt good afterwards. I was in control going through treatment. My husband and children had no control and they were struggling. That was

my main concern. It was nice to come here and be able to open up. It helped me deal with some real issues."

After a gruelling regime of chemotherapy and radiotherapy that led to pain "as severe as the contractions in childbirth" the signs were hopeful but in April 2023, scans revealed the cancer was back and the only option was extensive surgery. There was no choice and it meant being left with a stoma bag for life.

In July she underwent a seven-hour operation that involved taking muscles from her legs to rebuild her pelvic floors. Surgery was successful but there was another brutal round of treatment, punctuated by visits to FORCE.

"It was really nice to be able to come to the Centre and chat. You feel like a burden to your family when you're down. The cancer has a lasting effect and it's not just me going through it and that's really hard. My family are my biggest supporters and they have got me through the toughest of times, especially my husband Dan. He really is my hero. We

have been together 24 years and we're best friends. This diagnosis really tested that in sickness and in health vow! He was fine but it was good to be able to talk to someone else when I needed to."

Entering the Great West Run gave Amy, finance director at the engineering business she runs with her husband, a focus and helped take her mind off the next scan in June.

"I'm grateful that I can run and every time I do it's to say thank you to my body and legs. I'm alive and I don't take anything for granted any more. I really do live life to the full. When I got my head around the stoma I thought, you can let this defeat you or you can do the things you want to. I'm not going to let it control, define or defeat me. That's always been my mindset.

"I will be eternally grateful to FORCE for their compassion and kindness. Every single member of staff has helped me get through the most traumatic time. Now it's time for me to give something back to this amazing charity. Thank you for all you did for me." ●

You can support Amy's fundraising at <https://www.justgiving.com/page/amy-green-1711981824486>





# Hats off to Hannah

**H**annah Gange was presented with a specially engraved glass to mark 25 years of volunteering at our shop in Heavitree. She shared a few memories with FORCE Matters.

“I remember when the FORCE shop was the only charity shop in Heavitree and had only been around for four years when I started as a volunteer in February 1999. When it first opened it was just one room at the front, so it’s been interesting seeing the different areas expand during my early days and the funds raised being used to build the FORCE Centre in 2004.

“I began on the tills and then decided to do books. They were originally located in the bric-a-brac corridor, then where the children’s room now is and finally moved to their present home. I was involved with each move and helped with the design and layout of the current Bookroom, as it is affectionately known.

“I enjoy sorting, pricing, replenishing and displaying the books, also helping customers, who liken the Bookroom to a proper book shop! They appreciate the bargains they find, the large selection and the sections that are A-Z by author. It’s also fun working with the rest of the team, be it staff or other volunteers. Each shift is different and gives a great sense of achievement, always a good workout too.

“It’s such a unique shop and I like the fact it only sells donated goods. I’m proud that my small contribution helps with fundraising that’s used for local patient support and services that FORCE Cancer Charity provides.” ●



# Bag a bargain

Whatever your style, whatever’s on trend, we reckon you’ll find something in our shop to suit your taste and at a hugely competitive price. The supermarkets all do price match guarantees but we don’t need to – our rates are among the cheapest anywhere. And we think you’ll be impressed by the quality of items on the shelves and hangers throughout our store. That’s because our dedicated team of staff and volunteers spend many hours each day sorting through the generous donations from our big-hearted supporters to ensure only the best for our customers. There’s new stock on show every day and our team regularly show their creativity with themed displays! Why not call in at 73 Fore St, Heavitree, Exeter, and bag a bargain.



# Join our team

We have a wide variety of volunteering opportunities at our shop. We have teams who like to specialise. Some are sorters, others love to steam. There are book lovers who can’t wait to get their hands on the latest literature. Jewellery junkies with an eye for bling. Camera buffs who can spot decent kit in a flash.

Whether it’s on the shop floor or behind the scenes, we can find something for you to suit the time you have to spare – all in the knowledge that you are doing something remarkable for a charity that supports the people in our community.

Contact us for more details: 01392 271652  
or email: [shop@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:shop@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



# Mamma mia! Here we go again for a very special Nello

The Nello is always a special date on the FORCE events calendar but our 2024 bike ride is even more significant and one you certainly won't want to miss!

