# Press Release | 11 March 2025

**Ballet at 80: How one cancer patient found strength, confidence and joy through dance**

Two people sitting on a yellow couch

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**At 80 years old, Jenny Baker has defied the expectations of both age and illness, turning to ballet and chair aerobics to boost her energy and confidence after being diagnosed with a rare, incurable form of blood cancer.**

What began as part of a hospital fitness programme at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King’s Lynn (QEH) has now transformed into a passionate pursuit for the octogenarian that has revitalised her in ways she never expected.

Jenny, who lives in Watlington near King's Lynn, was diagnosed with Waldenström's Macroglobulinemia (WM) in 2020, a slow-growing blood cancer that affects plasma cells. But rather than let her diagnosis define her, she took a bold step in 2024 by enrolling in the Physical Activity Assessment Programme (PAAP) organised by The QEH’s Cancer Wellbeing and Support Centre.

The eight-week fitness initiative, funded by the QEHKL Charity and delivered by Alive West Norfolk, focuses on low-impact exercises to improve energy levels, mental wellbeing, and physical health for cancer patients. Remarkable feedback from patients shows it is redefining cancer care helping them regain strength, confidence, and control over their health no matter the prognosis.

To date 141 patients have participated in the programme over the past three years. Some were moving forwards following surgery, and or treatment, others were still undergoing intensive treatment with some facing a terminal diagnosis. All feedback received showed they were unanimous in stating the fitness sessions had helped them.

While the programme offers gentle exercises including chair based, it is ballet that has captured Jenny's heart.

A group of women doing exercise

AI-generated content may be incorrect.“Ballet might be a challenge, but I’m determined to keep going,” she says, now attending ballet classes at her local village hall. Each session, she stretches and strengthens her body, pushing through the limitations of age and illness and bolstering her sense of pride and accomplishment.

“It’s been such a rewarding challenge,” she says. “I never thought I’d be doing this at my age, but it’s brought me so much joy.”

Jenny, who lost both of her parents to cancer – her father in the 1960s to lung cancer and her mother in the 1980s to metastatic breast cancer – is no stranger to the impact cancer has on life.

Jenny described the eight-week programme as "extremely good," saying it not only gave her a boost in confidence but also connected her with a supportive community. “The social aspect of the programme was incredible,” Jenny said. “It gave me the confidence to keep moving and to try new things.”

Pippa Street, Chief Nurse at The QEH, said: "Jenny’s journey is a testament to the incredible resilience and strength that our patients show in the face of adversity. It’s been wonderful to witness how the programme has not only helped her regain her physical strength but also significantly boosted her emotional wellbeing.

“The confidence she has gained from connecting with others and her determination to continue with ballet, highlights the powerful role exercise plays in supporting both mind and body. Jenny’s story is truly inspiring, and we are so proud of her progress."

Vicky Mitchell, Patient Information and Support Manager at the Cancer Wellbeing and Support Centre, added: "By working together with Alive, we’re able to offer a range of exercises that have a lasting impact on our patients' emotional health and overall wellbeing, giving them the support they need to lead fuller, more active lives despite their diagnoses."

Tommy Goode, Head of Performance and Development at Alive West Norfolk, echoes the importance of this approach: “Jenny’s story reminds us of the profound impact that exercise and community can have on recovery.”

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**Notes to editors;**

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For media enquiries only, please contact Communications Team, [media.enquiries@qehkl.nhs.uk](mailto:media.enquiries@qehkl.nhs.uk) or 01553 613216.

For all other enquiries, please contact QEH Switchboard on 01553 613613.