

# force matters



## THE POWER OF SUPPORT



Life-changing support	5
Inclusion for all	6-7
The power of groups	8
Equipment update	9
How we make a difference	10-11
Study day success	12
Gerry reflects	13
Taking that first step	14
Physio and exercise latest	15
Needle points	16
Volunteering	17
Collaboration and kindness	18-19
Finance and fundraising news and pictures	20-28

# Thank you to everyone for helping us make a difference



By Kate Few-Singh  
FORCE Chief Executive

In my first months as FORCE CEO I have been inspired and impressed by so many things.

I've been struck by the small things that matter to so many – the time and space we give people who visit our Centre, which is so important, the support and care we give patients on the wards in the hospital, the great working relationship we have with staff at the RD&E and the gratitude from the people we see, like the men receiving their first ever complementary therapies that have made a physical and emotional difference.

The feedback we receive from patients and families is overwhelmingly positive and I believe that is because of the core values that drive our mission to support as many local adults affected by cancer as we can in Exeter, East, Mid and West Devon.

We have a passionate, professional and dedicated team providing an incredible service to people in need, who are always at the heart of what we do and how we do it. Our values of professionalism, compassion, responsiveness, empowerment, innovation and collaboration are the cornerstones of this remarkable charity.

You will read in this magazine how those values are woven into the stories bravely shared by some of the people we have supported and those who have generously chosen to support us in many and varied ways.

We are helping more people than ever as the number of cancer diagnoses sadly increases but the good news is that people are living longer with cancer – and living well. We are acutely aware of the pressure that puts on our resources, however, and it means we must adapt and change to meet the increasing demand within the current economic climate as competition for funds increases and costs continue to rise.

That will involve continuing to raise awareness that we are a local, independent charity, solely funded by donations. People often assume that we are part of the NHS. We are not and we don't receive any NHS funding.

As we adjust, we also plan to do more partnership work and collaboration to ensure patient services are maintained and improved.

We know that our outreach service has a really positive impact for patients beyond Exeter. It makes a massive difference to the people who use it but we do need to sustain funding when the National Lottery grant runs out in September.

We are committed to providing services free of charge for those who need them but it is worth reminding everyone once again that we survive only on voluntary donations and fundraising.

I would like to thank everyone for their support of what we do. It's vital and we are so grateful for your donations and fundraising efforts. It means we can continue to build effective cancer support right here in Devon.

And I am indebted to Meriel Fishwick for the incredible legacy I have inherited from her that enables us to continue delivering on the values we hold so dear.



**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.

Editor: Trina Lake  
Design: TRG Design, Exeter  
Printing: Brightsea Print, Exeter  
Published: Spring 2025

FORCE Cancer Charity  
Corner House, Barrack Road, Exeter EX2 5DW  
**Open: 9:30am - 4:30pm Monday to Friday**

**Patient support:**  
☎ 01392 406151 @ support@forcecancercharity.co.uk

**Fundraising:**  
☎ 01392 402875 @ forcecfr@forcecancercharity.co.uk

**FORCE Charity Shop**  
73 Fore Street, Heavitree, Exeter EX1 2RN  
☎ 01392 271652

**Open: 10:30am - 4:00pm Monday to Saturday**

Chairman: Dr Jenny Forrest  
Registered Charity No: 1140676  
Registered Company No: 07529991

If you no longer wish to receive our FORCE Matters magazine, let us know by calling **01392 402875** or emailing [supporter.relations@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:supporter.relations@forcecancercharity.co.uk). If you would prefer to receive the magazine via email we would be happy to amend your preferences. Supporters of FORCE are incredibly important to us. We are fully committed to protecting your privacy in accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018. Full details of how and why we process your data can be found in our Privacy Notice on our website [www.forcecancercharity.co.uk/privacy-notice](http://www.forcecancercharity.co.uk/privacy-notice) Paper copies available on request.

# THANK YOU MERIEL

Last Autumn we said an extremely fond farewell to our Chief Executive Meriel Fishwick, who retired after dedicating more than three decades of her life to helping people with cancer in Devon.

**M**eriel spent an incredible 34 years working to make FORCE one of the most respected and valued third sector organisations in the South West.

She made an unparalleled contribution to cancer services in Exeter and beyond and it was her unique leadership that enabled FORCE to develop into the charity it is today, providing a personalised and flexible approach to care for cancer patients and their families. She never allowed FORCE to stand still or rest on its laurels, always striving to improve our services.

She was instrumental in establishing a laser-like focus on our main missions:

- free, face-to-face support for anyone locally affected by cancer
- funding for local research projects
- purchasing equipment to improve patient care at the RD&E

Meriel ensured that FORCE was always true to its patient-first culture, something that has become a blueprint for others to follow. She was also passionate about ensuring that FORCE services were accessible and available closer to where the people who need them live and, as a result, we have outreach services in East, Mid and West Devon.

During the darkest times of the pandemic, Meriel provided the calm guidance that ensured FORCE was still here for vulnerable patients as we were forced to change everything we did almost overnight.

And when uncertainty clouded our charity's very survival, she was there with the steadying hand needed to instil confidence in staff, volunteers, supporters and the people we serve, confidence that together we would see it through.

She built and nurtured a strong, resilient team, established strong relationships across the community and fostered an incredible supporter base.

Our Support and Information Centre is a lasting testament to her passion and drive. Meriel campaigned for and led a £1.25million fundraising campaign to build, and later extend, the Centre. This haven and what happens within



are a reflection of the care and compassion that she engendered in everyone associated with FORCE.

As well as the core services like information, advice, counselling and complementary therapies, Meriel always promoted innovation, allowing us to pioneer new support such as individual physiotherapy assessments and exercise provision, the Moving Forward programme and support for people living with incurable cancer.

And while we admired her visionary skills, always able to see the bigger picture that would drive the charity to new heights, we also loved her willingness to get stuck in with the most basic of tasks, mop in hand when needed!

She had a knack of knowing when someone needed a bit of extra care – an arm around the shoulder, a quiet word of comfort – and a laugh that would instantly lift your spirits.

Meriel was uniquely approachable, dynamic, compassionate, warm and funny with a devilish streak! She was at the heart of FORCE and shaped our services, culture and ethos in a way that no-one has done with such breadth and depth of impact.

Thank you Meriel.

## Message from Meriel

**WHAT A TRULY** rewarding working life I have had thanks to FORCE Cancer Charity.

From its origins, the charity has been about people, people facing life changing, sometimes life limiting challenges following a cancer diagnosis.

Along the way I have worked with many remarkable people; patients, families, staff, trustees, volunteers, fundraisers and medical teams. They have inspired me, been my teachers and critical friends, laughed with me and sometimes at me! It is their shoulders the charity stands on as it enters a new chapter.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who has helped shape FORCE and supported me in my role. How lucky I have been to work alongside some genuinely awesome people.

# Support from friends and donors even more important now

**F**ORCE is an amazing charity, offering much-needed support for local oncology patients and their families.

As you know, the autumn saw the retirement of our long-standing CEO Meriel Fishwick and the appointment of Kate Few-Singh as our new CEO. She was already known to the charity through her work with the income generation team over the last few years. She has hit the ground running and is settling into her new role, supporting staff and providing leadership to the teams.

It is easy to forget that all our services are provided through charitable fundraising. We have had success with income generation through The Nello and Great West Run in particular. However, there is ever-increasing demand for our services and the cost of meeting that demand is also increasing.

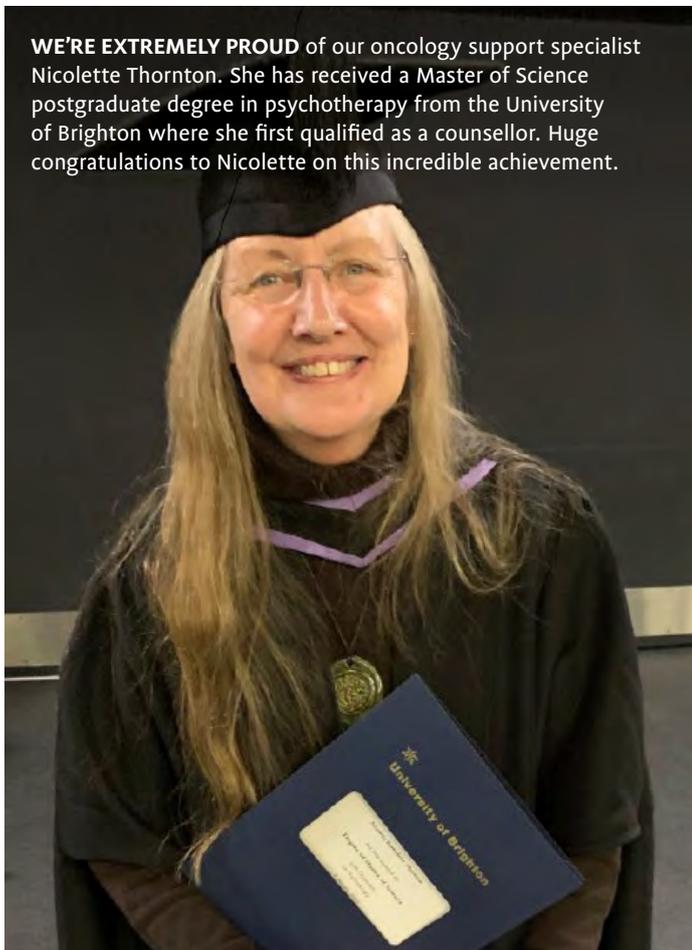
As a clinical oncologist I am aware of the growing demand on cancer services and so on FORCE. The success of general medicine and other specialities such as cardiology means that the population is living longer. This and other factors mean that there is an increasing number of patients being diagnosed with cancer year on year. In addition, in oncology there are more and more treatments available and patients are living longer with a cancer diagnosis, even if they are not cured. Cancer for some becomes a disease lasting years with ongoing treatments and hospital visits. While this is a medical success

story, the challenge for FORCE will be to find new ways of supporting more people for longer. This will mean being innovative about how we design our services so that we can have the greatest impact with the resources we have.

FORCE has already responded to the change in demand with groups, retreat days and counselling around living with non-curable cancer. This has proved very popular. And, over the last 12 months we have expanded our provision further into the community with outreach centres now at Ottery St Mary, Tiverton and Okehampton. It is great to be able to improve access in our rural communities by bringing service closer to need. These facilities come with their own challenges of fighting for space, resourcing staff to travel and making sure that they are fully utilised. We will keep the exact nature of provision under close scrutiny to see if improvements can be made.

FORCE will continue to respond to changing needs and demand. However, we will need to grow our income to do so and so ongoing support from our friends and donors will become even more important. We are so grateful for the generosity of our local community – thank you for helping us to reach all those who need us, now and in the future.

**Jenny Forrest**  
FORCE Chair of Trustees

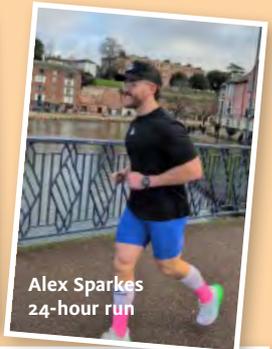


**WE'RE EXTREMELY PROUD** of our oncology support specialist Nicolette Thornton. She has received a Master of Science postgraduate degree in psychotherapy from the University of Brighton where she first qualified as a counsellor. Huge congratulations to Nicolette on this incredible achievement.

## Fundraising heroes



Axminster  
Young Farmers



Alex Sparkes  
24-hour run



Cheriton & Tedburn YFC



BG&E

When Josie Clark found out she had cancer for the second time in 2023 it was if a light in her was extinguished.

