

## Being There When it Counts

Spend a little time around 44-year-old Kim Bingham and you'll walk away impressed with her sunny disposition and positive outlook on life. As a paraprofessional working with special needs children in the Olathe School District, she has a can-do, upbeat attitude mixed with the patience necessary to encourage and motivate the kids.

So, when Kim had her first mammogram at the age of 42 and the radiologist spotted some calcification in her breast, she was optimistic that it would turn out to be nothing and she could carry on with her life. But when she went to see the doctor he said, "I'm sorry, but we found cancer in the pathology report and we need to begin treating it right away." The doctor recommended Kim consider having a double mastectomy and chemotherapy, which meant she'd also be losing her hair.

The normally upbeat educator and mother of two was numb. She wasn't sure who to call or what to do. She didn't know anyone who had breast cancer so she started reading everything she could find to educate herself. Her husband and children were there for her, but they could only do so much. In the literature she read about a support program at Cancer Action, funded by United Way. Kim called a close friend, asking if she would be willing to go with her to Cancer Action to check it out. Kim says, "It was one of the best things I ever did."

"A social worker warmly greeted us at the front door and took us back to a private room filled with tons of different hats and wigs. I began trying them on, and in my moment of fear and uncertainty I was able to relax and laugh and have some fun at a very scary time of my life."

Kim left Cancer Action that day with a wig and some hats, a blanket to keep her warm during her chemotherapy treatments, a handmade pillow to protect the area where a port was inserted in her chest for the year-long chemo and infusion treatments, a prescription card to cover co-pays for the nausea medicine she would need and information to help her better understand cancer and what to expect in the months and years ahead. But most importantly, she left knowing the staff at Cancer Action would be there to answer questions, offer guidance, and provide whatever support she might need.

Kim had a double mastectomy, went through five months of chemotherapy and yes, she did lose her hair. She also had a year of Herceptin treatments to decrease the chances that the cancer will return. To complicate things, Kim is also suffering from fibromyalgia which makes the nerve endings throughout her body extremely sensitive. At first Kim cut back her hours at school, but she eventually had to take a leave of absence because of the fibromyalgia and because her immune system was so low due to the chemotherapy. She is now cancer-free and hoping to get back into the classroom working with her students very soon.

Although she wouldn't want anyone to have to face what she's gone through, Kim's positive outlook remains intact. She says, "It's a rough road, but in the end so many good things came out of it too. It's increased my faith in God; helped me forge new friendships; and strengthened the relationships I already had. The caring and compassion of people I didn't even know, who brought over meals and sent warm, supportive cards really meant a lot."

Kim says she's ready to pass along some of the kindness and support she's received. "I've got so many books and so much information about cancer that I want to share. If somebody is having a rough day and needs someone to talk to, I'll be there because I know how much it means to talk with someone who's experienced what you're going through. If my cancer returns I know I can get through it because I've got God, a wonderful family, all these friends and a strong support system of organizations, such as Cancer Action, to help. I've really been blessed in so many ways. I'm a cancer survivor and I'll fight to the end, no matter what comes my way."

Cancer Action is one of 156 health-related programs receiving more than \$7 million this year from United Way.



Kim Bingham says the support of her family meant a lot during her battle with cancer. Now, with the help of her husband, Kevin, and her children, Sierra and Tarren, she is feeling confident about the future.



When she found out she'd be losing her hair after undergoing chemotherapy, Kim went to Cancer Action to learn more about their program that provides free wigs to cancer patients. Kim says the staff at Cancer Action made the chore of finding just the right wig, painless and even fun.



Today, Kim is cancer free and her hair has grown out again. She is thankful for the help she received from Cancer Action, one of 156 health-related programs funded by United Way.