

VOLUNTEER of the WEEK

I help people find HOPE

Leonie is doing all she can to support people with cancer **Leonie Young, Brisbane, Qld**

We like our volunteers to have first-hand experience with cancer so patients can relate to them,' the representative explained.

It was 1987, and I was looking into volunteering for the Cancer Council.

Living in Brisbane with my husband, Tim, and our daughters, Erin, then four, and Vanessa, 18 months, I wasn't ready to return to work but wanted to do something to help others.

And after recently losing my friend Beryl and my grandfather Joe to cancer, visiting cancer patients in hospital to support them was something I was interested in. But I understood how patients might prefer to speak to a cancer survivor, who could fully relate.

'No problem,' I said.

Little did I know that just a few months later I'd qualify for the role.

That June, I felt a large lump in my breast and was diagnosed with breast cancer. Only in my 30s, I had a mastectomy and went through chemo.

It was a year before my treatment was over and I was ready to move forward with my life.

But sadly, I lost my sister, Joanne, 38, to brain cancer soon after.

So in 1990, I began volunteering. Sitting beside newly-diagnosed people, I hoped seeing how well I was doing would give them hope about their own outcomes.

Being diagnosed so young, I also volunteered with the Cancer Council to raise awareness of younger women with breast cancer, and began speaking to younger patients at Wesley Hospital's Choices Cancer Support Centre. That led



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me to a job as a Choices' Peer Support Co-Ordinator, but my voluntary work continued.

I want to help cancer patients as much as I can, I reasoned.

In 1998, Breast Cancer Trials started a Consumer Advisory Panel (CAP) made up of survivors from all walks of life, who shared first-hand experiences to help researchers develop clinical trials that were sympathetic to the needs of patients.

In time, I became the panel's chair and when my term was coming to an end, in 2017, I was asked to join another organisation's panel.

Passionate about making the experience of patients trialling new cancer treatments as smooth and supported as possible, I said yes, and signed up to support the Australian and New Zealand Urogenital and Prostate Cancer Trials Group (ANZUP). ANZUP supports

research and clinical trials for penile, testicular, kidney, bladder and prostate cancer.

I survived breast cancer thanks to the patients before me who participated in clinical trials and helped develop the treatments we have now. So I appreciate those doing the same for a new generation of people affected by cancer.

I work with researchers to finesse things such as the language they use, so that patients don't feel overwhelmed or intimidated, and help make questionnaires more patient friendly.

'Could we combine some tests so it's less taxing?' we'll suggest.

Cancer treatment isn't perfect, but it's better today than it's ever been.

Along with the researchers from ANZUP, I'm dedicated to the development of future treatments that mean even more cancer patients become cancer survivors. ● Visit anzup.org.au and their fundraising campaign website belowthebelt.org.au

ASTOLD TO SAMANTHA IRELAND

Me at an ANZUP event



Tim and me



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