

Ulverston cancer survivor backs charity in bid for Â£32,000 National Lottery funding

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Finding out she had breast cancer was the shock of a lifetime for community leisure manager Caroline Smith.

Caroline, a mum-of-two from Ulverston, said it was something she never expected to happen and it came at an extremely difficult time in her life. Caroline's father was gravely ill with cancer and she and her husband had separated.

Over the last few months Caroline has received support from CancerCare in Barrow and Ulverston and she is now backing the charity's bid for 32,000 of National Lottery Peoples Projects funding for Barrow and the wider Furness area.

She is also one of the stars of a new short film which will be shown on Monday, April 16, on the main ITV Granada 6pm news. Voting for CancerCare Well Be There also opens on Monday, April 16 and the films can be viewed on the Peoples Projects website from 9am at www.thepeoplesprojects.org.uk

Caroline said: "My husband had left and my dad was very ill. It was an extremely traumatic time.

"It was also devastating for my two kids who were 15 and 18 years old at the time.

"The NHS is very good at fixing your body but they don't do much for your mind.

"You're so scared; you can't describe the fear.

"The fear is so powerful. You need to get to the bottom of it and learn to live with what has happened - that's the key.

"CancerCare offers this service. It's amazing. The people I've met there have completely changed my life."

Caroline said talking to people who understood her situation was incredibly helpful.

"It's comforting to know that it's normal to feel that fear; to feel that you're not the only one," she explained.

"You do think: 'Why me?' You're bobbing along and then your life is like a snowstorm.

"It knocks your confidence. I completely lost my confidence.

"I had stage one breast cancer. It was only diagnosed because I took part in a pilot project to screen women for breast cancer at a younger age.

"I was 47 at the time and they usually don't test until a few years later.

"I didn't have any symptoms and it was in a place where it couldn't be felt under the skin.

"I had my operation in Kendal and I had radiotherapy in Preston."

Tragically, Caroline's dad, Tony Dance, also had cancer at the time and he died six months after she was diagnosed.

She said: "My dad lost his cheek, nose and the roof of his mouth to cancer. He was so brilliant. He never let it stop him doing anything. He died in April 2017."

Caroline, who works as an Active Communities Manager for GLL (Greenwich Leisure Limited) in South Lakeland and Copeland, continued working throughout most of her treatment and recovery.

When she was diagnosed she set up a Facebook page named 'Caroline's Breast Cancer Battle' to keep it separate from her own news feed.

She said: "I'm a big fan of social media. It has helped me to say how I feel and to talk to others about how they are feeling.

"I have documented everything so that I can look back and see how far I've come.

"I have lots of very good friends. Keely Evans from Ulverston was my rock. I am very lucky to have her as a friend. I couldn't have done it without my kids and my little dog, Elvis, either!

"The best piece of advice I ever got was 'Put your lipstick on and you won't cry'.

"We made a big deal of going for radiotherapy and tried to make it fun. I always put my make-up on and different friends drove me each day. It was like a day out with a bit of radiotherapy thrown in and always involved coffee and cake.

I also met a group of five ladies on line all diagnosed with breast cancer around the same time as me, we became firm friends and still chat everyday.

We called ourselves the 'Princess Warriors' and we met in September and will meet again in May.

"A positive attitude is so important to get you through. You won't have a great day every day but you can keep finding the positives."

Surviving cancer has made Caroline think about other aspects of her life: "I used to go home and get the wine out but now I rarely drink.

"I look after myself. I want to be 'battle fit' in case I have to fight anything else.

"If cancer comes for me I'll say: 'Don't you dare try to take me away from my kids!'

"Having the massage therapy with CancerCare has been wonderful. In the past I wouldn't make time for myself. Like many people, I'd say 'I'm too busy for that'.

"Now I take time for myself. Stacey Whittle, my massage therapist at CancerCare, made me feel as if I mattered.

"Sometimes the medical staff are so busy and they don't have the time to invest in your mental well being. Stacey always gives me time and makes me feel valued."

Caroline took up lots of different crafts including glass making after she had cancer and now makes what she calls little 'Positivity Boxes'.

"I get little inspirational quotes and put a little rhyme in it and give the boxes to friends and family - or anyone who would benefit from one."
She added: "Since I have had cancer, I try not to say no to things I'd like to do.

"I'm a great believer in living and not just existing."

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