# Cornwall family raises funds after rare cancer diagnosis changes student’s life



A 19-year-old woman from Cornwall has faced an exceptionally rare cancer diagnosis shortly before starting university, an event that has significantly altered the course of her life. Becca Emes, from St Ives, was diagnosed with a stage four Wilms tumour on 3 September 2024, just three weeks before she was due to move over 300 miles away to begin her higher education.

Wilms tumour is a form of kidney cancer that typically affects very young children, usually under the age of three. The diagnosis in an adult is extremely uncommon, with medical professionals estimating the chance at one in five million, according to Becca's father, Mark Emes.

Becca’s initial symptoms were stomach pain and bloating, but the eventual diagnosis came as a shock to the family. Following the diagnosis, Becca underwent chemotherapy and surgery at a hospital in Bristol to remove the tumour and her left kidney. The operation took place just before Christmas; however, surgeons discovered that the cancer had spread to her lungs, identifying two small tumours there.

Despite these challenges, Becca was able to return home for Christmas to recuperate. She is currently continuing chemotherapy aimed at treating the tumours found in her lungs. Speaking to CornwallLive, her father said: “It was like having the wind knocked out of your sails. From our perspective, you never expect to hear those words come out about your own child. There are illnesses but you never think it’s going to be one of your own, so it took a bit of getting used to."

Mark also reflected on his daughter’s resilience throughout the ordeal: “Becca has good days and bad days. I think anyone in that situation would be the same. She takes it in her stride as much as she can and I’m very proud of the way she has handled it because I can certainly say at her age, I don’t know if I would have handled it in the same way. She’s very pragmatic about it and it’s a lot to deal with.”

Fortunately, Becca's university has deferred her entry for a year, and she plans to start her stage management course in September 2025, pending her recovery.

Motivated by the support his family received, Mark is planning to participate in the Isle of Wight Challenge on 3 May 2025. Alongside three teammates, he will be trekking 106 kilometres within 24 hours to raise funds for the charity Young Lives vs Cancer. This charity provided Becca's family with accommodation at Sam’s House in Bristol during her treatment. Sam’s House offers free lodging for families to be close to children undergoing cancer treatment, significantly easing financial pressures related to accommodation and travel.

Mark explained the importance of this support: “Sam’s House is a home away from home and it has individual rooms and a communal area for teas and coffees but you can stay there free of charge… For some of the families going to Bristol, on average they would be at Sam’s House for 40 nights, which would normally cost £60 a night. This support means a great deal in reducing financial strain during a difficult time.”

Training for the challenge has involved walking along Cornwall’s coast path, and Mark said he feels “quite good” about the upcoming event. The team initially set a fundraising target of £2,000 but are now close to raising £10,000. They have expressed gratitude for the donations and the ongoing support from Young Lives vs Cancer and healthcare staff at the Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro.

Young Lives vs Cancer offers specialist support for families affected by childhood cancer, including free accommodation near hospitals, grants to manage the increasing costs associated with cancer, and social work services. Last year, the charity supported 93 families from Cornwall, with Bristol being the nearest treatment centre. Families stayed an average of 40 days at the charity’s homes, saving thousands in accommodation and travel expenses.

Katherine Sawyer, fundraising and engagement manager for Cornwall and Devon at Young Lives vs Cancer, praised the fundraising effort: “The challenge Mark and the team have set out to achieve is incredible. We are in awe of their amazing efforts and can’t thank them enough for their support during such a difficult time. For every step the team takes, and every kilometre they cover, they will be raising vital funds and awareness for Young Lives vs Cancer to be there for children and young people at a time when they need it most.”

Mark and his family’s story highlights both the rarity of adult Wilms tumour and the supportive measures in place for families affected by childhood cancer. The fundraiser underscored the community effort to assist those facing similar challenges.

For those interested, donations to support the fundraising efforts can be made via the team’s JustGiving page.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/wilms-tumor/about/newly-diagnosed.html> - This URL supports the information about Wilms tumor being a type of kidney cancer typically affecting young children and its rarity in adults.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/wilms-tumour/> - This link provides additional information on Wilms tumour, including its common age groups affected and the symptoms like stomach pain and bloating.
* <https://younglivesvscancer.org.uk/what-we-do/> - This URL corroborates the specialist support provided by Young Lives vs Cancer for families affected by childhood cancer, including accommodations near hospitals.
* <https://www.justgiving.com/> - This platform is mentioned as the medium through which donations can be made to support fundraising efforts like Mark's for Young Lives vs Cancer.
* <https://www.islandbreaks.co.uk/isle-of-wight-challenge/> - This link relates to the Isle of Wight Challenge event, which Mark is participating in to raise funds for Young Lives vs Cancer.