

A big thank you to everyone who donates to the Hospice – by Maggie Newbold (Day Hospice Patient)

I'm sorry I can't say "thank you" in person for the help you have given to the hospice. However, I would like to tell you something of myself and what St Mary's means to me.

I became ill 25 years ago with what proved to be a hitherto unknown heart defect. My children were all young, I was nursing my mother who'd had a major stroke, and I worked one night a week at a Nursing Home. Suddenly I found myself unable to do very much at all, and although latterly I have been a bit fitter, the damage to my heart caused my kidneys to fail. Having already had a skin lymphoma, a stroke and epilepsy I was not my former self – dashing around and getting things done!

Although we live nearby in Stirchley I had not heard of St Mary's Hospice until my GP decided my husband Mike and I would benefit from some respite care. A date was arranged, but true to form, I became ill and so came to the hospice via Selly Oak and the Q E hospitals.

I found myself in a haven! Lots of staff all of whom seemed pleased to be doing their job. Good food and loving care did their part in making me feel better. I'd had a bad fall whilst in hospital, but the staff here accepted my purple face and bloodshot eyes as perfectly normal, and I made many friendships which have lasted to this day.

When I went home, looking less like a make-up room disaster, I couldn't stop talking about St Mary's. I was asked if I would like to come to the Day Hospice each week. I took to it like a duck to water! I've been attending for about 2 years now, and have met some wonderful people – staff, volunteers, and fellow patients. We have such a good time together. I started looking after the plants which I still enjoy doing. My pantry at home is full of pots of bulbs awaiting transfer to the Hospice.

We are helping to make blankets, hats and jackets for premature babies. We may have problems but we still find ways to be helpful to others. We do 'gentle' exercises including moving our feet like penguins or pigeons. I sometimes have to stop because I find I am 'puffin'! We also have quizzes and memory games. Last week we were all on a desert island and had to decide what to wear, take with us, and who we'd like to accompany us (suggestions ranged from Clark Gable to family members). The whole group enjoy their day out and newcomers are welcomed and quickly become part of the group.

We don't dwell on our illnesses, but feel free to enjoy ourselves in the company of others, all of whom are in the same 'boat'. Often you go feeling a bit low, but it's not long before we're all laughing and we're so glad we made the effort.

I've also benefited from treatments such as reflexology and head massage. A trained hairdresser comes every other week and makes a lovely job of some of the ladies' hair – really boosting their morale. We had tremendous fun helping to make a DVD about St Mary's which will be used by GP's to encourage patients they feel would benefit from the Hospice's services. I have also been greatly helped by Social Workers and my husband is currently seeing one of them whilst I am in the Day Hospice. Everyone who works here is cheerful and they always seem to have time to chat.

I am so very grateful for all that the Hospice has given me and I know it is only possible for this to happen because kind and generous people like you have given the funds needed to help those of us who need St Mary's. Thank you from all of us here at Birmingham St Mary's Hospice.