

The worst year of my life!

"In March 2007, when my wife was 32 weeks pregnant, she discovered a lump in her breast. To our horror, it was diagnosed as cancerous. I have never felt so shocked and helpless in all my life.

Both in our mid-thirties, we had two little girls already and were eagerly awaiting the latest addition to our family. I had started a new job six weeks earlier and we had moved out of our house whilst it was being renovated.

Two weeks after hearing the news, our beautiful son was delivered prematurely by caesarean section, so that my wife could undergo a mastectomy. After analysing the tumour and breast tissue, the doctors told us the dreadful news that the cancer was advanced and had spread to my wife's lymph nodes. The prognosis was not good. Our lives had been turned upside down and the news just got worse and worse. Amidst all this turmoil, we had to make ends meet, manage a major building project, keep my wife's business running and care for our babies. Friends and family rallied round and helped where they could.

Get well wishes arrived alongside baby congratulation cards and it felt so surreal to mix those feelings. There were times when we felt like we had hit rock bottom – my wife never seemed to get a break - her wounds wouldn't heal and the chemotherapy literally ravaged her body from head to toe as it went about its business destroying every growing cell in its path. When her ability to fight infection dropped dangerously low, she even contracted MRSA during one of her spells in hospital.

I had no choice but to reduce my working hours to part-time so that I could give my family the care they needed and try to reduce my own stresses. It was all about prioritising. My employers were very supportive, but I could not expect that to last forever. The local council and a few charities helped financially as I was struggling to keep so many plates spinning at the same time.

Somewhere in all of this, a leaflet arrived from CABA - I immediately contacted them to see if they could help. I filled in the forms, but had not expected to hear anything more. To my surprise, a Case Officer contacted me and explained, in a friendly, sensitive and sympathetic way, that our case would go before the Trustee Panel. The Case Officer was honest and said it was unlikely that we would receive ongoing financial assistance as our income was above the level at which CABA would normally provide support; however, he said he would do what he could.

Around the time my brave wife was facing her 8th round of chemotherapy, (and with the prospect of radiotherapy immediately following) our Case Officer phoned to ask if he could come and visit us. He arrived the following week with a bouquet of flowers and the news that CABA would pay for a much needed break for all of us. This was the first piece of good news we had received in a long time. We were very excited and overwhelmed by this generosity. My wife and I spent a weekend away in a lovely hotel in Cardiff, which was relaxing and therapeutic. We have also booked a family holiday at Centre Parc for April, which we are all looking forward to – thanks to CABA and its generous benefactors. At Christmas, we received a fabulous hamper quite out of the blue - this gesture lifted our spirits once more.

I am pleased to report that almost a year down the line, things are returning to something like normality - though I am not sure quite what "normal" is anymore. My wife still has to face more surgery, but her wounds are almost healed, her energy and hair have returned and our building work is finished. I have started my own practice which is flourishing and our outlook is much brighter. We are so proud of ourselves and our lovely children, who have also coped remarkably well with Mummy's illness. Above all we are determined to make the most of life. In the summer we are having the biggest party imaginable!



CABA really gave us something to look forward to, and we can enjoy spending precious, quality time together as a family, recharging our batteries and appreciating the simple things in life.

We would like to say a very big 'thank you' to everyone who has made a donation to CABA, and to the staff of the Association for offering a helping hand when the chips were down."

Mr & Mrs R, Bristol