This year we're celebrating the 25th annual Nello and we're pulling out all the stops! The big day is Sunday June 30 when we're hoping up to 1,500 cyclists and their supporters will gather to be a part of this amazing occasion.

To honour its heritage – the ride was named in memory of Topsham restaurateur Nello Ghezzi from Milan – we are planning an Italian Festival.

As usual, The Nello will start and finish at Topsham Rugby Club and the awesome Bike Shed crew will be on hand throughout the day to provide support. Cyclists will get breakfast courtesy of the Red Lion, Broadclyst, and authentic Italian coffee from Rocket Espresso before riding 60 or 100 miles with plenty of delicious food

stops along the way, including pasta at Nomansland, kindly provided by the Jack in the Green.

The finish back at the rugby club will feature a celebration of all things Nello with Italian-themed food and drink, music from local covers band The Dockneys and the draw for a fantastic Pinarello bike.

Exeter Physio will be offering their usual superb post-ride massage treatments and injury assessments and Muscle Mechanics will be handing out free pain relief balm.

There'll also be fun for children including a specially designed balance bike track for Nello cyclists of the future!

Since the first Nello Century Cycle Challenge in 2000, the ride has raised nearly £1.3m for FORCE. Event founder Marc Millon is excited about The Nello reaching such a significant milestone.

"This ride began out of friendship and



memories and those continue today. All are welcome to join in. In fact, we urge everybody who has ever thought about riding to make this the year that you do it. Both routes are possible for anybody with a little bit of fitness and, above all, the desire and will to ride. These rides are there to be enjoyed, riding with friends. They're rides to remember people that may no longer be with us, they're rides that are based on friendship and camaraderie. So whatever your age, whatever your bike, I urge you to register now and make this year the year you ride The Nello." ●



**THIS YEAR WE HAVE SET OURSELVES A TARGET** of raising £120,000 from The Nello and we believe that with the support of our brilliant cyclists and their friends, families, neighbours and colleagues, local businesses and our tireless volunteers, we can do it!

That amount could mean hundreds more counselling appointments or complementary therapy sessions, additional support groups, more wig-fitting sessions, extra physio and exercise guidance or increased services at our outreach locations in Ottery St Mary, Okehampton and Tiverton.

We are determined to build cancer support to meet the growing needs of the communities we serve and with your help, we believe that's possible.

If you'd like to add your support to The Nello but don't know anyone taking part, just go to our general event page – <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/nello2024> – and make your donation.

**There's still time to sign up.  
To secure your place, go to  
[forcecancercharity.co.uk/nello/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/nello/)**



**To mark the 25th Nello, our partners at Pinarello UK have generously donated a high-spec bike the Pinarello X3 Shimano 105 Di2, worth £4,500 as a fabulous draw prize.**

The Pinarello X offers all-day comfort without surrendering performance, thanks to a combination of specifically selected materials, unique geometry and a truly innovative rear-end. The winner will have the bike specially fitted for them.

Draw tickets cost £5 or £20 for a book of five, available at <https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/the-nello-draw/> or on Nello day, when the draw will take place at 6pm at Topsham.

You've got to be in it to win it!





# ROBYN'S RED BREASTS INSPIRED TO RIDE BY BRAVE FRIEND



Robyn Walton with Lorraine Stone, Martin Latchem and Jo Pope from Team Robyn's Red Breasts. Inset: woollen boobies crocheted by Angie Latchem.

A large group of riders will line up for the start of The Nello to celebrate the courage of a friend and fellow cyclist.

Robyn Walton found out she had breast cancer in November 2022 at the age of 37. After the initial shock of being told she might not make it to her 50th birthday, she went through a brutal regime of life-saving treatment and is now slowly rebuilding her world.

The way Robyn handled her diagnosis and treatment has been inspirational. It has motivated around 30 people to join Team Robyn's Red Breasts and sign up for the 25th Nello. They'll all ride with specially crocheted boobies on the front of their bikes as they tackle the twin goal of raising money for FORCE and awareness of what the charity does to support local people dealing with cancer.

