

Volunteer's Commitment to Charity Earns National Praise

2 years ago



A volunteer who lost her best friend to cancer and dedicated herself to fundraising for vital research has earned a national award.

Jo Jackson, 53, who chairs the annual Relay For Life event in York, has been named a Cancer Research UK Honorary Fellow in appreciation of her exceptional loyalty and support for the cause.

Jo began raising money for the charity following the death of her friend, Larna Cooper, at age 34. She's motivated by the knowledge that research brings improved outcomes for cancer patients such as Larna.

Jo said: "My best friend lost her battle to breast cancer 21 years ago and I've been supporting Cancer Research UK since then.

"The reason I do what I do is I really believe research has come on so much that Larna would be here to tell the tale if she had been diagnosed today."

The charity's annual Flame of Hope Awards acknowledge remarkable efforts in volunteering made by people from all walks of life and 2023 marks 20 years of the recognition programme.

Jo, who lives in Strensall near York, is already the holder of a Flame of Hope Award for Corporate Charity Champion of the Year, which she received in 2016. Jo is a Senior Health and Safety Manager for the global food service company Compass Group UK, she has supported colleagues to raise £2.66 million for Cancer Research UK as part of a corporate partnership.

She was attending the Flame of Hope Awards ceremony in London when she first heard about Relay For

Life. The 24-hour fundraising event, which takes place in venues throughout the UK, is for teams of family and friends who come together and take it in turns to walk around a track. The family friendly event includes music and all-age entertainment.

The idea immediately appealed to Jo, who was put in touch with her local fundraising manager Rachel Speight-McGregor. After 18 months of planning, Relay For Life York was launched in 2018. Funds raised have already topped £260,000.

“I love Relay For Life,” said Jo. “Until you’ve done it, you can’t understand what it’s all about. It’s just going from strength to strength.”

Her family is also involved with the event. Husband Tim helps with logistics and their daughter, Samantha, runs the Instagram account.

Jo was presented with the Honorary Fellowship award on 30th March at a ceremony in Colwick Hall Hotel, by Simon Ledsham, Director of Fundraising.

Cancer Research UK’s chief executive, Michelle Mitchell, said: “Thanks to the dedication of almost 30,000 volunteers supporting us right across the charity – from fundraising and increasing awareness of cancer to helping run shops and events – Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of progress that has seen cancer survival in the UK double over the past 40 years.

“The Flame of Hope Awards give us the opportunity to celebrate and say thank you to those who have made outstanding contributions, and we’re proud to have presented almost 2,000 awards since the first ceremony back in 2003.”

The 2023 Flame of Hope Awards are taking place at seven locations across the UK throughout March and April. Jo is among 140 individuals and groups to be recognised.

Cancer Research UK spokesperson for North Yorkshire Michaela Robinson-Tate said: “These awards are our way of honouring incredible people like Jo who give their time freely to raise money for research and promote greater awareness of the disease, and yet ask for nothing in return.

“Time volunteered is not ordinary time. It’s time infused with passion, drive and determination. It’s time honouring lost family members and friends. Or extra time gained thanks to advances in research.

“Every step we make towards beating cancer relies on every pound, every hour and every person.

“That’s why, with volunteer numbers having dropped significantly due to the pandemic, we’re encouraging people to get involved and start their journey to a potential Flame of Hope Award now.

“Volunteering is a great way to meet new people and learn new skills and committing just one hour a week can help make a difference to people affected by this devastating disease.”

Jo has volunteered at other events, including Race for Life, the London Marathon and collection days. During lockdown, she helped to raise more than £4,000 by collecting bags of donations and she organises an afternoon tea for cancer survivors.

She said: “Larna’s bravery facing cancer is what spurs me on to fundraise and I want other people to have

new memories to look forward to with their loved ones, so I'm determined to help more people survive.

"I'm so honoured to receive this fellowship. I always say I don't do it for recognition; the recognition is very nice but it is to raise awareness and much needed funds. Cancer is not a death sentence because research has come on so much. And that's why we need to keep raising awareness and funding for vital research"

Find out more about opportunities to volunteer for Cancer Research UK at: cruk.org.uk/volunteering