# I lost myself but you saved me

“My dad always used to say I was the sunshine of our family,” said the 65-year-old retired carer. “I lost that when I was diagnosed. I lost my spark. I love music but I couldn’t sing along to anything anymore. I wasn’t me. I was angry for a long time, angry with the world until I started coming to FORCE.”

Josie was first diagnosed with kidney cancer in December 2018 but after surgery the following month, she needed no further treatment. Scans every six months came back clear until 2023 when she received devastating news.

“It was my fifth year and after a routine scan they found I had three small lesions on my pelvic bone – it was secondary cancer and it was terminal.”

She was living in Yeovil with new husband Chris and recalls telling him that he “didn’t sign up for this” and gave him permission to leave, which of course he didn’t! They moved back to

Exmouth to be nearer her family – sister Christine, daughter Laura, son Garry and four grandchildren – and she missed the sea!

Being back in Devon enabled her to access the support that FORCE offers and that has been life changing.

“In 2018 my clinical nurse specialist recommended FORCE but I didn’t feel I needed or deserved support. I just got back to normal life. This time was different. I lost myself for a long time, who I was and what was I doing. I wasn’t worried about my make up or how I dressed



and that wasn’t like me at all.

“Sometimes when I woke up in the morning, I had to relive it all again. It was like somebody had died. Now I just wake up and breathe. I’m here for another day and I’m going to enjoy today. Coming to FORCE built my confidence. I had counselling with Marissa and that really turned it around. You have saved me. I feel like I’ve got myself back and I have a lot of life left to live.”

Josie also had complementary therapies, advice on exercise, a Look Good Feel Better session and has taken part in a relaxation course.

She is enormously grateful to FORCE but admits coming to our Support Centre for the first time was daunting. “I was a bit scared. It’s a massive step because you are going into the unknown. You don’t know what you’re going to get, whether people will be judging you. But the volunteers make you feel so

welcome. They always have a smile on their faces. They are the first people you see and they are always so jolly.”

Josie is on immunotherapy treatment. She has scans every three months and her cancer is stable. “FORCE has been a godsend. Thanks to you, I’m smiling a lot more. After counselling and complementary therapies my daughter said I didn’t look so angry, I was softer and less tense. I’m so thankful to FORCE. Where would people like me go if you weren’t here?”

## Fundraising heroes



# Eunice shares a passion for helping with hair loss

Our pre-loved wigs service continues to grow and we now have an even greater variety on offer without the high price tag of a new one.

Eunice Percy from Torquay was so impressed with our support for cancer patients suffering hair loss from their treatment that she donated £100 plus two brand new wigs.

A hair loss specialist herself, Eunice visited our Centre to meet Shelley Boulton, who coordinates the FORCE pre-loved wigs service.

They had further discussions at Eunice's salon and are working together on providing wigs for women from differing ethnic backgrounds.

"Hair loss is deeply personal and understanding the emotional impact helps in providing passionate care," said Eunice. "I decided to donate as not everyone can afford a new wig. I have given a couple of wigs to ladies who had lost all hair and they

could not afford a wig. No one has ever left my shop the way they came because they couldn't afford.

"How beautiful it is when we give back to someone who has lost their confidence. I'm always very content when I give, it makes my heart full of joy."



We have a wide selection of wigs available in blonde, brown, red, grey, black and vibrant colours plus a small selection for men. They are all washed and prepared by our dedicated volunteers and then photographed and catalogued before we fit them. The suggested minimum donation is £30 for each wig. All donations help support the charity.

The service is run by volunteers Sally Gallagher and Karen Taylor, a former professional photographer who takes pictures of the wigs for display on our website.

Sally said: "It has been such a rewarding experience and we have met so many wonderful women along the way. There have been tears but also much laughter and so many happy customers who have left with renewed confidence and great hair! It can be such a daunting prospect when you discover you are losing your hair. It's part of your identity and it is really important not to feel that you have lost who you are when having any kind of cancer treatment.

"We hope we are able to make the process easier from the incredible kindness and generosity of all the people who have donated wigs to us over the last year or so as we now have an extensive catalogue of styles and colours on the website."

"It's lovely to think these wigs are being reused rather than discarded and I'm also pleased that we are including men, which isn't a terribly common service," said Karen, who also helps keep the FORCE Centre gardens neat and tidy!

We could do with more volunteers to support the pre-loved wigs service and if you need further convincing of the difference you would be making, just read some of the feedback.

*"Very fun appointment, the team were very helpful and flexible around my medical appointments."*

*"Amazing service, friendly, really gave me the confidence boost I needed. Made me feel like me again."*

*"A great, much needed service."*

There's more information at [forcecancercharity.co.uk/force-pre-loved-wig-service/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/force-pre-loved-wig-service/)



# Breaking down barriers for all

**W**e are working hard to ensure that anyone who needs the services on offer at our Support Centre is able to access them and is comfortable doing so.

We have installed a hearing loop – a special type of sound system for people using a hearing aid. It helps make public places like our Centre welcoming to anyone with hearing loss, transmitting audio directly to hearing aids or cochlear implants, cutting out background noise and making speech and music clear.

We have also introduced large print leaflets and posters to make information easier to read for clients with a visual impairment.

If you visit our main Centre and outreach locations you may also notice posters that make it clear that all are welcome at FORCE.

“One of our main priorities over the next few years is to make sure that we engage as much as possible with the diverse range of people who live in Exeter and Devon who need us. We want everyone to know that we are here for you, whoever you are, whatever your background, ability, gender, race, ethnicity, identity, sexuality, class... you name it. If you are affected by cancer, then FORCE is for you,” said FORCE Support Services Manager Alex Moseley.

As part of our efforts to ensure greater inclusivity we hosted an LGBTQIA+ coffee and chat session at our Centre and Alex also visited the Intercom Trust, an Exeter-based charity that has been supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans+ communities since 1997.

Paul Izzard underwent radical surgery for colon cancer in 2021 and is now passionate about supporting others in various ways, including a Facebook group called Gay Men with Stomas.

“FORCE was very helpful in the lead up but it was my besties that helped me through the initial time of surgery and homecoming but my positivity and determination to get fit and well was done by myself, in my own time,” said Paul.

“I am looking forward to helping FORCE and the Intercom Trust



Paul Izzard

to share my story and experiences so that others can hopefully get comfort and information which will help them get through cancer.”

FORCE is also reaching out to members of a diverse range of cultures in Exeter to listen and understand what barriers there might be to people affected by a cancer diagnosis in those communities to accessing FORCE support.

## A clear focus on targeted help

**FORCE IS SETTING UP** focus groups to get a better idea of where there might be gaps in our support and what we can sustainably deliver.

Over the next two years we will bring together different groups – men, parents, people with specific cancers for example – to determine what services are already helpful and where we could improve.

The review began with four young mums living with non-curable cancer. They took part in two sessions to provide feedback and help us put some new ideas in place.

Oncology Support Specialist Emma Ellis, FORCE lead on Support and Education Programmes, is running the programme.

“It’s really helpful to know what we’re doing well and where we need to make adjustments, like developing peer support groups. It’s good to get a first-hand perspective on how needs have changed with new treatments and their side effects.

We want to create a package to give more people what they need in a timely manner and determine how we might link with other organisations.”

Charli Lee and Kathryn Hulland both have young daughters and have used FORCE



Charli Lee with her family

as they navigate life with a diagnosis of incurable cancer. Their contribution to the focus group has been invaluable.

You can discover more about their remarkable courage in two FORCE podcast specials on our website later this year.



Kathryn Hulland and her daughter

# Groups create an intangible magic

FORCE has held group sessions since our Centre opened in 2004, consistently evolving and adapting to best serve patients and their loved ones. Emma Ellis, Lead Oncology Support Specialist for Support and Education programmes, reflects on her time creating and facilitating FORCE programmes.

I love bringing together groups of people with a shared yet unique experience of cancer and its effects on body, mind and lives, individuals with a range of ages, genders and cancers, living with varying effects from their treatments as well as individual life experiences and circumstances.

Often, we witness the shared relief of realising they are not alone, the indelible threads of experiencing cancer connecting them. Seeing first-hand the healing power of human connection and understanding is both humbling and such a privilege. A unique relationship manifests itself in each group and they are not the only ones to leave a session feeling its impact and something which is almost impossible to put into words – a magic that's intangible.

I think I speak for me and my co-facilitators when I say that our lives have changed and will continue to be impacted by the people we work alongside. They leave imprints on our hearts and minds long after they leave our services.

I appreciate groups are not for everyone and that timing can also be a key factor in someone benefiting from group support. We will support and guide on when the timing and even which group might serve them best.

As with all our services, timing and the order someone accesses

them can make a significant difference to the overall benefits. For example, it could be that we advise having counselling with one of our oncology support specialists before attending a group.

If you are not sure if a group is right for you but have questions, please contact us. I am happy to answer any questions and give guidance if needed. It might also be helpful to know that if you join a group and feel that it's not for you after the first session or two, there is no expectation for you to continue.

Sometimes I wonder if we even need to be there as facilitators. The support, understanding and sharing among peers feels like the essential ingredient.

The programmes we develop offer the scaffolding if you like – the structure holding a safe space – and this feels like 20 per cent of what's needed. The other 80 per cent is what the group creates among themselves. Our presence is what allows for this to happen. With the 80 per cent in mind, we are currently looking at how we might support and enable groups of people with a shared experience, to set up their own peer support groups with a common purpose.



## RELAXATION & ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

Classes in relaxation and anxiety management techniques to help you cope with cancer. A rolling four-week programme open to patients and carers. You can opt in at any stage of the programme and repeat the course once if you need to. One-hour sessions are held at the FORCE Centre on Wednesday from 12 noon. One of our Relaxation and Anxiety Management specialists will call you to conduct a brief assessment and book you on to a course if appropriate.

## MINDFULNESS

A five-week programme designed to practice mindfulness techniques to help cope with cancer, open to patients and carers.

## MOVING FORWARD AFTER TREATMENT

FORCE's Moving Forward programme is designed to help patients who have finished treatment within the last two years. The five-week course is designed to help people adjust to life after treatment – a time when fewer appointments and less regular contact with the hospital can feel like a safety net has been removed. The time beyond treatment can be difficult. People often feel pressure from family and

friends to get back to normal but they may still be reeling from the physical, emotional and practical demands of treatment. The Moving Forward programme is designed to help people deal with some of those demands and pressures and to help support them through a time of adjustment.

## LIVING WITH NON-CURABLE CANCER

**Retreat days:** Offered twice a year in Spring and Autumn and people can attend once. An opportunity to meet people with the experience of living with a non-curable diagnosis and support each other, hopefully helping to reduce a sense of isolation. The days are guided by professional staff and feature talks from and with clinical staff and oncology support specialists. Participants have the chance to join smaller groups to discuss topics such as mortality, living with uncertainty and finding hope.

**Non-curable Cancer Support Group:** An open support group is held on the first Monday and Tuesday of every month at the FORCE Centre. The group offers an avenue for people to connect with others going through similar experiences in a safe and supported environment. Experienced staff from FORCE will guide each session.

For more details or to register your interest in any of the above, please contact our information team on **01392 406151**.



# FORCE buys lifesaving equipment

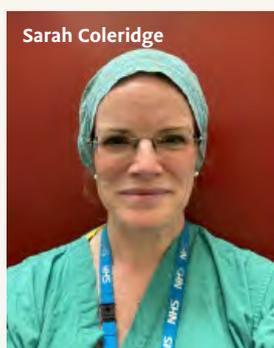
**D**evon women are being spared a trip of up to 200 miles for lifesaving surgery thanks to a new piece of equipment bought by FORCE.

