It took just a split-second for a dream holiday to turn into a nightmare – and leave Justine Holmes struggling to cope with a new role caring for her boyfriend, Gilbert.

Justine, from Shipley, started going out with Gilbert after they met while studying at Salford University. They continued to share their lives after graduation – and planned a roadtrip across Australia as part of their shared love for travel and adventure.

Disaster struck when their car was in a high-impact collision. Gilbert was critically injured, spending nine days in a coma, four weeks in intensive care and more than two months in hospital there as he was treated for a brain injury and a broken pelvis. Justine had a lucky escape but also suffered a head injury.

When Gilbert was medically fit to go back to the UK, complications set in and he had to be re-admitted to a hospital in London for further treatment lasting another two months. The distance between the capital and home added further stress and complexities to the situation. It was now that the pressure of being a carer started to take its toll on Justine, particularly as she was not able to work and was struggling to find her way through the maze of benefit entitlement.

“I didn’t know what to do and wasn’t getting any help from anyone. I kept going around in circles, being passed from one person to another, and was getting nowhere...”

We put Justine her in touch with SCARD (Support and Care After Road Death or injury) enabling her to meet up with someone to share feelings and experiences. We also tried to get some financial support from Salford University and, although unsuccessful, it gave Justine confidence at last that people were doing their best to support her and that she was not on her own.

Justine is now looking for a job and is also interested in volunteering. We have helped her to strengthen and update her CV and referred her to CReate – the charity’s work club designed to help carers back into employment. Justine has also become a volunteer with us to gain experience and give something back to other carers like herself.