"My friends and family have seen the support from FORCE and that has held me together," said Robyn, a geography teacher at St James School in Exeter. "Cancer can be treated with chemicals and surgery but you need psychological support for the mind."

Robyn has ridden the Nello before and would love to take part again this year but admits: "I'm having to hold myself back. I've got to take it slowly and that's frustrating. At the very least I may cycle the last mile."

Robyn went to her GP after she felt a lump in her breast. She was referred to the RDUH where she was told to prepare for some tough times ahead and that she might be kept alive for 11 years. Acronyms became part of her everyday language - CT, MRI, PET CT - scans that confirmed primary breast cancer

with a spread to a lymph node.

She admits the first two weeks after diagnosis were frightening but once she had received a treatment plan – "You wouldn't believe how comforting that is" – her confidence grew.

She had six cycles of triple chemotherapy and chemoradiation – chemotherapy and radiotherapy delivered at the same time – and radiotherapy. Treatment wasn't without its problems. During the first round she developed a blood clot in her right atrium and had to go on blood thinners and in the second cycle she caught COVID and pneumonia and had shingles.

Riding The Nello, our flagship fundraiser, was her only connection to FORCE until her diagnosis. She has since had counselling, acupuncture – "It was nice to be in group activity sessions for the first time and good to speak to people with cancer. That was really powerful" – complementary therapies, relaxation and anxiety management sessions and has found just visiting our Support and Information Centre in the grounds of the RD&E a tonic.

"When you're poorly it's exhausting," said Robyn. "I really appreciated being able to come to a space where you can relax away from the hospital, get some fresh air on the way over and sit in the beautiful gardens. It's a wonderful, relaxing building. Cancer has taught me that I don't need more things. It has given me more gifts than I could have imagined, including a real focus on family and friends. When I was diagnosed, I felt like I had such a privileged life."

Jo Pope is part of Team Robyn's Red Breasts. She has known Robyn for 15 years, a friendship born out of a love of sport and strengthened by the events of the last two years.

"For someone as young as her to be facing what she was came as a massive shock to us all," said Jo. "She has been amazing and very open about everything she's going through. It's her way of coping and it's pulled us all in. It's made us want to be part of the journey with her and made it easier for us to support her. She's been through so much. The side-effects of the chemo were particularly brutal."

Many of her friends have ridden The Nello before but Robyn's experience has given a whole new context to taking part in this year's event.

"It feels like a really good opportunity to celebrate that she has got through this and to repay FORCE for all they've done for her," said Jo. "We are very lucky to have something like FORCE here in Exeter. It's a tremendous comfort to know that it's there for people who need it."

The Robyn's Red Breasts idea was initially tongue in cheek - some people had already signed up as Robyn's Riders – but Robyn loved it and when she spread the word, more and more people joined the team. Martin Latchem is one of them and his wife, Angie, is crocheting the woollen boobies. ●

You can support Robyn's Red Breast at <https://www.justgiving.com/page/lorraine-stone-1715021547345>



# Chiefs legend takes on tough challenge for FORCE

Former Exeter Chiefs star Don Armand has joined one of our corporate partners to take on a major fundraising effort this summer. Don and his wife, Rayanne, are teaming up with RGB Recruitment to tackle the Three Peaks Challenge on July 5.

RGB has been working with Don through his company sampsonarmand.co.uk and he was up for the challenge while supporting a fantastic charity. Key clients AtkinsRealis, a global construction company, are also on board.

RGB are specialist construction recruiters, based at Winslade Park near Exeter. They have supported FORCE since 2022, raising nearly £20,000 from a variety of events from murder mystery evenings to bake sales. This is their biggest test yet, as RGB Principal Consultant Sophie Randle explained.

“As a charity committee we have organised and participated in a few sponsored walks over the years, each time a bit more challenging in terms of distance and terrain. This year we really want to go big and push ourselves, as well as giving the best opportunity to raise maximum funds for FORCE. So, what bigger challenge than the National Three Peaks!

