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Support Connection: 25 Years of Providing Help & Hope, and The Journey Continues

I will never forget the day in 1990 when my dear friend Isabel called to tell me she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Isabel had excellent medical care but wanted to find a local support group where she could speak with other women who had been through cancer. I offered to find a group for her. After much research, it broke my heart to tell her that there was nothing available in Northern Westchester where she lived.

In the fall of 1995, I saw an ad for a Breast and Ovarian Cancer Walk in FDR Park. My daughter and I went in honor of Isabel, Little did I know that this Walk would lead me to help create Support Connection.

Myra Adamski was the inspiration for that first Walk years ago. Family and friends gathered to honor her memory and raise awareness about breast and ovarian cancer. Nancy Heller, a breast cancer survivor, and the late Richard Adamski, Myra's husband, helped organize that Walk. It was their dream to start an organization to offer free breast and ovarian cancer support services, provided by cancer survivors. The money raised at the first Walk was used to establish Support Connection in 1996. Myra continues to be an inspiration as a team in her honor proudly walks each year.

After the first Walk, attended by hundreds of people, it was clear we needed to turn Nancy and Rich's dream into reality. Along with about 20 volunteers, I helped get Support Connection established. In the fall of 1996, with two desks, a telephone, fax machine, and a donated computer, I opened our office in the Roma Building. When later asked to be the Executive Director, I felt honored. Whether it was support group facilitators or office volunteers, everyone had the mission in mind...to provide emotional, social and educational support services to women, their families and friends affected by breast and ovarian cancer. Ilene Cohen, our first office volunteer still volunteers with us today! She has donated more than 20,000 hours of her time over the years. I am so grateful to our generous supporters who enable us to offer our critical support services for free.

On our first day, Sept. 10, 1996, the phone rang at 9:10 a.m. with our first call for support. We began with one breast and one ovarian cancer support groups, run by trained facilitators, all survivors of these diseases. In the years since we were founded, we have added numerous other programs and services.

One of the cornerstones of our services is our One-on-One Peer Counseling program. This was created by Maria Jennings, a breast cancer survivor. She recognized the need for people to have individual as well as group support. The One-on-One Peer Counseling Program enables people to speak directly with a professional Peer Counselor on our staff, a cancer survivor who has traveled the journey already. Peer Counselors offer information about breast and ovarian cancer; ongoing emotional support; community resources and referrals; connections to other women with similar situations.

We also offer numerous wellness and educational workshops that empower women with cancer to better cope with recovery and treatment while continuing with their day-



Katherine Quinn, Executive Director

to-day lives, such as informational lectures, yoga and nutrition classes, etc. In the past year, we have added virtual programs and counseling services. Every day, I count my blessings and am so grateful that Support Connection has been here for 25 years. I honor the memory of Isabel, Maria and pay tribute to all the women and their families who have entered our doors. We look forward to many more years of service.

We have helped thousands because of the dedication of our staff, board and volunteers who give tirelessly of themselves. A special thanks goes out to all our community

sponsors and donors who believe in us and help us fulfill our mission through their generosity. Support Connection is proof that every person has the power to make a positive difference. When I get a call from someone thanking me for the help that they received, I rest easy. I know that they have found a peaceful, welcoming home in Support Connection.

Support Connection is a gift to many people. While cancer support is our mission, Support Connection stands for so many other things. It is about the power of caring that joins people together to make a dream a reality. It is about setting an example that each person can make a difference, and that giving is good for the community and the spirit. It is about creating the extraordinary by giving your all to the ordinary, knowing a smile, a hug or taking a few minutes to listen can work wonders. It is about love.

With heartfelt gratitude, Katherine Quinn **Executive Director**



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Support Connection — A Love Story from the Start

By Nancy Heller (as told to Kathy Quinn)

Wouldn't it be great if we had a crystal ball to see the future? Or would it be? I have found so many wonderful things in life happen by following your gut and taking a risk. Such is the story of Support Connection.

Some call it a love story. Support Connection became a reality because of the love the late Richard Adamski had for his wife Myra, who died of breast cancer, Kathy Quinn's love for her girlfriend Isabel, who was diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age, and my love for family and concern for people dealing with cancer.

As a breast cancer survivor myself, I knew how difficult it was to navigate cancer while being a single parent. I had to take care of myself while caring for my family. From our own experiences, Richard, Kathy and I knew that people with cancer, as well as their families and friends, wanted to connect with someone who had been through it. Up until Support Connection opened its doors in 1996, there was no organization in Northern Westchester and surrounding areas that offered this connection.

The stars lined up for the three of us to meet. I met Richard when I participated in a run in NYC to honor his wife. We spoke afterwards and a dream began to take shape. We wanted a place where people with breast or ovarian cancer could find support provided by someone who walked in their shoes. When I met Kathy after our first Walk in 1995, I knew she was the person who could help get us there. Add to that the many friends and family who brainstormed and volunteered, along with the kindness of the community who supported our efforts, and Support Connection came to life.

