

Dear friend,

I'm a patient of Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services. I'm writing to you today to ask you to do something very simple but something so very important. So, I'd really appreciate it if you'd take a few minutes to read this. Thanks so much.

You should probably know that I'm very seriously ill. The only reason I'm mentioning this is because I want you to know how my life has been transformed through the wonderful care I receive in the hospice.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer which led to four surgeries, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. I have cancer in my bones, joint pain, severe problems with inflammation in my legs, mobility problems and other complications.

Yes, I've been through the mill but the good news is that, because of the extraordinary care, love and support I received in the hospice, I am so much more comfortable and able to cope with these challenges.

In fact, when I think of what I've been through, I'm so thankful for all the blessings and benefits the hospice has given me. They've really been there for me. I know they're there for so many people. That's why I'm putting my heart into this appeal because they need our help too.

It's funny looking back. I remember my daughter thought it would be good for me to go to Day Hospice. But I really didn't want to go. To be honest, I was afraid. I thought the hospice was a solemn, quiet and scary place you go to die.

How wrong I was! It's not a place of fear. It's a place of safety. It's not solemn. It's vibrant. It's not quiet – it's filled with chat and laughter.

And most of all, it's not a place to die – it's a place to live – with joy and friendship. I don't know how to properly put it into words – the wonderful, almost-spiritual effect the place has.

The people here have also given me a precious gift – the gift of knowing what to accept and what not to accept. I've accepted my cancer and illnesses but I won't accept that my life just stops because of it.

I was in a bit of a crisis before I came to the hospice. I really did need care and support. But I suppose I didn't admit it – especially to myself. And certainly, my amazing family and friends who support me – they needed a break.

Plus, I've always been independent and self-sufficient. I didn't want them fussing over me and worrying about me.

I availed of Day Hospice and also Respite – and the Community team came to see me at home. You've no idea the difference it made to me physically, mentally and emotionally. Everyone you meet whether it's a nurse, doctor, physio, cleaner or volunteer – they're just so lovely and caring. It's a very rare and precious thing feeling the love and care and understanding. The staff make you feel like you're the centre of their world. Your needs are so important and also no trouble to them.

And the patients too, we have such a bond – maybe it's because we know that we're all seriously-ill. We've all thought about death. And also, because of the therapies and the counselling we get, we feel we can be open about our hurts, and worries and concerns –

medically and emotionally. That is so healing.

Like others in my family – and I suppose like many people out there, I have endured tragedy and disappointment at times throughout my life. Some of the people I loved were lost to the darkness of addiction. There were children in my life who died far too early. You never forget them – you never really let them go - you keep a special place in your heart for them.

The care and support I've received in the hospice has taught me to accept and adapt. Right now, I'm awaiting the results of my latest scans. I'm hopeful that the cancer has stabilised or reduced.

I've made great friendships here. Friends like Catherine – who is living with Motor Neurone Disease. Like me, the first day she came here, she was nervous and worried. I tried to put her mind at ease and chatted about all the great people and services here.

She was grand then and adored the place – and we really hit it off. Recently, I got a card from her thanking me. She told me she had made a friend for life. That meant so much to me.

How do you put a value on a precious gift like that – one of the many gifts the hospice gives us? In fact, it's a gift you give us – because your generosity helps to make this possible.

But right now, there are really practical things they need. Medical devices like infusion pumps to help patients to manage extreme pain; overnight beds for loved-ones, and highly specialised, pressure-sensitive mattresses that prevent damage to skin tissue.

Will you please help? Kind people – like you – who give to the hospice are every bit as special as the amazing people who work there. It's like one family of healing kindness – you and them.

Your big generous heart makes little miracles happen.

In all my health struggles, I've had to dig deep for new energy and strength each time I had a setback. I remember him telling me the cancer had returned. The world seemed to stand still. I knew I had to face into another battle. But my friends and family were there for me. And knowing that the hospice was there for me was a light at the end of the tunnel ...visiting me at home, encouraging me to come to day hospice and when I needed it some respite care.

They have helped me to accept where I am at but to seize life as well and invite back in the joy and love. For family it's so comforting for them to see you in such good form and to know we're getting the best of care. And it gives them a much-deserved and needed break.

Yes that's another priceless gift they give you – please help them to give that gift to so many more people and their families who need their care.

Thank you so much for considering my special request.

Yours sincerely,

Carmel Cush.