

## Headline: Jacqueline's story

### Sub: The support from Carers First has been vital for Waltham Forest mum after life took an unexpected turn

Jacqueline never considered herself a carer. Looking after her husband during his ill-health and supporting her teenage son was for her "just a part of having a family and being a mum."

However, when Jacqueline's doctor referred her to Carers First, a charity that helps people providing unpaid care to family or friends, she was for the first time able to speak with people in similar situations who understood and empathised with her situation.

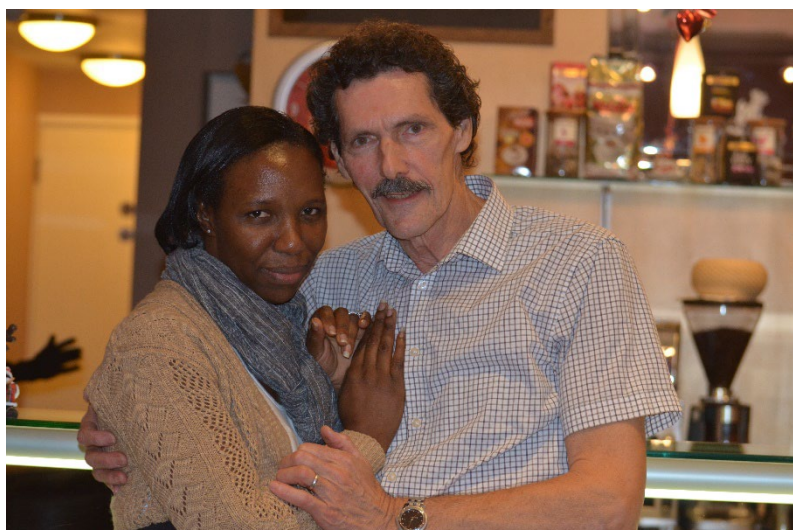
Attending Carers First's talks, clubs, and virtual meetups gave Jacqueline the confidence to recognise that she was doing her difficult job well. Carers First enabled Jacqueline to learn about the support available to her, as well as helping her build long-lasting friendships along the way.

Jacqueline, who lives in Waltham Forest, was looking forward to her life with Nicholas when they married in 2011. But six months after their wedding Nicholas became ill with ulcerative colitis; he had an operation which removed 80% of his colon, lost half his body weight and was bedridden for the following year and a half during his recovery. Then in 2015, Nicholas was diagnosed with and treated for prostate cancer. Throughout this time caring for Nicholas, Jacqueline has also been raising the youngest of their three sons, who is now seventeen years old.

Jacqueline says: "It has been a traumatic, turbulent ride for me, my husband and our children. I do not get the luxury of having respite or time off, so finding time for myself is amazingly difficult."

But through Carers First, Jacqueline has made new, "accommodating, kind, supportive and funny" friends who are also carers. Jacqueline says that her friends have "helped me understand how important I am to my husband, our children, our community and to myself."

Jacqueline's friends have encouraged her to take time out from her caring responsibilities, helping her to appreciate the importance of "recharging and remaining fit to care for Nicholas."



This has led to new hobbies and unexpected sources of happiness. Jacqueline says: "I've discovered that I can sew, and that I am brilliant at sewing. In sewing I have found my happy, restful place, and learned how to sew patchwork quilts, which I love!"

As well as friendship, Jacqueline has learned about the carer's grants that both she and Nicholas are entitled to. In 2021 she was awarded a grant which she was awarded on the condition she spends it entirely on herself.

Before her introduction to Carers First, Jacqueline says: "I didn't know I was entitled to any support as a carer, or that there are people looking out for carers health, safety, and wellbeing."

Jacqueline advises anyone who is in a similar situation to her to contact Carers First, which has been especially helpful during the pandemic, where she has at times found accessing vital healthcare and advice difficult. Her network of fellow carers offered her advice and guidance: "I was able to cope through the help and support of the group chats with other carers."

What would Jacqueline say to anyone who is reading this and looking after loved ones? "I used to think that being labelled a 'carer' would increase the pressure on me. But I have been encouraged and gained confidence in myself. The support from Carers First has been a real blessing for my family."

Waltham Forest Council works with Carers First to help and support people caring for others in the borough. For more information visit: <https://www.carersfirst.org.uk/waltham-forest/welcome/>

The Council in partnership with NHS and Carers First is undertaking research into the support available to unpaid adult carers; please help us by completing the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/WFcarersplanning>