“We have just 24 hours to climb the three highest mountains in the UK. There are 23 of us taking on the challenge, with a real variety of ages and abilities in the group. Our epic journey begins with a 520-mile trip from Exeter to Glencoe. After a full day of travelling, we’ll get some well needed rest at our bunkhouse, ready to set off early in the morning on

the challenge at Ben Nevis, which, at 1,344 metres (4,409ft), is the highest of the three peaks. The average time it takes to climb is seven to eight hours; we’ll have just five to be in with a chance of completing this challenge in 24 hours!

“From there, we head to the Lake District and Scafell Pike (978 m, 3,209 ft). The final mountain is Snowdon (1,085 m, 3,560 ft), which we’ll be faced with climbing in total darkness! The distance between the three mountains is about 480 miles (772km). This means roughly 12 hours of driving time, leaving us with just 12 hours to get up and down all three peaks. Only around 40 per cent of people manage to complete this challenge in under 24 hours.

“Since working with FORCE, we have raised a total of £19,681! Our target for the Three Peaks is £10,000 so hopefully we will smash that and aim to reach a total of £30k by the end of the year!”

RGB Recruitment has chosen FORCE for three years running because we are local, self-funded and fit their goal of community support.

A member of their charity committee has special reason to back our charity. Laura explained: “Having watched two women very close to my heart suffer with breast cancer it’s imperative for me to do what little I can to support this fantastic charity that does so much to support families in their darkest of times. FORCE offered my family a lifeline of support, guidance and care that I can’t put into words. Living in London, I frequently travelled to and from Exeter and FORCE offered a place for me to work, cry and just be, all with a cup of tea and a friendly face.” ●



Andrea and Steve Brown, The Nello 2023



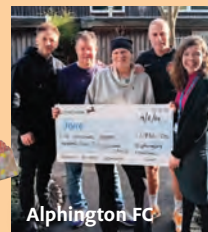
Shipman Wealth Management volunteer garden day



Ewe Fit Zumbathon



Cadbury Quiz winners



Alphington FC



Robert Williams Estate Agents



Santa Cycle 2023





Savills, charity walk



BG&E



Taylor Woodrow

Nick Marvin, Great West Run



Power Run 24

# “Blown away by the amazing work you do”

Crisp Professional Development have chosen FORCE as their corporate charity of the year for 2024.

As well as individual fundraising challenges within the team, they are also supporting us by volunteering, taking part in campaigns and donating a percentage of their profits. They hope to raise at least £3,000 over the course of the year.

Roselle Brenchley, Crisp Director and Client Experience Manager, said: “We agree as a team who we will support each year and we look for a local charity. Some of the team have had a personal connection to the work FORCE does.”

Crisp staff visited the FORCE Centre to understand fully how our charity helps cancer patients and their families and to see the impact of corporate support and fundraising.

“We were blown away by the amazing work you do. We couldn’t believe how many different ways you were supporting those affected by

cancer and it hit home how much it must cost to provide that service – it really spurred us on to get stuck into the fundraising and do whatever we can to support you. We are loving the challenge!” said Roselle.

So far Vicky Woolsey has raised more than £400 by crocheting chickens at Easter and Roselle did 100 ab crunches every day in April. Some of the team helped with the bucket collection at Exeter Chiefs and entered the RGB quiz in aid of FORCE. They also supported the Great Devon Breakfast and plan to take part in our Cream Teas for Cancer campaign.

Crisp deliver a range of professional development opportunities for businesses of all sizes and from all sectors, locally and nationally, run both virtually and at their

site in Exeter. They are offering special deals to corporate sponsors and supporters of FORCE who can access an additional 10% off the cost of scheduled open and on-demand e-learning courses using the code COTY10. ●



## Totally tasty ways to support us

We’re one big FORCE foodie fundraiser down and one to go for 2024.

Our **Great Devon Breakfast** campaign ran throughout March and now we’re gearing up for the second course on the tasting menu.

Join in with **Cream Teas for Cancer** on **Thursday July 11** and for just £6, you’ll get a delicious combo of two scones, Devon clotted cream, strawberry jam and a teabag, all locally sourced and packed in an eco-friendly paper carrier.

NEW for 2024 – if you’d prefer a tea alternative, why not add a bottle of Four Elms Devonshire Apple Juice for only £2.50!

