

A tribute to Chris Christensen from Cancer Voices

Many people get cancer, but few have raised a voice so effectively on our behalf as Chris Christensen. Chris is well known, well-loved, well respected and was influential as a cancer advocate at the local, state and national level.



I have known Chris since 2013, the Cancer Voices chapter of her life. I'll start with some tributes received from Chris's Cancer Voices friends & colleagues from across Australia .

Chris was smart, funny, patient, strong, loving, kind, determined and darned effective. A shining light of mission and passion in the consumer world. She loved her family and cared about her friends and colleagues with all her heart. (Thank you Deb, that's perfect!)

Chris was a remarkable woman and will be remembered for her capability and determination to make a difference for so many, whilst coping with her own health challenges. (Shirley)

Chris was such a force for 'getting things done'. She will be very much missed and fondly remembered. (Emma)

In 2013 Chris 'discovered' and joined Cancer Voices South Australia, a survivor-led volunteer organisation whose purpose is to raise an independent voice to influence better outcomes for people affected by cancer. Chris had modest advocacy ambitions including holistic, high quality patient-centred treatment and ongoing care, consumer voices and engagement in all aspects of cancer services and policy; better access and equity; cancer research and public education about cancer. It was Cancer Voices focus on 'good systems not just good luck or chance' and focus on 'wellness not just illness' that really resonated with Chris from the outset, and drew her to us, saying she felt she'd 'found her tribe' of like-minded people.

In 2015 Chris established a Cancer Voices walking group in Belair National Park on every Tuesday morning. We continue to walk each week.

For Chris, the walking group was also vital as the Cancer Voices office-space for us to discuss issues, share information, make decisions, talk about advocacy and research-related things, and seek advice from our 'brains trust' of co-walker community advisors. PhD student Imogen regularly walked with us, learning a lot by osmosis from hearing us talk and access to an 'ongoing focus group' of advisors.

These walking group catch-ups provided the element of fun and connection and friendship that made the grinding, lonely hard work of advocacy sustainable. Don't underestimate grassroots social contacts and connection.

Chris became more involved as a consumer rep on a number of projects, many involving Prof



Bogda Koczwara and the Flinders Cancer Centre where Chris had her treatment. To mention just a few of these activities:

- The 'Return to Work after Cancer' website resources project,
- SA Statewide Survivorship Framework project,
- South Australian Cancer Services committees related to governance, safety, quality and chemotherapy standards.
- through Cancer Voices 'survivors as teachers' program Chris 'told her story' in presentations to medical professionals, students and community groups.
- on the planning committee for 2 national Survivorship Conferences in 2017 & 2019 presenting, co-chairing sessions and in poster presentations,
- then more recently the Australian Roadmap for Digital Health in Cancer Care,
- as consumer advisor to SA Pathology Services.

(note - each of these projects often spanning more than 2yrs)

- and Chris also contributed a short vignette for a cancer nursing textbook in the Chapter on "Care of the person with a chronic disease"

From 2017 Chris stepped up to lead Cancer Voices SA, bringing her professional skills to this role. She also became more involved as a consumer advisor in cancer research, and reviewer for allocating ovarian cancer grant funding.

Cancer didn't define Chris, despite Chris actively redefining survivorship to include 'living with a cancer that couldn't be cured'.

Chris forged on despite illness as her cancer came back again and again. She always fought back. Unbelievable how Chris defied 'cancer gravity' so many times. Chris was a fighter to the very end, although she didn't at all like the 'battle' analogy for cancer, but I don't know how else to describe the strength of will power and tenacity that Chris exhibited. Trevor tried to moderate her efforts sometimes when he could see she was overdoing it, but I remember the wry smile, of Chris resisting this with a shrug: 'well, good luck with that darling'. Chris was unstoppable when she was on a mission.

I can't do justice to all the facets of Chris we loved, admired, enjoyed ... her smile, fairness, generosity, energy, capability, insights, ability to say things in a way that made people listen and helped people understand

Dear Chris – cancer isn't fair. You had so much more you wanted to do, time **we all wish you'd had**. You won't be forgotten. Your legacy lives on especially in those you have mentored and influenced and 'changed' as a result of meeting you. Thank you Chris.

Chris was a passionate and effective advocate - constantly striving to improve cancer care systems, services, inform research, policy and clinical practice. she led by example, was a lovely person,an amazing lady, ,,,,

Her advocacy roles on numerous projects helped shape new understandings of 'cancer survivors' - and the value of our capabilities, insights and participation.

Julie Marker, Cancer Voices SA 12 Nov 2020

Cancer Voices SA is an independent 100% volunteer organisation, *Raising a voice for people affected by cancer.*
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