The £30,000 Thompson Retractor is now in use at the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital for abdominal surgery on women with ovarian cancer. Patients previously had to travel to London for treatment that cannot be done with keyhole surgery.

Sarah Coleridge, a consultant surgeon specialising in gynaecology at the RD&E, approached FORCE for funding to cover the cost of the kit, which will initially help around 20 women a year but could be used more widely in future.

“Maximal effort cytoreductive surgery is now being offered in Exeter to women with advanced ovarian cancer (Stage 3 or 4). This type of extensive surgery involves upper abdominal procedures around the liver, spleen and diaphragm and on average takes around six to eight hours to perform. It aims to remove all cancer deposits visible to the surgeon’s naked eye from inside the abdominal cavity,” said Mrs Coleridge.

“Women who are able to have this type of surgery have greater overall survival and a longer period of time before additional chemotherapy is



Sarah Coleridge



The Thompson Retractor

required. In order to undertake the surgery, women need a cut from bone to bone (the bottom of the rib cage to the top of the pubic bone) and the cut is held open with a retractor while the surgery is performed. The Thompson Retractor, kindly donated to the hospital by FORCE, allows access and safe visualisation of the cancerous tissues that need to be removed,” she added.

Mrs Coleridge sees the purchase of this kit as a significant step towards improving the gynae-oncology service as a whole, helping to entice and retain surgeons in Exeter.

Mum of two Natasha Fisher from Ottery St Mary knows better than most how important this new piece of equipment is. Surgeons using a retractor kit on loan to the RD&E saved her life. She was diagnosed with Stage 3 ovarian cancer after months of feeling bloated and unwell. It was an emotional time for her family in more ways than one.

“I was quite ill but my grandmother, who I was very close to, had passed away and I was determined to be at her funeral,” said Natasha.

After she finally saw her GP, things progressed quickly when scans partly revealed the extent of her cancer. A treatment programme was drawn up involving several rounds of chemotherapy and a full hysterectomy.

Amid the anxiety and trauma of treatment, Natasha was also touched by the support and kindness of everyone involved in her care, a factor that proved significant when she was faced with further surgery.

During the initial procedure, it was discovered that her cancer had spread to the diaphragm, liver and other organs. After talking to the consultants, she was faced with a hugely invasive eight-hour operation to remove the tumours.

Natasha takes up the story: “The option was to have the surgery in London, where they specialise in this procedure, or here in Exeter, even though they had never done it before. I had absolute confidence in Mike



Natasha Fisher with her family

Hannemann (consultant gynaecological oncology surgeon), Sarah Coleridge and their team. Having faces around me that I knew was so important to me. I knew that everyone, from the surgical team to the lady who brought me cups of tea, saw me as a person and not a number. I had total faith in the doctors and I didn’t hesitate. They knew what I needed physically and mentally and what was important for my husband and children too. I felt safe.”

Natasha admits she was scared but the procedure went extremely well – all the tumours visible to the eye were removed.

She is grateful on behalf of future patients for the investment FORCE has made in buying the Thompson Retractor.

“It’s amazing that they were able to do this. To have this kind of equipment is very important and makes the procedure easier for surgeons and patients and gives people peace of mind that having surgery in Exeter is the right decision to make.”

Natasha is having maintenance treatment at Ottery St Mary

Hospital, where specialist nurses are supported by FORCE volunteers.

With the love of her family, a hugely supportive employer and colleagues at Perkins Ltd, and her medical team, Natasha can look forward with renewed confidence.

“The prognosis, from where I was, is amazing,” she said. “I’m starting to live a normal life again. I even cut the grass last week! I’ve started to feel like the old Tash again. It’s a hard journey that I wouldn’t wish on anybody, but I have been very fortunate.”



Ray Stabb and his son Paul

# RAY FOUND A HAVEN AT FORCE

**W**hen trauma and grief overwhelmed Ray Stabb, FORCE was the haven where he sought comfort and support.

His wife Carol was in hospital with terminal cancer. It was found in her kidney and lungs, the diagnosis confirmed just before their 46th wedding anniversary last June.

Carol's initial prognosis suggested she might have two years to live but she became increasingly poorly and the time left with her family rapidly disappeared.

She was admitted to hospital in November when Ray and their sons, Marco and Paul, had to cope with the worsening news that they might lose Carol inside a year, then two months, then two weeks.

"On the Friday we were told it was two days – she was moved to a side ward and was quite unresponsive. That's when I came to FORCE and saw Jayne Fahy (FORCE Information Team). She was absolutely brilliant and I just sobbed my heart out. She was very good. I could let it all out," said Ray.

Carol's condition deteriorated over the weekend. Ray became ill himself and was admitted as an inpatient.

"On the Sunday, they wheeled me down to see her. Her breathing was very laboured. On the Monday I was with her with our two sons and my brother-in-law when she died. She was 67.

"I came to FORCE with my two sons. People here were absolutely brilliant. It was so nice to come here and tell people what I was thinking. You try to keep upbeat and you

become a good actor. It's hard to see someone you love gradually die.

"I could just come here and have a cup of tea, away from the hospital atmosphere.

"FORCE is a place where I can be myself, let people know my fears, hopes and aspirations. I can tell people exactly how I feel without embarrassment. It's cathartic.

"I was at such a low point in my life. This was a haven. I was so tired of being in hospital waiting rooms and wards. As soon as I came through the door everybody was so pleasant and it was so quiet. When I said my wife had cancer, they sat me down, held my hand got me a cup of tea and I could be myself and not be embarrassed. It was so calming.

"A haven is where ships go to shelter from the storm. The storm for me was taking its toll emotionally and physically. It was as though I was carrying a heavy emotional burden and by coming here, I've been able to shed some of that burden. I have a long way to go but it's been such a big boost, not only to me but my sons. I'm very grateful, I really am."

Ray, a retired Post Office worker and volunteer with young offenders, had taken on increasing responsibility for Carol's care since she first became ill in 2012 with e-coli.

He is rebuilding his life and FORCE has played a part, including our oncology support specialist and complementary therapy teams.

"I had counselling with Paul. I was very weepy, blaming myself because I didn't think I did enough or did the right things. You do your best in the circumstances. Diane massaged my toes. I was so used to being

tense but that was the most relaxed I'd been for two years. She was lovely. Paul and Diane combined helped me feel OK for the rest of the week. I started planning things, looking at things from a different angle, allowing time to give myself rewards.

"I'm getting my self-confidence back and I'm beginning to think about the future."

Ray's message to others?

"I think there is still this feeling that men should not show their feelings. It's really time to learn that big boys do cry. Don't hold back because you will make yourself ill."



**WE'D LIKE TO THANK** the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund for supporting FORCE's outreach services.

Their funding over the past three years has enabled us to resume support in Okehampton, Tiverton and Ottery St Mary.

Being out in our local communities has made it easier for individuals to access vital support such as counselling, complementary therapies, physiotherapy and exercise advice as well as the Moving Forward programme.

# I'm stronger, wiser and better equipped

“I always thought of myself as a very lucky person having been fit and healthy all my life, living with Stuart, my lovely partner of 30 years, and doing things that I enjoyed. Since retirement I've been able to devote lots of time to my art. I love painting. I also like to keep fit by going to aqua aerobics and I loved cooking healthy meals from the all the fruit and vegetables that Stuart used to grow.

Then one day in August 2023 I felt something odd at the top of my left breast, not a classic lump (it was long and not round). I thought it was a bit of muscle, so pleased was I about my fitness and extra efforts in the swimming pool! Reluctantly I phoned my GP and to my embarrassment she said come to the surgery in 15 minutes. Oh no, I'm making a fuss about nothing! But no...they referred me to the breast clinic at the RD&E where I was diagnosed with an aggressive grade 3 tumour and told I'd be having a mastectomy and some lymph nodes removed the following week. I was in shock. There was no cancer in my family. A few weeks later I was on chemotherapy for four months.

During this time I was also caring for Stuart, whose Parkinson's Disease was accelerating, so life was suddenly very challenging. I was very focussed on looking after Stuart, who needed more and more assistance from me, day and night. I didn't have time to think very much about what was happening to me. I just got on with it. One of the breast care nurses suggested I go to FORCE to find out what support might be available. I was recommended for counselling. I had never had counselling before and was apprehensive, not at all sure what I wanted to say and somehow feeling a bit of a fraud because I was coping very well, wasn't I?

I had my first session with Maria and quickly relaxed and opened up to her; the words just came out as did the tears. Maria made me realise that what I was coping with was a very big deal and I was astonished at all the emotions I had been keeping hold of for a long time. I was able to confide in her worries and anxieties which I didn't want to share with anyone else. Sometimes family members care too much so can't act as a dispassionate sounding board. The relief to share everything with a sympathetic, non-judgemental person was huge and the reassurance massive. The medical treatment I was receiving was excellent and now I was having psychological support as well; I felt very fortunate indeed. It was tough caring for Stuart when I was undergoing chemotherapy. I was admitted to hospital a couple of times with an infection and he was getting very weak too and had a minor stroke. On one occasion we found ourselves in the AMU on the same day and we shared a bay

*“Life was not all doom and gloom. Two weeks before my diagnosis we acquired two adorable kittens from the neighbouring farm. At first I wondered how an earth we would cope but they brought joy into the house; full of mischief but also full of snuggles and distractions. Something else to talk about besides our illnesses. Just what we needed.”*

waiting for a bed!

Earlier this year Stuart passed away. Even though it was inevitable, the shock and the loss were huge. I had lost my soul mate as well as my role as a carer and it felt like my life had no purpose. Maria once again helped me to process things. As well as being a sympathetic listener she also recommended books and helpful podcasts. I survived my cancer and am determined to live my life to the full. It is a new phase and although I am still very sad, I am establishing new routines, getting fit, seeing friends and I've started painting again. I want to give something back to FORCE and am using my art as a way of fundraising.

FORCE is an amazing organisation. I have been blown away by the support I have received. As well as counselling I have also benefitted from reflexology with Diane – something else I'd never tried before and was apprehensive about. It is a wonderful therapy and I have felt very calm and as if I've been healed in some way after each session. Maria gave me strategies to process my cancer diagnosis, my demanding role as a carer and how to cope with bereavement. In all these situations she helped me realise the importance of giving self-care priority. Thanks to her I am a stronger, wiser person, better equipped to cope with the hand life dealt me.”



Above: Susan and Stuart



# Big tick for first education study day

The first FORCE education study day for healthcare professionals this Spring was an overwhelming success. It featured talks on innovations in surgery, radiotherapy and immunotherapy plus guidance on the support aspects of cancer care.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Overall, 99.4% agreed or strongly agreed that the day was:

- Relevant** to their work
- Well structured**
- Good use of **time**
- Greatly improved their **skills and knowledge**
- Would **recommend** to colleagues
- Rated the programme as **excellent**

The day was put together by the FORCE Information Team. Lead Nurse Judy Gent said: “It was great to see so many professionals attend. We had extremely encouraging feedback. Attendees enjoyed the speakers, they commented on how interesting and informative they were. They also enjoyed how the day was set out and flowed really well.”

There were some suggestions for things could be improved, which was helpful to hear.

