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Title:

Chino Hills breast cancer survivor, teacher, and mom gives back to patients

Breast cancer survivor Kim Carew founded Peace, Love and Tote in February of 2018 run by donations to make the chemotherapy journey easier for patients in the town of Chino Hills, Calif. by distributing bags filled with essentials for going through treatment.

Living in the community as a teacher for 18 years, Carew said her life changed when she was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer, a rare and aggressive form of breast cancer.

“My first reaction was just sheer panic,” Carew said. “The biggest fear for me in the whole world was to be diagnosed with cancer.”

However, Carew said she tried to keep busy throughout her battle with cancer with both work and family, never missing even one of her son’s college football games.

“I do better mentally, if I’m busy... I decided to work through it,” Carew said.

Carew entered full remission from breast cancer in 2015, and about a year or two after, Carew started handing out tote bags full of essentials including a blanket, reusable water cup, socks, coloring books and supplies, and much more to women in the community of Chino Hills diagnosed with breast cancer. Patients are able to request a tote on the foundation’s website as well as donate to help fund the tote bags and supplies in the bags.

Pam Phelan, a survivor of breast cancer, said Carew began distributing supplies out of pocket before creating her foundation and expanding its outreach.

“When I was diagnosed Kim hadn’t started the foundation per se...she was doing this for multiple people, really out of pocket at the time just out of the kindness of her heart from her own experience,” Phelan said.

As Carew found more patients in need of her totes, she decided to create her own foundation in February of 2018 to give back called “Peace, Love, and Tote.” Carew said her struggles with her first chemotherapy appointment inspired her to create her own foundation.

“First of all, I got there, and I was absolutely freezing. I realized, I’m going to be here for six hours, what am I going to do for six hours? I had nothing to do,” Carew said. “Then every time I went to a to a appointment, I had all this stuff I had to write down. So I needed a journal, the medications they were giving me.”

Lisa Stout – who was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in 2020 – said Carew’s totes were well designed and thoughtful.

“Everything she packed in there was definitely with love and detailed... it was truly so thought well thought out... it’s a bag of comfort,” Stout said.

Stout said she not only received a tote to help her through her cancer journey, but also gained a close friend in Carew, who was able to guide her through difficult times.

“It was a comfort knowing that I know Kim, she lives in our city, and that it was a reminder to me that somebody cared,” Stout said.

Michele Fischer-Olsen, a survivor of ductile and lobular breast cancer, added that Carew’s efforts made her feel supported.

“I also was able to learn from Kim herself on just getting that extra support and knowing that I wasn’t by myself, that I wasn’t alone,” Fisher-Olsen said.

Carew and her foundation have also seen a major increase in requested totes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic due to many missing regular health checkups. Lots of hospitals were closed for regular health checkups, causing many cancer diagnoses to be delayed, according to Marty Carew, the secretary and treasurer at the Peace Love and Tote foundation as well as Kim Carew’s husband.

“She’d probably given out well over a hundred totes over this last year,” he says. “Many women and men skipped, you know, regular checkups during the pandemic. Unfortunately there’s a need for the foundation more so,” Carew states.

After the launch of the foundation in 2018, hundreds of tote bags have been given out every year with many recipients meeting other patients and survivors to help support each other. As the foundation grows Carew said she hopes to be able to help more patients in their cancer journey. Knowing how alone many may feel, she said she wishes for the tote bags to be a reminder of hope to others and continues to work toward the expansion of her foundation to reach more people.

“I do hope that I made the journey a little bit more comfortable and cozy... hopefully people will find some comfort in my foundation,” Carew said. “I hope that my foundation grows over the years.”