



**For Immediate Release**

## **Nottingham cancer services unite to tackle isolation this Christmas**

While most people are making their Christmas preparations, those affected by cancer are getting ready to face what is one of the loneliness times of the year for them.

According to statistics from Macmillan Cancer Support 22% of cancer patients experience loneliness following diagnosis due to lack of practical support or emotional issues such as anxiety or depression. Worryingly, those who are lonely are three times more likely to miss appointments, not take their medicine properly, not pick up prescriptions or refuse some types of treatment.

The issue is heightened around Christmas when many of the usual support networks such as volunteers, carers and support groups close down to spend time with their own families.

This Christmas the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in Nottinghamshire is on a mission to ensure that the 26,500 people living with and beyond cancer in Nottinghamshire do not feel lonely.

The £3 million cancer improvement programme has launched a number of schemes designed to tackle isolation and ensure the practical and emotional support needed is readily available.

The Macmillan One2One Support Project for teenagers and young adults is one such scheme. The initiative, which has just been launched in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and is run in partnership with the East Midlands Teenage and Young Adult Integrated Cancer service, Self Help Nottingham and De Montfort University.

It provides emotional and practical support to young people aged 18 - 30 and is already making a huge difference to people like Kelly Burfoot, aged 22.

Kelly was diagnosed with leukaemia at the age of 17 and treated successfully at the Queens Medical Centre in Nottingham. However the cancer had a lasting effect on her and created severe stomach problems which then led to acute anxiety, depression and panic attacks.

For months Kelly has been almost entirely housebound, leaving only to attend hospital appointments or see her therapist and even then it has been with the support of her family.

It wasn't until she was partnered with volunteer Nadia Morawski on the Macmillan One2One Support Project a few weeks ago that she felt able to leave the house by herself.

Kelly said: "I finished my treatment in November and was back at school full time by January to do my A-levels. Then I went straight to university. I just had to keep going. Through the whole of my treatment and for a long time afterwards I didn't ask any questions, I didn't ask 'why me', I just kept my head down and got

through it. Then when my treatment finished I just threw myself back into everything.”

However in her second year of University Kelly began to struggle. “My body was struggling with the after effects of the chemo. I felt weak, I was always poorly and I’d developed stomach problems as a result of the treatment.”

The stomach problems made eating difficult and would cause her crippling pain.

“I became really anxious and depressed. I’d suffer from panic attacks because I’d be worried that I’d eat something which would set my stomach off when I was out with friends or at uni and I’d have to rush to find a bathroom.”

In her second year of university, Kelly started missing lectures and in her final year she attended just 3.

“I got a headache I’d panic and not know what to do, I’d worry it was the cancer coming back. Even though I’d gone back to my old life it didn’t feel like normal.”

At first she hid her anxiety from everyone including her parents until it wasn’t possible to hide it anymore.

“I was scared of going outside and being in small spaces. I stopped going out with my friends. I passed my driving test, but then didn’t trust myself to drive because of the panic attacks. I used to get the bus into uni but I’d have to get off at every town or city en route as I was worried about my stomach. In the end my parents used to have to take me to my lectures and wait in the car park for me so I could go back to them during the breaks.”

Her mum became concerned so contacted Macmillan Clinical Nurse Specialist Laura Cutler at Nottingham City Hospital who specialises in supporting long term

survivors of teenage and young adult cancer and runs the new Macmillan One2One Support Project.

Laura introduced Kelly to Nadia, one of the volunteers on the scheme.

Kelly said: “I’ve seen Nadia four or five times now and she’s already helping me to get my confidence back. She’s so easy to talk to. We take my dogs out for walks or go to the shops for an hour. She’s happy to do anything that I want to and will suggest short trips out. It’s definitely given me the confidence to start socialising again and is good to have someone to chat to and keep me company.”

Macmillan Clinical Nurse Specialist Laura also runs the Teenagers and Young Adults Survivorship service in the East Midlands which helps young people at the end of treatment deal with the long term consequences of cancer and maximise their life chances.

She said: “The change in Kelly is just phenomenal in such a short space of time, which just shows how vital the service is for young people recovering from cancer. Just because the cancer treatment has ended, doesn’t mean that support is no longer needed. Anxiety and depression affects a lot of people after treatment, leaving many feeling very alone.”

“Our fully trained One2One support workers are also young people aged 18 – 30 and can provide companionship, whether it’s accompanying patients to appointments, having a chat over coffee or helping with practical tasks such as shopping.”

While the Macmillan One2One Support Project is the latest scheme to be announced, there are other projects within the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in

Nottinghamshire which have been up and running for longer and are already seeing positive results.

