

Marie Curie Helper



Our new service provides one-to-one emotional support, companionship and information about relevant local services to people living with any terminal illness, and their families and carers.

This service is available from the time of a person's terminal prognosis and for their families after bereavement.

“ It’s a very individual service, but I’ll be there for the person I’m supporting and her family when they need me. Having a Helper is like having an extra friend in the family with the knowledge to help. ”

Hilary, a Marie Curie Helper

www.mariecurie.org.uk/helper



Marie Curie Helpers are volunteers who provide company and support to people with a terminal illness, and their families and carers, to help them to cope with more confidence.

Our volunteers visit people in their homes, offering a few hours of their time each week to provide:

- **a listening ear and emotional support**
- **a short break for families and carers from their caring role**
- **information about relevant local services**

Our service is available completely free of charge.

The Marie Curie Helper service was developed in response to feedback from families and carers who had received support from our Marie Curie Nursing Service.

Marie Curie Cancer Care's Director of Volunteering Ruth Bravery says: "People have told us that they would welcome support from someone who is not a healthcare professional or a member of their family – someone who can provide a listening ear, share the emotional and practical burden of their situation, and point them in the right direction for further support and information."

A survey conducted by Marie Curie Cancer Care in 2008 shows that:

- Many people are unaware of the support they can get in their area, such as respite care, especially if they are in the final stages of their lives or are caring for someone who is.
- Carers are often under strain and can find it difficult to cope or continue to provide the care they would like to. This can lead to the people they are caring for going into hospital or a care home when they would rather be at home.
- Carers would like someone to be there for them when the person they are caring for has died and the healthcare professionals who provided the care are no longer around for them.

How a Marie Curie Helper can help

The majority of people with a terminal illness wish to be cared for and to die at home but only one in five people are currently able to do so.

The Marie Curie Helper service aims to improve people's ability to stay in their own homes if they are terminally ill, and for their carers to continue with their caring role.

Our service provides volunteers who are able to give that extra bit of support and information to reduce the strain felt by families who are coping with an illness.



People who are getting our service can rely on a dedicated volunteer to:

- offer their time on a one-to-one basis each week, through home visits or on the phone
- support them for a few months after bereavement

Volunteers for our service undergo a rigorous selection process and training, and they also receive ongoing supervision and support from their local service manager to help them in their role.

We support people with terminal cancer or other life-limiting illnesses such as heart failure, motor neurone disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

People aged 18 or over with any terminal illness can make a request for our service by contacting us directly, or they can ask their health or social care professional or another organisation to refer them.

Support provided to terminally ill people and their families

The first Marie Curie Helper service was established in Somerset in spring 2010. We have now introduced the service in Nottingham, Bristol, Liverpool and East London, and are aiming for further expansion to other parts of the UK in the coming years.

Since we began delivering our service, we have already provided more than 1,500 hours of support to terminally ill people, and their families and carers.

Our first Marie Curie Helper service in Somerset now has over 40 trained volunteers who have supported more than 100 families.

In addition to providing company and a listening ear, Marie Curie Helpers have supported families in a variety of activities. These have included taking them to their hospital or hospice appointments, going for walks, and helping them to source benefit advice from relevant organisations.

Respite support provided by our volunteers has enabled carers to take some time away from their caring role and do something for themselves such as going for a walk, doing their shopping, going to the hairdresser or catching up with friends.

Although some support is provided over the phone, our volunteers usually visit families they are supporting to spend time with them in their homes.

“It’s so rewarding to see what a difference you can make to a family by being there for them just a few hours a week. You can feel the pressure lift just by helping to make sense of things or taking away the burden of a practical problem.”

Janice, a Marie Curie Helper

Jocelyn and Lesley’s story



Jocelyn and Lesley chat over a cup of tea

“It made such a difference to me to have someone there,” says Jocelyn about her Marie Curie Helper, Lesley. Jocelyn’s husband Tony found out he had prostate cancer in the summer of 2009.

Jocelyn says: “He received treatment but then he developed a chest infection that turned out to be something more serious. At this point we were trying to cope on our own but then Lesley came along and she was brilliant.”

Lesley met Tony and Jocelyn in the final weeks of Tony’s life. “When I came round, Tony had just been taken into hospital,” says Lesley. “I was more than happy to take Jocelyn to the hospital to visit, and to sit with her.”

Jocelyn says: “I was a wreck when we first met, but I felt really comfortable with her and we established a rapport straight away. I used to get so uptight going to the hospital, and I don’t know what I’d have done that first day if she hadn’t been coming with me.”

Lesley offered calm, consistent support to Jocelyn. “I’ve provided end of life support for my own family and friends in the past, and I always thought I would like to help others,” she says.

“To offer support in a difficult situation doesn’t just make a difference to the person and their family. It’s a privilege to be involved with people at one of the most significant times in their lives.”

This story was featured in the summer 2011 issue of *Shine On*, a magazine for Marie Curie Cancer Care supporters.

Outcomes and learning

We have commissioned evaluations of the Marie Curie Helper service to help us understand the impact of our service in supporting families, the types of support provided, and the role of the volunteers.

Key findings from the first evaluation report in 2011:

- Marie Curie Helper was very well received by families who were supported by the service. The provision of befriending or social support and a 'listening ear' were identified as essential aspects of the Marie Curie Helper role.



- While the service primarily supported people with terminal cancer, one quarter of people supported had a non-cancer terminal diagnosis.

The families who were supported and interviewed for the evaluation were in agreement with the following positive effects of having a Marie Curie Helper. They were:

- Coping better with daily life
- Having confidence in their volunteer
- Thinking highly of their volunteer
- Satisfied with the timing of visits and the matching with their volunteer
- Feeling comfortable and relaxed when their volunteer visits
- Satisfied with the service
- Satisfied with the responsiveness of the volunteer to their needs

October 2011

www.mariecurie.org.uk/helper

Find out more

Go online to view our short films in which volunteers and families we have supported share their experiences of our service. You can also find our service information leaflets at www.mariecurie.org.uk/helper

Tel: 0845 303 2777

Email: somersethelper@mariecurie.org.uk

Information and support

For more information about our services, advice or to see our video guides with practical information for patients and carers, visit: www.mariecurie.org.uk/patientsandcarers

About Marie Curie Cancer Care

Marie Curie Cancer Care provides free nursing care to patients with terminal cancer and other illnesses in their own homes and at its nine hospices. We also conduct research to find better ways of caring for terminally ill people and develop new, innovative services to support them.

For more information, visit: www.mariecurie.org.uk/healthcare-professionals

Support us

Visit: www.mariecurie.org.uk or phone 0800 716 146 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5.30pm).

“ *The service is very flexible, making it easy in most cases to meet the wide range of needs of families who are coping with a terminal illness. There are so many ways a Marie Curie Helper can help. They can accompany people to hospital appointments or for a walk. They also provide support after bereavement. The service is, in one word, excellent.* ”

Peter, a social worker in Somerset