But the most common responses to the programme and the overall day were: **excellent, informative, engaging, relevant, well structured, interesting, varied, fantastic balance, positivity, relaxed, friendly, amazing, thank you, please repeat!**



## Colorectal cancer support worker Claire Dyke attended our first education study day

I work alongside the Colorectal CNS Team at the RD&E and support our patients at various points along their pathway. I see them on the ward, on Cherrybrook if they are having chemotherapy and I also present a monthly Health and Wellbeing Clinic with my colleague. I ring patients when they are diagnosed to have a conversation about the things that matter to them and do their holistic needs assessment.

I found the FORCE study day very helpful. There was a good mix of topics

and a variety of speakers from different specialities so there was certainly something for everyone.

I found the sessions on brachytherapy, immunotherapy and gynae surgery really interesting as this was new information for me.

The personal account of cancer from one of the doctors was really insightful.

We refer a lot of our patients over to FORCE for physio so it was lovely to see Louise (Ballagher, FORCE oncology physio) at work and try out some Tripudion (movement with a focus on the body’s fluid systems). It was useful to have this after lunch to get us all going for the afternoon!

The session from Gerry (FORCE oncology support specialist) on breaking bad news was a useful reminder and some helpful pointers for this difficult subject.

It was good to think about looking after ourselves and to remind ourselves what we enjoy about our jobs and how to care for ourselves.

The day had been put together really well with a good order of speakers and sessions.

There was a good variety of speakers and balance of learning things, stretching our brains and reflecting and thinking about psychological care.

I would definitely recommend this to others as the sessions were good but it was also helpful to network with colleagues.

FORCE is invaluable to our patients at different points in their pathway. The support they offer, to patients and their families, is so important.

I have many patients who enjoy the complementary therapies. Sometimes this is a point where they have less confidence about their bodies or having time to care for themselves is low on their list of priorities and FORCE makes this possible.

Having someone who can help with benefits advice is really important and the emotional support offered by FORCE is also really important. The courses such as Moving Forward after cancer, skin workshops, art groups etc have been very beneficial to our patients. Knowing others are there to support and walk alongside is priceless.”

# Gerry is part of the fabric of our charity

When we asked Gerry Gillespie to reflect on his 25 years at FORCE, he typically switched the focus away from himself to the people he has supported over that quarter century.

“I am thankful to all the people I have walked alongside and who have taught me so much about life and living deeply,” said our most experienced oncology support specialist. People I have been privileged to accompany on their journey, staff members I have worked alongside, I always feel their presence in my life and I feel humbled by that. It has been an honour and privilege to have shared people’s lives. They say where there is the greatest suffering, the greatest love is shown and I have witnessed that so many times.”

Gerry joined FORCE at the end of May 2000 and admits: “I don’t know where the time has gone. It doesn’t seem like 25 years. FORCE is a family and there have been so many life and family events in my own life over these years.”

He was integral to plans for our Support Centre, visiting the Maggie’s Centre in Edinburgh with former CEO Meriel Fishwick to see whether something similar could be done in Exeter.

“We drew plans on the way back home on the train and I used to walk around the hospital at lunchtime looking for possible sites to build a support centre. I always came back to this corner, where our Centre is now. The Centre is a special place. People come here, often overwhelmed by a diagnosis of cancer. We offer support and an oasis for them to rest awhile, to be listened to and supported. Then hopefully they will find new ways of coping and find resilience and strength to live more deeply and not be defined by their illness.

“We try to help people through some of the most difficult times of their lives and that leaves an imprint on us.”

“We are changed by those encounters. Changed by the courage and strength we see in others, changed by their vulnerability and strength. Anyone who has used the Centre has left a soul print, a footprint, in the heart of the building. They have left a part of themselves here, their courage, love and strength. It’s an enduring legacy. The echoes of that goodness become a part of the fabric of the building and a part of who we are.”

COVID presented perhaps the most challenging period in Gerry’s time with FORCE. “The day we left, we didn’t know if we’d see each



other again let alone work in the building again. Everything changed in a heartbeat. We changed the way we worked almost overnight. Telephone and Zoom became a lifeline for people isolated by COVID and their diagnosis of cancer. We learned to listen to people in a different way and listen to what they weren’t saying as much as what they were saying.

“The biggest change I’ve experienced during my time is in the treatment of secondary cancer. A diagnosis used to mean a limited prognosis but more and more people are now living with non-curable cancer and we support them to live well in the present – not worrying about yesterday or tomorrow but to live this day well, to live in the moment. It’s about seizing the day.

“The beauty of being an independent charity is that we can respond to local need as it arises. We react to what people need and evolve as we continue to listen and respond to those needs.”

“So 25 years! I feel gratitude and thankfulness for the opportunity of being part of this incredible family called FORCE. I feel proud of its continuing ability to reach out to those in need, to those struggling and alone. Together we make a difference and long may that continue into the coming years.”

**PAT BUTLER CELEBRATED** her 60th birthday this year with a special celebration to raise money for FORCE.

Reaching this milestone was especially significant, as Pat explains: “In 2021, I was diagnosed with an incurable cancer. My prognosis wasn’t good, but with an amazing oncology team and great support from family and friends, I am already beating the odds and hope to do so for a while yet.”

Pat, who also received support from FORCE including complementary therapies, physio and exercise advice and classes, raised a magnificent £1,043.11 from her big

bash at the Corn Barn in Cullompton.

“It was A-MAZ-ING, filled with dancing, laughter and hugs! It still gives me a warm, happy feeling just thinking about it!”

Celebrations are a great way to support FORCE – many people chose to ask for donations to us in lieu of gifts for their special occasions and we’re so grateful for these generous gestures.

Let us know if you’re planning a celebration in aid of FORCE. Contact our fundraising team on **01392 402875** or [forcefr@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:forcefr@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



# Taking the first step enriched Sasha's journey

Sasha Bonnett was diagnosed with breast cancer in February 2024, the week before a family holiday.

"I had to put on a smiley face but I went to bed each night and worried about the uncertainty," said Sasha.

Two weeks later the diagnosis was confirmed and she was given a treatment plan that involved surgery in March, chemotherapy every fortnight from June for 16 weeks and a course of radiotherapy until the end of November.

"The CNSs (Clinical Nurse Specialists) are like angels for the support they've given me. I have two children and telling them was the worst conversation I have ever had but the nurses had prepared me for it," she told FORCE Matters.

The emotional impact was heightened by a family history of cancer. Sasha lost her mum to the disease at 57. She has become adept at hiding the tears but sometimes it's clear, they are not too far from the surface. Family helps her draw on great inner strength and FORCE has played a large part in supporting her on a challenging cancer journey.

"My husband came to FORCE before me. I was having chemo and Chris came and sat in the garden and saw how great it was. I was desperately worried about coming here. I was worried about seeing poorly people having watched my mum go through cancer treatment. Chris reassured me I would get a warm welcome.

"I wanted advice on hair covering and the volunteers were so helpful and supportive that I bought my blue beanie. It's like my safety net and has been everywhere with me."

That first step opened a door to the wide variety of services on offer at FORCE. Sasha, who took time off from her job as a primary school teacher just before surgery, has had counselling and exercise advice and joined groups for breast recovery, Pilates, acupuncture to help with hot flushes and Moving Forward after treatment. She has also had complementary therapy and enjoyed a pampering session with the Look Good Feel Better team.

The groups have fostered friendships and bonds – not to mention WhatsApp groups – and have given Sasha renewed confidence. She describes our oncology physio team of Louise Ballagher and Becky Bailey as "fantastic."

"I played netball through school and uni. The night before my surgery I passed my umpire exam. I needed to get that under my belt. It was something positive at a dark time when everything was out of my control. I've always been like my mum. I like making connections and talking to people. In the exercise group I met some lovely ladies who had all been through a similar experience. We were able to chat, listen, share, laugh and cry.

"It was the first normal thing I had done since my diagnosis. I was always fit before my surgery and I was determined to push but pace myself to get as fit as I could be again. It was really good to do it collectively, in a safe space with ladies who had been through a similar thing. We had things in common and were able to share good advice. I also had a gym referral to help me reach my fitness goals."

The Pilates class with Caroline Dodd at the FORCE Support Centre was a massive hit.

"I loved it and raved about it so much that my husband and my father-in-law, who's in his 80s, also come to classes at Dunsford. We



all feel invigorated and it's the best night's sleep I have all week. I feel in a safe pair of hands with Caroline as she knows what I've been through.

"The Moving Forward sessions helped in lots of different ways. There was a different focus each week with laughter and tears in a safe space to talk about things. Although family and friends go through it with you, it's not the same as people who have been through it themselves.

"Coming to the groups, knowing there's support after clinical appointments become fewer and having positive things on the calendar, filling your week and networking, was good. It validated the way I was feeling.

"Being part of that group and being able to talk about the way I was feeling helped clarify where I was at and what I wanted to do. It helped rebuild my wellbeing, set goals and improve my confidence. It gave me support but hopefully I was able to support others too. It built friendships and I've been able to have a laugh, knowing what we've all been through."

"I have met so many lovely people. Over time I have got stronger and stronger with my health and wellbeing. We have smiled and laughed and been positive as a family and I try to live life to the full.

"FORCE is a fantastic resource. I feel really lucky to have come over and stepped through the door. It has definitely enriched my journey. I don't know if people going through treatment realise the benefits of FORCE so I do spread the word!"

## Fundraising heroes



# Leading the way in sharing best practice

**F**ORCE has helped establish a professional network for oncology physiotherapists in the South West.

Our physio team – Louise Ballagher and Becky Bailey – set the ball rolling by hosting the first get-together last year.

There are now 34 specialists in either exercise and cancer care or palliative treatment involved in the network from across the peninsula.

“There was nothing out there so we put some feelers out and it’s grown by word of mouth,” said Louise. “It’s really useful to share best practice and innovation and find

out what other people are doing.”

Louise had already set up a network for exercise professionals with a specific qualification in cancer rehabilitation, working across Devon.

She regularly keeps them up to date with developments in our service and the wider world of cancer and physical activity.

To ensure she and Becky keep themselves at the cutting edge of oncology physio, they will be attending a specialist study day in September at London’s Royal Marsden, the world’s first hospital dedicated to cancer diagnosis, treatment, research and education.

It will share insights from science and research alongside examples of good practice to make the case for physical activity to be a standard of care within cancer pathways.



## “Bubble wrap” for radiotherapy symptoms

**Our teams are always on the lookout for new and innovative ways to support patients.**

FORCE physios Louise Ballagher and Becky Bailey are currently collaborating with the Breast Care Team at the RD&E to improve recovery for women who have had radiotherapy for breast cancer.

The treatment can cause a hardening of the tissue, known as fibrosis, which may lead to pain and discomfort as well as restricting arm movement.

One thing that may help is a product called Mobiderm, cubes of foam that look a bit like bubble wrap.

Strips can be worn under everyday clothing where it gently massages the affected area as the patient moves around as normal.

FORCE has a limited supply for patients who may benefit. Members of the exercise group for breast cancer patients, a six-week course held at the FORCE Support Centre on Wednesdays, are helping gather data on how effective Mobiderm is for fibrosis.

“Our goal is to get people back to how they were before treatment with both arms moving as well as each other,” said Louise. “We know that problems start after radiotherapy so we want to collect as much information as we can to feed back to the Breast Care Team.

“Hopefully, through this collaboration, we can help reduce the number of people referring back into the RDUH Trust’s service.”



### Fundraising heroes



# Cancer is one of life's big levellers

Justin Davies had a turbulent start to 2024 – a shock diagnosis of throat cancer and surgery soon after followed by 30 consecutive days of travel from Barnstaple to Exeter for aggressive radiotherapy.

His nursing team explained that treatment would severely attack his saliva gland and render his mouth extremely dry, causing difficulty with eating. Gels and sprays did little to help so the ENT team recommended a course of acupuncture at FORCE.