The Macmillan Beyond Diagnosis Project, which is also run in partnership with Self Help UK and is part of the Macmillan Cancer Partnership has been running since April and has already supported over 100 people affected by cancer.

Offering practical and emotional support to people of all ages from the point of diagnosis to beyond treatment, the scheme has a particular focus on tackling isolation.

Support is delivered on an ongoing or one-off basis and can range from accompanying patients to appointments or groups to assisting with light house work or other tasks. The service volunteers can also provide a befriending service to help service users both face-to-face and over the phone to lessen the feelings of loneliness.

In the last seven months the project has gone from strength to strength and now has 46 trained volunteers supporting local people affected by cancer. One example of the life-changing work the service provides comes from our volunteer David and Brenda<sup>1</sup>.

When we first met David, from Nottingham City, he mentioned that in particular he noticed people struggling to carry their heavy shopping bags through town and felt that it was something he might be able to help with - although if he approached them in the street they would undoubtedly be suspicious and refute his offer of help. Joining the Macmillan Beyond Diagnosis volunteer team provided the opportunity to make a positive impact on someone else's life.

Since completing his training programme in June David now supports 2 people on the Macmillan Beyond Diagnosis Service, both of whom are living with a long

term cancer diagnosis. He regularly visits each of them on a Friday and Saturday and helps take them out for a coffee and do some shopping.

After each visit, David helps carry the bags of shopping back to the house which has saved one of his clients £10 per week in taxi fares. "I find the volunteering really rewarding and it's really nice knowing that you are doing something to help someone less fortunate than yourself.

"One of the ladies I am supporting was very isolated prior to her being referred onto the service, sometimes going a week or two without really seeing anyone else. We now go for a weekly coffee and shopping trip, and it has helped give her some independence back."

Brenda, from Sherwood, is one of the women who has been supported by David through the Macmillan Beyond Diagnosis service. She has found that having practical support from David has made a great difference for her. "He supports me and has given me some more independence, he is very helpful and has been very patient as I've been to the Post Office or shopping.

"It is nice to know that somebody is there to support you. I thank the service for putting me in touch with a wonderful volunteer and providing me with some support."

If there is someone reading this and has an hour or two spare to support someone through this service I really encourage you to get in touch. It is a really good feeling to know you are helping someone."

James Wheat, Macmillan Project Manager at Self Help UK, said: "Living with cancer, at any stage, can be emotionally overwhelming; we want to make it easier to cope with and help people to keep their lives on track. People can self-refer into the service by calling and we are asking health professionals to identify

lonely cancer patients and make them aware of the support available so that they don't have to go through their cancer alone. All of our volunteers are professionally trained to ensure that they can provide the best support possible."

Elaine Wilson, Senior Macmillan Development Manager and programme lead for the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in Nottinghamshire, said: "We know that isolation is one of biggest challenges for people living with and beyond cancer, and these feelings can be heightened at Christmas for those who don't have friends or family around them. Whether this isolation is caused by practical difficulties, or emotional ones such as anxiety or depression, it can have a devastating impact on the person and their recovery from cancer as the research shows. That's why it's one of the key priorities for the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in Nottinghamshire with many of our project and pilots focussed on delivering the emotional and practical support that is needed to combat isolation."

**If you think that you, or someone you know, could benefit from Macmillan Beyond Diagnosis Project please get support by calling 0115 8523 102.**

**If you are between the ages of 18 and 30 and would like to know more about the Macmillan One2One Support Project text Laura on 07812 269 998 with your name and contact details.**

**If you're affected by cancer and need information or support, call the Macmillan Support Line on 0808 808 00 00 or visit [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**

**Find out more about the Macmillan Cancer Partnership in Nottinghamshire by visiting [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) and typing 'Macmillan Cancer Partnership Nottinghamshire' into the search bar.**

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**For further information, please contact:**

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**About Macmillan Cancer Support**

When you have cancer, you don't just worry about what will happen to your body, you worry about what will happen to your life. At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything and we're here to support you through.

From help with money worries and advice about work, to someone who'll listen if you just want to talk, we'll be there. We are millions of supporters, professionals, volunteers, campaigners and people affected by cancer. Together we make sure there's always someone here for you, to give you the support, energy and inspiration you need to help you feel like yourself again. We are all Macmillan.

No one should face cancer alone. Call us free on 0808 808 00 00 (Monday to Friday, 9am–8pm) or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup>Brenda is not the patient's real name, this has been withheld for confidence reasons.