All our **Cream Teas for Cancer** are hand packed and delivered to your door by FORCE volunteers **between 12noon and 3pm on July 11 unless otherwise stated.**

It’s a great opportunity to get your colleagues, friends or family together for a special taste of Devon. All you have to do is save the date, send out the invite, put in your order and FORCE does the rest. It couldn’t be simpler!

Thanks to The Exeter, the Devon-based life and health insurance provider, and estate agents Wilkinson Grant for supporting the event again this year.

We were thrilled by the number of eateries that came on board for the **Great Devon**

**Breakfast** with all sorts of ways to contribute, from giving us a share of the money from every classic French pastry sold during the month to a percentage of the takings from each coffee or breakfast served on a particular day. Businesses did their bit, individuals and groups supported us – it was fantastic.

And we’ll be doing it all again next March! There’s no set format - how you do it, what you serve and where is entirely up to you.

We can’t wait to hear what you’ll do. ●



Ducky’s Beer - Great Devon Breakfast



Knight’s - Great Devon Breakfast



Cream Teas for Cancer

# Consider becoming a regular giver and help make a difference to more people like Ruth



**EAST DEVON MUM RUTH BAGWELL** began her association with FORCE in 2009 when she took part in her first Nello cycle ride. She went on to become a FORCE volunteer at our Support Centre, at the hospital snack bar, in our charity shop in Heavitree, with a prostate cancer support group and with a Walk, Run, Talk exercise programme. Her fundraising efforts also continued and she briefly joined our staff as an admin assistant.

Ruth describes her relationship with FORCE as rewarding and one which was strengthened by a twist of fate in 2022.

"Turning 50 actually saved my life. I was offered a routine mammogram by the NHS and shortly afterwards I became a statistic - the one in two given a cancer diagnosis. I had never been healthier in my life but unknown to me, a tumour that I never felt was growing in my breast and needed treating.

"My years of experience volunteering at FORCE has been the best training to deal with this unexpected adventure. Friends I had made during that time came to my rescue and scooped me up in my hour of need. I will be forever grateful for their kindness, time and knowledge. I knew exactly where to turn after receiving the diagnosis and I can't tell you how odd it felt accessing the service as a patient.

"Luckily for me, I already knew that FORCE would be there for me, my family and any friends that were going to be experiencing my diagnosis with me."

FORCE has been with Ruth every step of the way through chemotherapy, surgery, radiotherapy and ongoing treatment to keep her cancer free.

"FORCE has reinforced my strength to keep going during some of the more bleak moments on the road to wellness and I look forward to accessing their services and to continue raising funds for the charity."

"I am sharing my story to help us encourage more people to become regular givers."

By making a monthly donation to FORCE, you'll be helping to support more people come to terms with a cancer diagnosis. Your monthly donation will help with our ongoing work and enable us plan for the future so that we can be here for more people like Ruth.

£5



**£5 a month**  
could help provide a calm space and a cup of tea.

£10



**£10 a month**  
could help fund complementary therapies for a cancer patient or their carer.

£20



**£20 a month**  
could help a patient or loved one access one-to-one counselling.

£50



**£50 a month**  
could help fund an information nurse, who can support patients in distress.

*Please support FORCE on a regular basis if you can, monthly, quarterly or annually. It's easy to do and you can cancel at any time.*

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN DO IT

### Option 1

Set up a **STANDING ORDER** online with your bank

The details you need:

**Account name:** FORCE Cancer Charity

**Account number:** 60796568

**Sort code:** 30-80-37

**IMPORTANT:** Please email [donations@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:donations@forcecancercharity.co.uk) to let us know that you have set up a standing order. We'd love to thank you and confirm whether we can claim Gift Aid in your donation.

### Option 2

Set up a **REGULAR DONATION** through our website via JustGiving. Go to [forcecancercharity.co.uk](http://forcecancercharity.co.uk) and click DONATE. Please be aware that this is subject to JustGiving processing fees.

**Have a query?**

Please email [donations@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:donations@forcecancercharity.co.uk) or call us on 01392 406166.

*Thank you*

FORCEcancercharity @forcecancer charityforcecancer

01392 402875 (Fundraising) / 01392 406151 (Patient Support)

Charity registration no. 1140676 Company registration no. 7529991

