

You are AMAZING

'Little things mean a lot'

How one amazing lady is giving people affected by cancer treats to look forward to via the charity she was inspired to start during her own illness

By Katharine Wootton

Whether it's a meal with family or a weekend break away, we all know how important it is to have nice little treats to look forward to in our lives. And that's never more the case than when we're poorly or going through a tough time.

That's something Fiona Coldron knows all too well, and now dedicates her life to helping gift treats and special experiences to people going through cancer, at a time when they need it most but may be least likely to afford it.

It all started 12 years ago when Fiona received an out-of-the-blue diagnosis of breast cancer. As a single mother of two teenagers, her first thought was how she was going to be able to pay the bills while having her treatment. But finding little financial support available, she had to continue working while undergoing a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The one thing that gave Fiona some much-needed joy during this time was when her new partner, Andy, booked nice things to look forward to.

"As I had chemotherapy in three-week cycles, there was always one week

when I felt particularly poorly and it was then that Andy would tell me he'd booked something nice, like a meal out, for the following week when I'd be better," says Fiona (55). "And that always brightened my mood and gave us both something happy to talk about when often conversations revolved around illness and hospital visits.

As Fiona started to get better and finish treatment, Andy suggested they could set up a charity giving treats to other cancer sufferers. It was a great idea but in the midst of getting life on track, it was put on the back-burner.

Then in 2013 Fiona received the devastating news that the cancer had come back and had spread to her lungs. Sadly, it was incurable. Nevertheless, she began a rollercoaster programme

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of treatment that still continues today to keep the disease at a manageable level, but that meant it was almost impossible to keep working.

It was at this point that Fiona really realised what a ruinous effect cancer can have on finances. Figures from Macmillan suggest four out of five people affected by cancer are, on average, £570 a month worse off because of their cancer diagnosis.



Fiona, with daughter Francesca and partner Andy run their charity together

Fiona and Andy still find time to have fun as a couple

"Businesses have said to us that when they donate money to a charity they often wonder where it goes, but by donating a specific gift to us they know it's directly benefiting someone with cancer," says Fiona. "And the gift they give doesn't have to be expensive - our only requirement is that it's something to look forward to."

Once gifts have been sourced by Fiona and her daughter Francesca, who's also involved in the charity, they appear on the charity's website for people to apply for. Fiona then approves the applications based on need. She'll also always try to offer an alternative gift, or the same gift but at a later date, to those who are unsuccessful.

Something To Look Forward To supports applications from anyone with a primary cancer diagnosis up to one year after their last treatment, and for anyone with a secondary or terminal diagnosis.

And over the years she's been amazed by the reception from people who have received gifts from the charity, who generally say the gifts have given them the chance to feel normal again, focus on something that isn't cancer and make lovely memories with loved ones.

Some have also said the gifts have allowed them to enjoy something they'd previously had to give up because of the financial pressure of their cancer diagnosis.

"The most humbling thing has been when I've learned of people who received gifts from us a few years ago when they were poorly and, now they're better, they're donating gifts or asking their local businesses for donations, which is lovely.

"It's wonderful to know what a difference I can make with these treats, having been there myself, and what a lovely job I have to be able to make people happy with presents."

Fiona decided she wanted to do something to help and set up the charity she and Andy had dreamed up during her first diagnosis - Something to Look Forward To. To date, they've provided over £230,000 worth of gifts and experiences to over 5,300 people.

These gifts have included everything from holiday cottage stays and spa breaks to lovely smellies and handmade jewellery, all donated by businesses and individuals around the country.

To find out more about Something to Look Forward To, including donating or receiving gifts, please visit somethingtolookforwardto.org.uk