“After so many trips to Exeter and my naive perception of alternative therapies I respectfully declined,” admits Justin. “Food for our family is a major factor – enjoying, cooking, the socialising, finding new places to try etc. You really don't appreciate the simplicity of eating and all that surrounds it until it's taken away from you. A huge impact, not just physically, it was making me depressed and in turn impacting on my family.”

During a routine hospital follow-up, Justin explained how he was feeling and again they recommended acupuncture. “With reluctance and cynicism, I accepted. I had to try something else, what did I have to lose.”

He found Cath exceptionally reassuring with a plethora of knowledge and a wealth of experience.

“In go the pins, not painful, yes slight discomfort for a nano second.

I've gone through throat surgery and radiotherapy, so let's keep this in perspective. We spend the next 50 minutes introducing ourselves to the group, all very informal just giving an overview of what has happened and where we are. Amazed to be with six other people who I could totally relate to, who were explaining exactly how I was feeling.

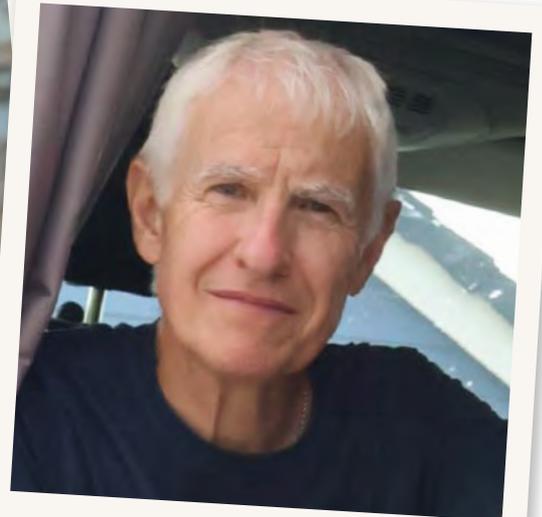
“I'd had no appetite, nor desire to eat for months. Two days after my first treatment I wake up hungry. I eat some cereal, which is somewhat easier. I eat some toast for the first time in months. I eat more that day than I have done in the last 10 days. Yes, it's a struggle, but a lot easier.

“In summary, a middle aged man with a cynical opinion has been proven wrong. Acupuncture worked for me, it was a massive game changer not just for me but my family and friends as well. We can enjoy eating together again.

“What was also extremely valuable was meeting some remarkable people on the course. Cancer must be one of life's biggest levellers. We would probably never have met if it wasn't for this treatment. Being with them gave me such positivity and a feeling of wellbeing, talking to people who were feeling just like me. Of course the medical teams have been incredible, absolutely incredible. But six weekly treatments with these people did me the world of good. Thank you.”



Justin Davies



John Clewer

## “We bonded over funky socks”

Retired highways engineer John Clewer, 67, from Brixham was diagnosed with prostate cancer in early 2023 and had radiotherapy in August that year.

Treatment left him suffering from hot sweats. He had joined the Torbay Prostate Support Association (TPSA) where acupuncture at FORCE was mentioned as a way to alleviate his symptoms.

The urology team at Paignton Hospital also recommended FORCE late last year and John, vice-chairman and press officer for Torbay Motor Club, began a six-week course in January.

“I was made to feel very welcome when I walked in on my first morning and I relaxed when I was given coffee and biscuits (always a

bonus!) whilst I waited in a lovely, bright space, waiting for the rest of the group to arrive.

“I'm very lucky in that 18 months ago I joined a very active local cancer group in Torbay and therefore I'm very used to talking about my diagnosis and treatment with strangers. However, for many of the group this was their first time, and Cath (acupuncture practitioner Cath Stacey) must have been very pleased with how people relaxed over the weeks and talked openly about their own situation, while sitting with pins sticking out of their bodies!

“While the treatment has reduced the intensity of my flushes, they are still there, however I guess it's early days and things will hopefully improve more over the coming weeks.

“Members of the group bonded very quickly, and the social chit chat before treatment was very lively. We bonded over funky socks and ended by sharing homemade cake, and each being given a present of colourful socks from one of the group!

“My wife came along on my last treatment and sat in reception for the duration, reading her book. She noted that the atmosphere was calm and kind, from the reception ladies to the other workers there. She loved the supply of coffees and biscuits, comfy chairs and big windows looking out on to the garden, along with the welcome afforded by the ever attentive staff to everyone who walked in.

“Many, many thanks, to everyone for the last six weeks.”

# SIMPLY THE BEST IN KAREN'S EYES

**K**aren Povey has given up her time to help a variety of organisations over the last 23 years but nothing quite compares to supporting FORCE.

“It’s my favourite volunteering experience – it’s my third year and I don’t see that stopping any time soon. It’s such a rewarding experience,” she said.

Karen volunteers at our Support and Information Centre and at many fundraising events, always with cheery enthusiasm and an infectious smile.

“I love to meet and greet people even though it can be difficult sometimes but, in the background, we always have the nurses and counsellors to offer professional support. I work with such lovely people and someone’s always got your back if it gets difficult.”

She moved to Devon from West Drayton 23 years ago with husband Phil and son Jack, keen to be nearer to her parents and sister. Their first contact with FORCE came when Phil was diagnosed with neck cancer in 2017. During his treatment, they would visit our

Centre for a cuppa and also appreciated the kindness of FORCE volunteers who delivered tea and sandwiches on the Cherrybrook chemotherapy ward.

“I was going to turn 60 and I’d volunteered ever since I’d been in Devon, mostly linked to our son’s school or our local community. When I decided to retire, I wanted to volunteer for something I wanted to rather than felt I had to. I asked Phil about FORCE and he was fine with it.”

Cancer touched the family again in January 2024 when Karen’s sister, Jacqui Le Feuvre, became unwell with a pulmonary embolism. In March, she began suffering the same symptoms and a CT scan revealed a mass that was identified as possible cancer, later confirmed by a biopsy.

“As soon as I was aware cancer was a possibility, I knew I wanted her to connect with FORCE because I have seen the benefits, even if it is just a calm space away from the hospital waiting room environment.

“She was treated at North Devon Hospital and accessed services at the Fern Centre. She then had surgery at the RD&E. I encouraged her to come and get registered at FORCE. She found it a really lovely space, calming and relaxing.

“On the day of her surgery I came here as a carer. I was very anxious. She’s my baby sister. She has been amazingly positive. Despite treatment at North Devon, we always make a point of coming here. She went to a Look Good Feel Better session and loved it. I was volunteering at it but we didn’t let on. I could see how lovely it was for her to be with others in a similar situation.”

Jacqui had physio advice from FORCE and was referred to an exercise programme at Lords Meadow Leisure Centre in Crediton. With support from her family and employer, she has worked hard to get back to a normal routine.

Karen and her family regularly give up their free time to help at FORCE fundraising events. They have worked on The Nello refreshment stops at Quince Honey Farm and Morchard Road, where they’ll be again this June.

They have also held a coffee morning at Chulmleigh Town Hall that raised more than £450, marshalled at the Great West Run and Jurassic 10K and supported events like Classics Galore! and the Stan Hacking Band concert and those run by Crediton Friends of FORCE.

Karen may think FORCE is simply the best but we think she’s pretty special too.

“I find it a lovely way to connect with people. At the Centre we are the first port of call in a positive, smiley environment that’s welcoming and warm.



Karen Povey and Jacqui



# CARE, COMPASSION AND PROFESSIONALISM

FORCE has always supported patients when they are admitted to hospital and over the past couple of years we have increased our time there, as Emma Barker, our Oncology Support Specialist Team Lead, explains.

**O**ur lead information nurse, Judy Gent, or someone from our counselling team visits Yeo, the main oncology ward at the RD&E, three times a week. We set aside dedicated time each week to attend the morning ward meeting and visit patients who would like support – emotional or psychological – or need information. We also offer support to patients' families while on the ward, enabling us to help at a time when people can feel vulnerable and possibly out of control. Having someone to talk to about how they are feeling can help to relieve anxious thoughts and feelings.

One area we particularly help with is supporting patients and families at the end of someone's life, hopefully enabling important conversations with loved ones or providing support during such a difficult time.

We can also visit oncology patients on other wards if they or someone from their

medical team asks us to.

A patient may spend long periods on the oncology ward, often without their family present. It can be a worrying and lonely time, filled with fear and uncertainty. As a team, we are able to support patients and families at this difficult time. Having someone to talk through things, to acknowledge what they are going through and to allow them to express their thoughts and feelings can be incredibly helpful. We can offer strategies for coping with anxiety, worry and fear of the unknown. It is so important that they feel heard and to know that they matter.

We also support members of the oncology team, including staff on the ward, helping them to manage difficult times, both personally and professionally. This helps with their wellbeing and ability to continue the important work of looking after oncology patients.

The relationship between the ward and FORCE is imperative to the ongoing care and support to patients and staff. By working closely together, we can make a difference to the wellbeing of patients, families and staff."

Clinical Nurse Manager (Yeo Ward) Lorraine Pickard: "I have worked in oncology for 23 years and during this time, my team and I have developed a strong and collaborative relationship with the FORCE Support Team. They work closely with patients and their families, offering emotional and practical support during some of the most challenging times of their lives. Importantly, they are also a vital source of support for staff. The emotional toll of oncology work is significant, and the FORCE team has consistently been there to help care for our wellbeing too. Their presence, compassion and professionalism contribute greatly to the holistic care environment we strive to provide."

## Doing our bit to improve South West support

**FORCE IS TAKING PART** in a two-year project to map the provision of psychological support for people affected by cancer.

The project is led by Macmillan and funded by the Peninsula Cancer Alliance, which works across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It is identifying

where there are gaps and inequalities and where there could be more collaborative work. A report is due later this year with recommendations on improvements as part of a national programme.

FORCE is among a number of South West cancer centres taking part, although we are unique in being completely independent,

not working within the NHS.

Organisations are sharing appropriate data, ideas and information and looking at how they can support each other with supervision, training and reflective practice.

**NHS**  
Peninsula Cancer  
Alliance

**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT

# FORCE answered all our prayers

Kate Legg's cancer journey began when she had her first mammogram in September 2023.

"Thankfully, I had a day off from work – I do not think I would have gone if I had to take unpaid time off! Luckily, I did go, as following my first mammogram, my results showed that I had cancer in my left breast," said 53-year-old Kate.

Kate's experience underlined the importance of breast screening and finding cancer in the early stages. Her lump was 1.6cms. She couldn't feel or see it. She had a lumpectomy and lymph nodes removed at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading – no chemotherapy needed – and soon after the second op, the family moved to East Devon. Unfortunately, she then spent a couple of weeks in hospital with a lymph fluid drainage infection and came under the care of the RD&E Breast Care Team.



"They took me under their wing and looked after me with amazing care and elite professionalism," said Kate, who had 15 days of radiotherapy in July. "Currently, my nerves are growing back but I am not yet at full strength with lifting and pulling actions following my lymph node removal operation. I have just had my first mammograms on both sides following my recovery and am pleased to say they show no suspicious features. Elation!"

While in hospital, Kate was given a FORCE leaflet which led to her, her husband and two children registering with our charity for support and advice.

"At the time we were all experiencing a lot of worry and anxiety. FORCE answered all our prayers. The people working at FORCE and the atmosphere of the Centre were just what we all needed to be part of. Kind, experienced listening ears and lots of free tea and stem ginger biscuits overlooking a beautiful garden! What more can you ask for?"

