

HARMONY'S STORY



Harmony on an upbeat day in her first year of treatment.

At age 21 I spent Christmas Day 2012 in a tiny room in hospital. It was the day my world changed. The day I was diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma – a rare malignant tumour of the muscles that are attached to the bones.

I don't remember much of the moment when I was told I had cancer. I blacked out. It was like my body went into a state of total shock. I was given just a twenty percent chance of survival and few treatment options. There wasn't much hope.

Luckily my family was there to help me take the blow. My family mean everything to me and they became my number one motivation, giving me the courage to fight.

When CanTeen came into my life, they truly became a vital extension of my support network. I don't know how I would have coped without them. They've been there for me and my family every step of the way. CanTeen is the only place where young people living with cancer can go and feel like they belong. There's no judgement and no one treats you any differently.

CanTeen understands that just because someone has cancer, it doesn't make them any less of a person

and it doesn't mean that the normal day-to-day reality of life as a young person goes away. You still have relationships and studies and ambitions. It's not just about supporting a patient in hospital. CanTeen is about getting you back into the real world and making sure your whole family is coping with the realities of your cancer fight.

My diagnosis certainly was not the Christmas gift I had been hoping for. I went through chemotherapy every week for a year and radiation for eight weeks during that time. I did what I could to counteract the side effects of hair loss, vomiting and fatigue through exercise and healthy eating. It was hard. Sometimes I got to the point where I just didn't want to do it anymore.

Before I got sick, I had heard of CanTeen but I never knew what it was truly about. The incredible thing about CanTeen is that the support they offer is tailored to each young person's cancer journey. I've enclosed our latest newsletter that will tell you more about how they do it.

I honestly do not have enough fingers to count the number of times CanTeen has put a smile on my face or the ways they have helped me. They've helped give me mental strength and given me the chance to talk to people who understand what's going on in my head. CanTeen helped me release the burden I'd been carrying on my shoulders since that diagnosis on Christmas Day in 2012. They gave me hope and strength and unconditional love.

I am now 24 years old. I am alive and I am well. I'm also in my final year as a CanTeener and I plan to make the most of it, giving back to the organisation that has given me so much. I know my cancer journey is not over but now I can help and that is one of the best parts of CanTeen, helping other CanTeeners as they start similar battles. I hope I'll be able to show them the same strength and love that CanTeeners have given to me.

CanTeen is the family that no one ever wants to join but, once you're in, they truly do change your life for the better. Please donate to CanTeen this Christmas and to the young people like me spending their first night in a hospital bed.