

Seeds of love



Alexander Canton,
with his mother
Karen Canton

The Pindara Private Hospital nursing team, together with some special patients and loved ones, prove little things can make a big difference

A patient's journey through cancer invariably touches the lives of those around them, sometimes in surprising and positive ways. Family, friends and even the medical teams often relate stories of their own personal journeys that involve an individual patient. This was especially true for 17-year-old Alexander Canton, his mother Karen Canton, and the Pindara Private Hospital nursing team. While Karen committed to supporting her son through his treatment for Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, she did not foresee the unexpected turn her own life would take as her passion for gardening brought joy to others; nor that a trainee nurse would be instrumental in making her son's wildest dream come true.

Alexander's journey began when he was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma after being admitted to the Pindara Private Hospital Paediatric unit for further investigation of a fractured neck. From the paediatrics ward, Alexander was transferred into the Pindara oncology ward (2D) to begin chemotherapy treatment under the medical care of Gold Coast haematology and oncology specialists.

In hospital, the days were long. The 2D nursing staff went above and beyond to make the time more pleasant. There was Gisele, the

oncology ward nurse unit manager of 2D, whom Alexander nicknamed 'Queen of Chemo,' and Julie, who organised a small celebration for the patient in the next room who was not well enough to attend her own daughter's wedding. And there was the trainee nurse Melissa, who as fate would have it, would be instrumental in making Alexander's wish come true.

While enjoying a chat and a cup of tea with Julie and Melissa, Karen Canton mentioned that Alexander was an undergraduate at Griffith University studying film and screen media production and that his boyhood hero - film director, producer and screenwriter, Sir Peter Jackson - had inspired him to pursue this career path. Karen told Melissa that when Alexander was in primary school in Wellington, New Zealand, he and his brother Samuel had been on a class trip to Mr Jackson's film set of *King*



Kong, and since that moment Alexander had a burning desire to meet the legendary director. Thinking nothing more about their discussion, Karen was later surprised to receive a call from Melissa. Melissa's mother had a friend with connections in the movie industry and Melissa thought this friend might be able to arrange a meeting with Mr Jackson for Alexander.

Karen continued to focus on her son and rarely left Alexander's bedside. She slept each night in the chair beside his bed and spent her days by his side or in the ward. Never one to sit still, Karen soon found she needed something to fill the long days, especially when Alexander was in isolation.

Always a green thumb, Karen soon found herself drawn to the 2D courtyard garden which she noticed needed some attention. At night she secretly began trimming plants, and before long family members of other patients in the ward noticed her work and started making special requests. Happy to brighten their day, Karen recruited her husband, Terry Canton, to help. Terry purchased brightly coloured potted flowers and Karen placed them outside their window. She soon realised her plants were brightening the day for all in 2D. The patients responded and thanked her.

One lady, whom Karen had never seen out of isolation, approached her to say, "I am going home - there's nothing more they can do for me. But I just wanted to say 'thank you' for all that you have done. You have no idea how much

joy your garden has brought me."

Thankfully Alexander's news was better. In March 2013, he was discharged from Pindara and later officially declared to be in remission. Trainee nurse Melissa's connections came good and Karen received a call to say that Mr Jackson would love to host Alexander on the set of the filming of *The Hobbit*. Alexander's wish had been granted.

But for Karen the journey with 2D wasn't over. She quietly continued to care for the 2D garden to brighten the days of patients in the Pindara oncology ward.

Today, Karen has been given access to come and go to 2D as she pleases. Every time she enters the ward people come out to thank her, and as she walks down the hallway, she can hear little claps coming from the rooms. Even the terminally ill and patients in isolation rooms who cannot come out have put signs up on their doors saying 'Thank you' and 'I love what you're doing in the garden.' 

By Robbie Falconer