"During the last year, I have been fortunate to access physiotherapy, one-to-one counselling, complementary therapies and my husband has received reflexology. FORCE has also been a trusted safe place where I

have been to sleep before and after radiotherapy, asked for professional advice, drunk tea, eaten biscuits and relaxed in.

"The benefits of accessing the services of FORCE have included improvement in my mental health, relaxation and anxiety release, confidence and acceptance of moving forward and getting some form of reality back into my and my family's life.

"FORCE provides professional and personal one-to-one help and support in managing everyday life. I used the services after the two operations, while I was going through radiotherapy and until now, rebuilding everyday life and dealing with the worries and mental health feelings at the end of treatment.

"I would highly recommend FORCE to anybody going on a personal journey after receiving a cancer diagnosis. The people at FORCE are all elite professionals in their fields with extremely good bedside manner and personalities. They are trusted professionals, open to helping you with any difficult side effects and regaining personal confidence. To promote FORCE I have placed a window sticker in my car. In the future I am hoping to be able to volunteer and give back the support that I have received. Thank you to all the volunteers who give up their time to run the front of house at the different centres.

"FORCE is just the best charity! It has provided free services to me and my family to enable us to heal and move forward positively and with strategies. FORCE has improved the well-being of the whole family. It has answered questions and provided solutions. We are so grateful and are moving forward together. I think with the support of FORCE, we as a family have overcome the anxiety and acceptance of my diagnosis and operations quicker than people who have not asked for support. A huge thank you to all that you have done and provided for us."

## Friends of FORCE



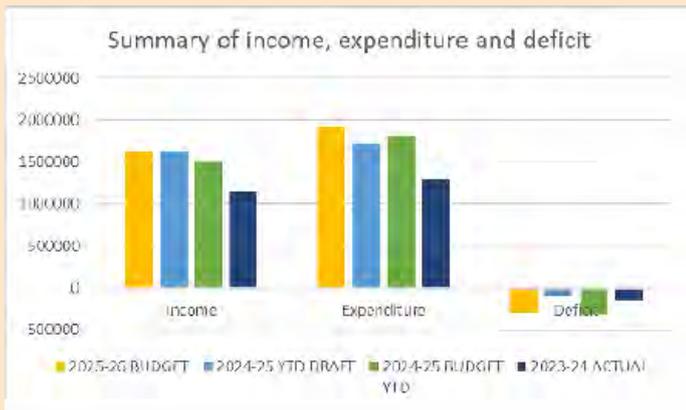
# Striving for a bright and sustainable future

Our new financial year started on April 1 and after another challenging 12 months, it is a great time to reflect on all that has been achieved and plan for the year ahead.

I'd like to record a warm welcome from the Finance Team to Kate Few-Singh. Her first six months as our new CEO have been hectic but it has been lovely getting to know her as we work alongside each other. After working with Meriel Fishwick for 18 years, it was very difficult to imagine how it would feel to have a new CEO and, although we all miss Meriel, the transition has been about as seamless as it could be with the essence of FORCE's patient and people-focused approach still cherished.

FORCE faces the same well-documented challenges as most charities in the current climate. We are already experiencing increased demand for our services and this is expected to rise still further with the changing cancer landscape. Alongside this, there is the double whammy of rising costs – particularly staffing, which represents more than 75% of our expenditure – and competition for dwindling sources of income as our supporters' pockets are pinched.

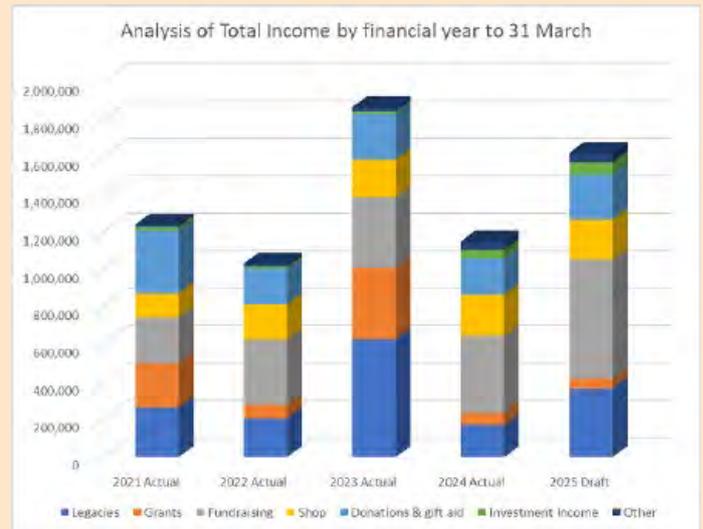
As we seek innovative ways to reach more people and raise additional funds, we are facing a further year operating with a deficit budget of just under £300,000.



Through careful financial management, FORCE was able to access reserves to see us through the pandemic and beyond but the economic environment is making it harder to reduce the deficit and return to a balanced budget. Our strategic plan recognises the importance of technology in improving efficiency and strengthening data for decision

making. Committing the necessary investment in IT, at a time when resources are stretched, is a calculated risk, undertaken only with thorough consideration. As a first step we have joined forces with a new IT partner, Solsoft, to help us draw up a digital plan and prioritise first steps, which will have the most impact for our beneficiaries.

FORCE has always aimed to raise income from a wide variety of sources as the chart below demonstrates.



The Income Generation Team has worked incredibly hard alongside our supporters and as a result, fundraising income reached record levels for 2024/25 through a successful mix of community events, corporate support, the Nello's 25th anniversary, a flourishing partnership with the Great West Run and a memorable Classics Galore!

There are opportunities to increase our income and alongside growing our fundraising activities, there are plans to promote regular giving and gifts in wills to help secure future income streams. Your support is needed more than ever to secure a bright and sustainable future for FORCE.

**Julia Pitts**  
**FORCE Chief Finance Officer**

## GOVERNANCE IN GOOD HANDS

**KATHY BARRAU** has been appointed to oversee the important area of governance at FORCE to ensure our charity is run legally, ethically, sustainably and successfully for the benefit of the people we support and our staff.

She works alongside consultant Phil Povey on issues such as health and safety, policies and procedures, systems improvements and regulatory requirements across the organisation.

She told FORCE Matters: "I am thrilled to have been appointed Governance Lead at FORCE. Coming from a General Practice background, I am committed to facilitating the delivery of essential healthcare and support to those who need it and this applies equally to the services we provide at FORCE.

"While I'm not part of the frontline team, my

role is to support the operational implementation of the policies and procedures that ensure our compliance with the law and governing regulations. Ensuring good governance is essential for

all organisations and as a charity, even more so. Achieving this relies on the dedication of the trustees and senior management team.

"This may not sound like the most exciting topic (my colleagues have been known to question how I find enjoyment in a project) but it is important to get it right and here at FORCE we are doing our utmost to ensure that we are.

"When I'm not working, I can usually be found taxiing my teenage children around and running around on soaking (and occasionally sunny) Dartmoor where we live."



# Age is no barrier to helping at our shop

Our volunteers bring a wealth of experience to FORCE and there's no better example of the magical blend of talents that makes such a difference to the local cancer community than at our charity shop in Heavitree. Our host of helpers range from teenagers to a nonagenarian!

**R**egular shop volunteer Carly Brown celebrated her 90th birthday this year while at the other end of the age scale, we have had six youngsters sign up to help out at the shop as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

DofE inspires hundreds of thousands of young people to develop skills, resilience and self-belief. It's open to youngsters aged between 14 and 24, each one choosing a cause to volunteer for in order to achieve a bronze, silver or gold award.

Teenagers volunteering at our shop must be accompanied by a parent or guardian, typically giving up an hour or two of their time on a Saturday although other times are available.

They do all sorts of things from sorting, tagging and putting donated goods on to the shop floor – anything but till work and steaming clothes – to using their tech skills to help with listings for online marketplaces like eBay and depop.

Some have enjoyed the experience so much that they've stayed on to help after their D of E hours are complete.

Isla Barrau from Okehampton College volunteered at our shop as part of her bronze award. She said: "Doing my DofE volunteering in the FORCE shop was really fulfilling and I really got to be part of a charitable cause. I feel I gained my first



proper experience of the world of work in a retail environment, learning how to work more socially, which boosted my confidence. It was a valuable experience and my mum enjoyed doing it with me too!"

FORCE Voluntary Services Manager Heather Taylor said: "It's great to be able

to tap into the fresh ideas that our young supporters bring and so refreshing to see them engaging with the work of our charity."

Carly Brown was 21 years old when Prince Philip launched the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in 1956. She became a FORCE shop volunteer in 2018 and does a shift every Friday morning.

"I get to meet some lovely people and have a good laugh and it's better than staying home and just reading a newspaper!" she said.

"I thoroughly enjoy my sessions. Everyone is so helpful and incredibly efficient and there are a lot of laughs, which is important! I am full of admiration for the range of skills involved in dealing with huge quantities of stuff brought in every day which has to be sorted, checked and produced for sale in immaculate condition. I shall never buy new clothes again!"

"She is amazing, fit as a fiddle and a real asset to our team," said Heather.

If you'd like to follow the shining example set by Carly or our DofE volunteers, pop into the shop for a chat with manager Anna Heard or contact Heather on **01392 406154** or email [heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:heather.taylor@forcecancercharity.co.uk)

## CALLING ALL SCHOOL RUN PARENTS

If you have some time to spare between drop-off and pick-up, volunteering at our shop could be just the thing for you.

Here are four great reasons to spend time volunteering in our charity shop in 2025:

1

**Flexibility!**  
You can work around your existing commitments

2

**Learn new skills** and gain experience while helping out

3

**Socialise** with a variety of different people

4

**Know that you're helping** to raise money for valuable cause

And you'll never have to panic about World Book Day again! We always have lots of dressing up gear. Plus, bedtime stories are sorted thanks to our extensive children's book section.

**GIVE THE GIFT OF YOUR TIME AND VOLUNTEER!**

**OUR SHOP SURVIVES** on donations from the generous people who support us. There's a full list of what we can and can't accept on our website – [forcecancercharity.co.uk/our-shop/exeter-shop/](http://forcecancercharity.co.uk/our-shop/exeter-shop/)

Among the things that sell well are bicycles and old camera equipment. If you have any unused photography gear lurking in your cupboard, please consider putting us in the frame as we can develop your unwanted kit into a hot shelf item or an online sale.





# Gearing up for another fabulous Nello

The 26th FORCE Nello cycle ride takes place on Sunday June 29 and it promises to be another cracker.

More than 1,000 cyclists are due to line up for the start at Topsham Rugby Club, ready to tackle 60 or 100 miles around some of the most beautiful countryside in Devon.

It's the biggest fundraising event we organise and since it was established by Marc Millon in memory of Topsham restaurateur Nello Ghezzi, it has raised nearly £1.5million to support tens of thousands of local people affected by cancer.

We couldn't run it without the backing of Bike Shed and they will again be working their magic this year, putting out signage, supporting cyclists before during and after the ride and providing invaluable expertise to the FORCE team.

There are a few changes this year, particularly with registration, thanks to sponsorship from Pinarello. In a bid to speed up the process, we have introduced wristbands with barcodes that riders can write their name and any medical information on and present to special electronic readers at the start and finish.

The Jack in the Green will be providing bacon rolls and porridge in the morning to set cyclists up for the day, Bike Shed will be doing pre-ride checks and there'll be specially designed snoods and water bottles on sale.

The event village will have a festival feel again, especially when riders return, when The Clinic and The ST School will provide massages. We'll have food stalls – pizza, pasta, a hog roast, churros and ice cream – and the club bars will be open.

