

Dunmurry beauty therapist helps cancer patients

Dunmurry beauty therapist Nicola Connolly, who has survived two diagnoses of cancer, says that she wants to help patients by volunteering for Cancer Focus Northern Ireland's nail bar service.

Nicola donates a few hours of her time most months to give manicures and hand massages to patients at Belfast City Hospital.

Because the service is so popular, Cancer Focus NI is now urgently on the look-out for more helping hand volunteers who have at least an NVQ level 2 qualification.

Nicola, who's a qualified beauty and holistic therapist, said: "I set aside a few hours once a month for Cancer Focus NI at the Bridgewater Suite at the City. It's something I love doing.

"I was once a patient at Bridgewater myself. I've had cancer twice, malignant melanoma and then cancer of the lymph nodes, which were removed. I was given the all-clear last March.

"A few months after that I saw the Cancer Focus NI appeal for more volunteers on Facebook. I thought I would love to get involved, having been on the other side of cancer myself. Now, I volunteer for four or five hours once a month or so, depending on how busy I am at work and the charity is very flexible," Nicola said.

"It is such a long day for the patients at hospital. They are often there from early morning to late afternoon, sometimes travelling for hours from home. They can be scared and worried, tired or bored. I know what that's like, so I wanted to help other people in that situation.

"The nail bar is the perfect way I can help and it's a fabulous little treat and a bit of craic for the patients. Sometimes after treatment you are too tired or unwell to go to a nail bar yourself, so we bring it to you. It helps pass those long hours, it's a pamper and a distraction. Over the months you also tend to meet the same people and feel a connexion with them," she said.

"I love to use my skills to do something special for people that they appreciate and enjoy. It's lovely to be able to put a smile on faces and see them leave feeling chirpy. It gives me a warm feeling inside and a huge sense of satisfaction."

Wendy Brown, Assistant Volunteer Co-ordinator, Cancer Focus NI, said: "Volunteers provide much needed relaxation and pampering for people at a very stressful time, as well as giving advice on caring for their nails and skin which can be adversely affected by chemotherapy.

"Volunteering also gives newly qualified therapists a chance to develop skills and build up experience which will be useful when they apply for jobs in the future. They take away a huge amount of personal satisfaction when they see what a difference they make to cancer patients."

She added: "We could not do our valuable work without the help of volunteers so please do come and join in. We really need you."

Full training and support is provided by Cancer Focus NI and volunteers are generally asked to give a few hours of their time one or two weekdays a month, with flexible hours.

If you have a few hours to spare and would like to help, please email volunteer@cancerfocusni.org or call 028 9066 3281 and speak to Wendy.

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