Robyn Walton has a very special reason for signing up to ride this year's Nello.

Last year she cheered from the sidelines as a large group of friends were inspired to ride by the way she handled a brutal regime of life-saving treatment for breast cancer. Thirty of them rode as Robyn's Red Breasts with specially crocheted boobs on the front of their bikes. Now it's Robyn's turn.

"I've signed up for the 2025 Nello to celebrate being a whole year into remission from HER2+ breast cancer. The charity is amazing! I'm excited to be able to join in this year to show my appreciation to the selfless team at FORCE, while raising money to support the work they do.

"FORCE enabled me to talk through my emotions with trained counsellors but I also quickly learned the benefits of wellbeing management through sessions in reflexology and massage. Treatment for cancer can feel relentless but there are strategies that help during tough times and finding small pockets of joy in everything we do regardless of where we are in life is so important."

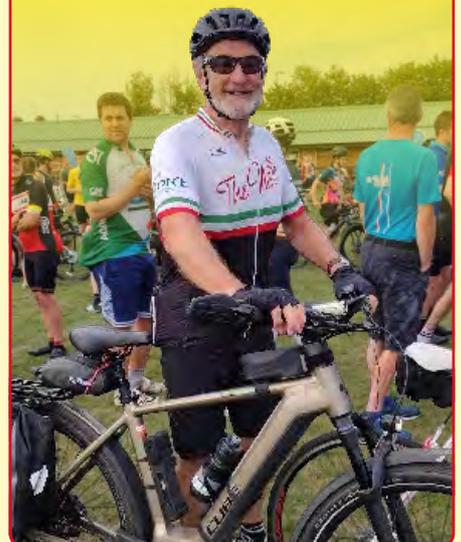
Robyn is thrilled about this year's Nello challenge and is encouraging others to join her. "If you like to ride your bike or have never done a long ride before this is a brilliant event to get involved with. The snacks are out of this world! See you at the start line."



## Did you know...? You can ride The Nello on an e-bike?

**THAT'S RIGHT!** We're all about encouraging participation and if that means getting a bit of battery powered assistance to be part of this super special day, then we're all for it.

Trevor Day, 76, bought his first e-bike three years ago. He has taken part in the last two Nello events and will be on the start line again this year. "The E is for enabling," said Trevor. "You are certainly not cheating. It still a challenge and that's the motivation. Don't feel ashamed. Use it as an opportunity to get out for a wonderful ride. Be part of it. Get out and do it. E-bikes are transformative – they let you continue your cycling life."



**A POPULAR PART** of the post-ride celebrations is live music. Local covers band **The Dockneys** will back with Chris Back from Moretonhampstead on guitar and vocals.

Chris is a regular supporter of FORCE and has set himself a FORCE 5 fundraising challenge, culminating in a Nello double header. He earmarked five ways to reach his £1,500 target, starting in May with the Keswick Mountain Festival Terrex half marathon trail run and the Great West Run.

Next up, a solo acoustic gig at the Ship and Pelican in Heavitree on June 12 and then The Nello. He signed up to cycle the 60-mile route with the aim of being back at Topsham Rugby Club in time to perform with his band. "I'm doing this to raise as much money as I can for this amazing local charity that does so much fantastic work for cancer sufferers in the area," said Chris.

# Paul plans a brass boost

Paul Smith is hoping to harness his musical talents to raise money for FORCE.



The Rackenford Rascals, a colourful band with rainbow uniforms, put on a concert at Filleigh and raised just under £900 for FORCE.

Paul from Tiverton was diagnosed with prostate cancer in January 2024, had brachytherapy in August and finished 23 doses of radiotherapy in September.

He was midway through his cancer treatment when he and wife, Lynne, discovered FORCE.

“It changed our whole perspective. I came here one day and loved that it was so calming. It’s amazing. Somewhere to come and relax – that was the start of our love affair with FORCE. It makes you feel all warm and fuzzy. The people here are lovely and help you feel so calm.”

The couple, who have been together for 45 years, both had complementary therapies – “A lovely way to recuperate together” – and Paul also had acupuncture. They have shared the journey with Lynne keeping her husband buoyant.

“We tell everybody about FORCE now. Every day brought us lower and lower but when we found this place, it picked us back up again.

It really is lovely. It’s a place where you can come and talk to someone who will help or find someone who can. It’s so reassuring. The whole experience has been great. The complementary therapies really worked. I don’t think people realise how good it can make you feel when you or your partner is going through so much,” said Lynne.

Paul retired nine years ago, giving him more time to indulge his musical talents.

He has played the euphonium for 57 years since taking it up as an 11-year-old and is a member of the Rackenford Rascals septet, three of whom have had cancer in recent years, and the Lympstone Band, performing with them in the last two Classics Galore! concerts.

“The band loves its involvement with the charity and that concert is the biggest audience we play to,” said Paul, who is keen to harness the energy of the band with a new fundraising event for FORCE. Watch this space!



**PAUL CLIFFORD WILL RIDE** The Nello less than five months after major surgery.

In July 2024 he completed the Étape du Tour, feeling at his fittest, but two months later he was diagnosed with stage 3 muscle invasive bladder cancer. “This came from nowhere as I had no symptoms. Like everyone before me, I thought this was never meant to happen to me. My life was, in a flash, turned upside down and suddenly just having a future became my all-consuming thought.

Six years ago I completed the Nello 100 miler, just because it was a decent challenge and not because I thought much about FORCE. Now I know. These guys give all cancer sufferers and their families invaluable support and refuge. I want to thank them for how they are helping me and backing up the amazing NHS team at Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital. For me, 100 miles on a bike was never a problem, but this time round it will certainly push me very hard.”

## COULD YOU FOLLOW IN THE MAGNIFICENT 7'S FOOTSTEPS?

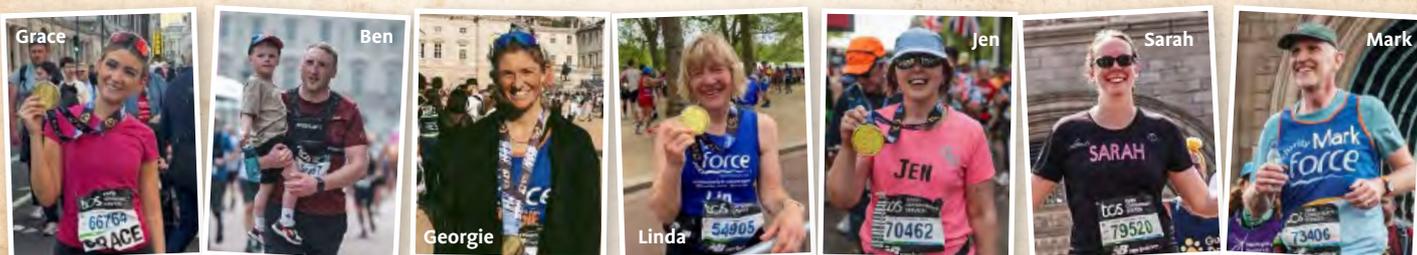
**A MASSIVE WELL DONE** and thank you to the seven runners who took on and conquered the London Marathon for FORCE this year.

Linda Grady, Grace Jeffery, Sarah Moffat, Georgie Pigott, Jen Poyner, Ben Trigg and Mark Wadeley-Jones all completed the 26.1 mile run through the streets of the capital and between them they have raised a magnificent £13,249.11 for our charity.

We’re so grateful that they chose to support FORCE at this most iconic of events and we’d love to see more of you tackle the challenge for us in future.

If you win a place in the 2026 London Marathon ballot or through your running group, why not make your miles matter by supporting FORCE?

We’d love to hear from you if you’ll be taking part in the world’s most popular marathon next year. Get in touch with Ceri Bastyan on **01392 406153** or [ceri.bastyan@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:ceri.bastyan@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



# Victoria can't wait for Classics return

Popular musical extravaganza Classics Galore! will be back next year so save the date – Saturday November 14, 2026.

It will be the tenth Classics staged at the University of Exeter Great Hall to raise money for FORCE and it promises to be something extra special.

The great news is that all your favourites – the Classics Galore! Orchestra, soloist soprano Cheryl Enever and the Lymptone Band – will be back on stage, joined again by compère Victoria Graham.

The BBC Spotlight presenter made her Classics debut in 2024, keen to support an event that raises money for FORCE after losing her father to cancer. She was moved to tears by the performance of some of the Westcountry's top musicians so had no hesitation in volunteering her services again.

“As my dad always said to me – when

opportunities come your way, grab them with both hands – so I am,” said Victoria. “I am thrilled to be asked to return to host Classics Galore! in 2026. I'll try not to be so emotional this next time, although I can't guarantee it! There's just something about music that's so emotive and I can't wait to once again come and celebrate and sing with you all in 2026.”

Classics Galore! was established by cancer patient Dick Passmore and his wife Posy. Sadly, Dick died in early 2019 but he has left an amazing legacy. So far, the concerts have made a total of £153,500 after a record breaking return of £23,500 from last year's event.



**WE'D LIKE TO SAY** a massive thank you to Cllr Kevin Mitchell, who left office as Lord Mayor of Exeter in May after two years in a role that saw him support FORCE as his chosen charity. As the Lord Mayor's Charity in 2023-2024, FORCE received £15,000 towards refurbishing the oncology department at the RD&E.

For his second term, Cllr Mitchell dedicated any funds raised to our work in helping people with non-curable cancer. His tireless commitment to attending so many diverse fundraising events brought in a further £13,740. That money will support our programme of retreat days and support groups for local people who have been told there is no cure for their cancer.

We hosted a thank you breakfast at FORCE as a small token of our gratitude to the Lord Mayor, his consort, Ian, and the whole team for their fantastic support of our charity over the past two years.

Cllr Mitchell is a Clinical Nurse Specialist within the Skin and Sarcoma Service at the RD&E so has a profound understanding of the work we do.

“It has been my great privilege to have FORCE as my chosen charity for the last two years. Together we have raised the profile of the work carried out by the charity, while also raising money for very important projects. I very much hope this legacy will have a long-term effect. The warmth, laughter and fun we have had over the last two years will give us memories for the rest of our lives. Also, the friendships we have formed over this time mean a huge amount to us both and believe me we will not be strangers.”



## Treat yourself and help others

**GET READY FOR** a delicious dollop of fundraising fun – Cream Teas for Cancer is back for 2025 but you'll have to wait a little longer for the lip-smacking satisfaction of doing your bit to support people affected by cancer, face to face, right here in Devon.

We have decided to hold our popular foodie fundraiser later in the year to celebrate the end of summer.

This year CTFC will be held on Thursday September 18 but the date is the only thing that's changed.

For just £6, you get a tasty combo of two scones, Devon clotted cream, strawberry jam and a teabag, all locally sourced and packed in an eco-friendly paper carrier.

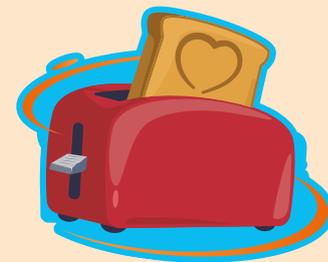
All our cream teas are hand packed and delivered to your door by FORCE volunteers.

It's a great opportunity to get your colleagues, friends or family together for a special taste of Devon this summer. 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!

Go to our website [forcecancercharity.co.uk/creamteas/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/creamteas/) or use the QR code to find out more.



# Raise a toast to the Great Devon Breakfast



OUR 2025 GREAT DEVON BREAKFAST campaign has been another tasty triumph.. From a full English to a slimming special, our incredible supporters surpassed themselves this year.

They have raised more than £10,000 as families, friends, colleagues, church and community groups, businesses, bakeries, cafes, pubs and restaurants all around the area showed they care about FORCE and the people we look after.

We are so grateful to everyone who took part this year and we're hoping to make the FORCE Great Devon Breakfast even bigger and better next year.



Browns Bakery and Cafe



Alan and Karen Brady



Health Records - Royal Devon University Healthcare



Robert Williams Estate Agents



Sian and Ruby Williams

If you are inspired to take part, there are lots of ways to join in. You can:

- do it **any time** in March (or whenever you like really)
- **wherever** works for you
- **tuck into** a full English or continental breakfast, coffee and croissants, burritos or bagels, waffles or Weetabix, porridge or pancakes - the choice is yours!
- lay on breakfast for **friends** and ask them to make a donation to FORCE
- put on a breakfast **fundraising event** where the profit goes to FORCE
- give a **percentage** of breakfast sales at your café or of sales of a particular dish/ coffee to FORCE during March or on a specific day
- ask customers to **round up** their bill and donate the extra to FORCE
- give a **voucher** for breakfast to FORCE to be raffled

The FORCE fundraising team can help with ideas, promotional materials and support. Get in touch on **01392 402875** or email [forcefr@forcecancercharity.co.uk](mailto:forcefr@forcecancercharity.co.uk)



## Putting the great into the Great West Run

We couldn't be more grateful and proud of everyone who took on the challenge of the Great West Run as part of Team FORCE this year.

Just under 700 of our fantastic supporters signed up to cover the 13.1 miles around Exeter at the end of May.

In 2024, our remarkable runners raised more than £100,000 last year and that figure has soared above £195,000 in 2025 when we became the GWR's official charity partners.

It's an overwhelming amount that does so much to ensure we can continue to offer a wide range advice and support to people in Exeter and other parts of Devon dealing with a cancer diagnosis, all free of charge.

The stories from so many of those who pulled on a FORCE vest are inspiring – too many for the pages of one magazine.

A personal connection to cancer motivated hundreds of

runners, people like Lottie Pidwell. She signed up in memory of her mum, Anna, a medical physicist at the Royal Cornwall Hospital for nearly 20 years. During that time, she helped treat hundreds of patients on their cancer journey.

In September 2018, Anna was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. She underwent chemotherapy, surgery and radiotherapy in the very department where she had worked. It drove her cancer into remission but in January 2021, she was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer and died in March 2023.

Her mum's courage motivated Lottie to create Team Anna for the GWR and she was joined by fellow medical students Tom Clayton, Daniel Jupp, William Stokes, Genevieve Vogt, Ellie Dagleish and Emily Vhadra along with dad, Andy. Lottie said: "We have chosen

to raise money for FORCE, a brilliant organisation that provides support for those affected by cancer in hopes of helping other families in similar situations."



The support of local businesses is absolutely vital to FORCE and we are fortunate that so many companies recognise the importance of the work we do. The partnerships we forge with our corporate supporters offer obvious benefits for us – they help ensure we can be here for people dealing with a cancer diagnosis. But what is so great to hear is how much they get from their link to FORCE and how many different ways they find to support us.

## Thanks for making your business our business

The local team at **Bishop Fleming**, an award-winning, dynamic accountancy firm with offices across the Westcountry and the Midlands, chose FORCE as their Charity of the Year.

They've supported us in all sorts of ways including a hugely successful quiz and a mixed netball tournament, bake sales, office competitions and other fun activities! One hundred people formed Team Bishop Fleming to take part in the Great West Run, which has Bishop Fleming as its official title partner.

Digital Marketing Executive Lucy Quicke said: "We chose to support FORCE because so many of us, our colleagues, friends, and families, have experienced the challenges and heartbreak that come with cancer. Supporting FORCE reflects our commitment to being a responsible business and making a meaningful difference in our local communities. Over the past 12



months, our partnership with FORCE has brought us together in a shared goal: to raise £12,500 to support the charity's incredible work with local cancer patients, their families, and carers."

James Finnegan, Partner and Head of Bishop Fleming's Exeter office, said: "We're

proud to support FORCE as our Charity of the Year. Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of our people, we've already raised over £8,000 so far - and we're not stopping there. It's been fantastic to see the whole team come together and make a real difference for such a vital local charity."

Premium estate agents **Knight Frank** believe in the power of partnership, long-term relationships and personal service, values that align perfectly with our own.

They have been sponsoring our Classics Galore! concerts for a decade and Louise Glanville, partner at their Exeter branch explained why.

"It's really important to us. We are a national company but we operate at a local level, we work live and breathe the area we negotiate in. Community is important to us and so is supporting those communities.

"It's such an important thing that FORCE does. It's an amazing cause and you never know when you are going to need a service such as FORCE and when you do, the fact that it is there is incredible. It's just amazing.

"We will definitely be supporting Classics Galore! again. We don't give it a second thought. It's on our calendar every two years without question."



**Stags**, one of the largest and most respected firms of chartered surveyors and auctioneers in the South West, celebrated their 150th anniversary in 2024 by fundraising for a charity from each of the four counties they cover. FORCE represented Devon and we have received an incredible £18,200.

Andrew Luxton and Tracey Hill from made a special visit to the FORCE Centre to see for themselves the impact of their year of fundraising for our charity.

"It was a humbling but satisfying visit in seeing how, in a small way, our fundraising activities will make a difference in helping the Centre continue its much needed work," said Andrew.

We have received an amazing £127,311.40 from our fantastic supporters at **The Exeter**, an affordable income protection, life and health insurance company, which is famous for paying out. We were their charity partners for three years and we want to say a massive thank you for their incredible support.

Isobel Langton, The Exeter CEO, said: "We are proud to have supported FORCE Cancer Charity as our corporate charity partner over the past three years. The funds raised by our colleagues will help FORCE provide essential support and information to cancer patients and their families across Devon and beyond."



# THE POWER OF SHARING YOUR STORY

Everyone's cancer journey is personal and unique. Real life stories can inspire and encourage others, offer comfort, reduce fear and foster hope.

By sharing your experience, you can bring to life all the amazing things we do. It can also be enormously helpful when we are applying to grant-making bodies and trusts to hear the impact that FORCE has

on the lives of the people we support.

We'd like you to help us tell more people about the support FORCE offers anyone locally affected by cancer. We'd also love to hear about the things you do to support FORCE, stories that can motivate others to fundraise or volunteer for us.

## Where would my story be used?

That's up to you.

We would like to share your story on our website and social media channels – we have followers on Facebook, X and Instagram – and our FORCE Matters magazine.

We might also use extracts or quotes on our posters and leaflets.

We also submit stories about our work to newspapers and magazines, news websites, television and radio.

We would use your story ONLY with your permission and you can specify where you would be happy to see it published.

## Do you have to use my name?

You decide.

You can choose whether your name or any other personal information is used in your story.

You can remain anonymous if you'd prefer.

We would take every care to remove details that might identify you.

To find out more about how we use information, read our privacy policy at [forcecancercharity.co.uk/privacy-policy/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/privacy-policy/)

## How do I share my story?

If you are inspired to help us raise awareness of all the great things FORCE can do for cancer patients and their families, please get in touch.

Contact us directly by phone or email or go to our website [forcecancercharity.co.uk/supporting-you/share-your-story/](https://forcecancercharity.co.uk/supporting-you/share-your-story/)

There's a simple form to complete.

You can include:

- as much information as you are comfortable sharing
- where you'd be happy to see it used
- whether you'd prefer to remain anonymous
- if you'd like one of our team to contact you

**JODIE SIMPSON WAS NERVOUS** when she set up her first fundraising event in aid of FORCE – a walk from Dawlish to Cockwood.

"I was worried no-one would come," she admits. She needn't have worried. More than 100 people joined her to walk just over three miles. Dozens of others turned out to welcome them in.

The event was inspired by Jodie's friend Keiandra Foote, who was diagnosed with incurable stage 4 lung cancer last May. The 53-year-old mum of three, known as Kay, wanted the money to come to FORCE after our charity supported her parents when her mother had cancer.

On the day of the walk in February Jodie arrived at the Dawlish bandstand, anxious that her hopes wouldn't be realised. "Suddenly people started coming from everywhere. We had 120 people on the walk and by the time we got to The Anchor, where I work, there were 150 of us. The pub did food and was great to see everyone coming together."

In the evening Shooters sports bar catered for 60 people to boost the fundraising even further. Local businesses donated raffle prizes and with donations on a JustGiving page, Jodie raised £2,160.

"This terrible illness is something this lovely family never saw coming and let's be honest who can be prepared for this news," said Jodie.

Keiandra's daughters – Sakara, Allana and Keisha – sent a message to supporters. "The woman who we are glad to say raised us, is the strongest woman you will ever meet. This illness will not get the best of our family, and we will continue to make the best memories that we possibly can."



## Dates for your diary

**September 12** Under the Radar Charity Gig  
*The Beehive, Honiton*

**September 27** Exeter Singers Concert  
*Killerton*

**October 25, November 8, November 11, December 12**  
Kenton FoF Soup and Dessert Lunches  
*Kenton Village Hall*

**December 12** Big Noise Chorus Concert  
*Methodist Church Exeter*

**December 13** Exeter FoF Christmas Fayre  
*Heavitree URC*

**July 12-13** Crash Box and Classic Car Club  
Historic Vehicle Gathering  
*Powderham Castle*

**July 19** Honiton Charter Day

**July 20** Stan Hacking Band Summer Concert  
*The Barnfield Theatre*

**August 7** Honiton Show

**September 10** Crediton FoF Bingo  
*Crediton Football Club*

For more information, check out the Events section on the FORCE website.

# Just £5 a month can make a difference – please support FORCE today

No matter the amount, a regular donation to FORCE provides stability and ensures that the charity's vital services remain available for those facing cancer. Here's why regular giving is one of the best ways to support the charity:

## SUSTAINED SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Cancer can be overwhelming and FORCE offers essential emotional and practical support. Reliable funding allows us to be here for everyone who needs help, whenever they need it.

## KEEPING SERVICES FREE AND ACCESSIBLE

From counselling and wig fitting to therapy and advice, FORCE provides these services free of charge. Regular donations ensure that no-one is turned away due to financial constraints.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Regular income helps FORCE plan long-term projects, improve services and invest in new ways to support those affected by cancer. It's not just about today – it's about ensuring continued care for the future.

## A COMMUNITY OF CARE

Giving regularly to FORCE helps create a strong community of support, ensuring that no-one facing cancer has to go through it alone.



## How your regular gift could support patients & families over a year:



**£5 per month**

Could help fund vital **support** from FORCE's information team, providing expert advice and guidance at our Centre and at the RD&E for those facing a cancer diagnosis.



**£10 per month**

Could provide three specialist **physiotherapy** sessions, helping cancer patients maintain their fitness, strength and mobility.



**£20 per month**

Could help fund a course of five **complementary therapy** treatments by qualified therapists, easing stress and anxiety for patients and their families.



**£50 per month**

Could provide five **counselling** sessions with FORCE's support specialists, offering a lifeline to patients and their families during their most challenging times.

## Setting up a standing order to make a monthly donation to FORCE couldn't be easier

The details you need:

Account name: **FORCE Cancer Charity**

Account number: **60796568**

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

IMPORTANT: Please call **01392 406150** or 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 on your donation.

FORCEcancercharity @forcecancer charityforcecancer

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

Charity registration no. 1140676 Company registration no. 7529991



[www.forcecancercharity.co.uk](http://www.forcecancercharity.co.uk)