I will never forget the day we started promoting the Walk in 1995. The money raised at that walk provided the seed money for Support Connection. David Sacarny, coowner of Robert-David Century 21, lent us office space to set up our headquarters. No sooner did we open when a woman came in the door and gave us \$5. I was so



(L-R:) Kacey Morabito, Richard Adamski, Nancy Heller, Kathy Quinn and Denise D'Amico.

excited that I called Richard Adamski and had his secretary get him out of a meeting to tell him the good news. When I eagerly announced we just made our "first five," he expected my excitement had to be for a \$500 donation or maybe even a \$5,000 donation. He was very surprised when he heard me say "oh no, it was \$5; you know we have to start somewhere. I know this will build and we will be able to help so many people. Just trust me." And so, he did trust me, as did the many people and community members who rallied around us.

On September 10, 1996, Support Connection opened a small office in Yorktown Heights. We didn't waste a minute. Our facilitators, all breast and ovarian cancer survivors, received training from SHARE, a Manhattan-based group that we are modeled after. Kathy got the office up and running, recruiting volunteers to assist with administrative work and planning for the next annual Walk. We started with two support groups and had no idea how busy we would be. In our first few months, 82 people reached out to us for support. Through the

years, our organization grew based on the needs of the people who came to Support Connection. Twenty-five years later, we have helped thousands of people.

We now have a staff of nine people. Our peer counselors on staff, all cancer survivors, offer empathetic, compassionate and educated guidance to those who turn to them. In addition, we have wellness programs, educational programs and more. Since the pandemic, we have been offering counseling and other programs and services virtually.

Support Connection has expanded to include support for all gynecological cancers. We now serve people nationwide. Our website, www.supportconnection.org, describes all our programs and services. I think you will be quite amazed at what can be accomplished when like-minded people who care join to help other people.

Kendra, one of the people who has turned to us, captures the essence of Support Connection:

"I simply would not be in the healthy, happy place I'm in today without the support

offered by Support Connection. They have not only been a great resource, but a true inspiration. I'm so happy to have them to lean on when I need an understanding ear, and I'm so grateful for all the programs and services they offer."

In 1996, I could never have predicted where we would be today. There were a few things I could predict....that Support Connection would stay true to its mission to provide emotional, social and educational support services to women, their families and friends affected by breast and ovarian cancer. We would honor our commitment to offer these services for free to all who need them. I could predict that, by delivering high quality services because of the dedication of our staff, loyal donors as well as volunteers and board members would stand by our side.

Like any love story, there are bumps in the road and challenges to face. Support Connection has risen to the occasion many times as it had to overcome economic downturns, the ongoing pandemic, the challenge to accomplish much with limited resources, and the ongoing need to raise enough money each year to pay our bills. And, like in any love story, showing love and gratitude is key to keeping the spark alive. That is why everyone at Support Connection is so indebted to our amazing donors and sponsors. We wouldn't be here without them.

What would I like to see in Support Connection's future? Of course, in the ideal world, breast, ovarian and all cancers would be cured. Until that day, if I had my crystal ball, I see us continuing our path of offering our critically needed services, being the anchor for someone during one of the toughest times of their lives. I see donors honored to support our work because they know they too have helped make a difference in someone's life.

I have been blessed to be a part of something so important to so many people. The Support Connection love story continues and that is a beautiful thing.

learned so much from so many people: all of our staff, especially our Peer Counselors... the people who reach out to us for help... our supporters. All of these lessons have shown me very clearly living with breast, ovarian or gynecological cancer.

~ Barbara Cervoni, Director of Services and Communication

When I think of Support Connection, my heart is full of gratitude for such a committed group of professionals that are so giving of their time and talents to support those in need. I remember the first time I met Kathy many, many years ago, I knew I had to join her and Support Connection in some kind of way because I was completely blown away by the overflowing love and support each and every one at Support Connection provides to our neighbors fighting breast and ovarian cancer. I could not think of a better organization to volunteer and financially support.

~ Chereese Jervis-Hill, Events to Remember

Support Connection is an amazing organization that does so much I started participating in Support Connection's Annual Support-Agood for so many people. Since I joined the staff in 2004, I have Walk when I was 5 years old. When two of my friends' moms were diagnosed with Breast Cancer and we wanted to help support them and we found Support Connection and the Walk. I have walked at nearly every Walk since then. I really enjoyed my time giving back that our services make a huge difference in the lives of people and helping make a difference. During my Senior year of high school, I had three family members diagnosed with Breast Cancer within three weeks of each other and because of that I truly understand why the work that Support Connection does is so crucial.

~ Melissa Higgins, Director of Fundraising Activities and Outreach

Their caring and knowledgeable staff gives help and hope during crisis. We are lucky we have been able to partner with them over the years to provide space for people to help each other. They create a genuine community of friendship and comfort right here in our neighborhood.

~ Ellen Koelsch, Vice President Club Fit

Support Connection Through The Years



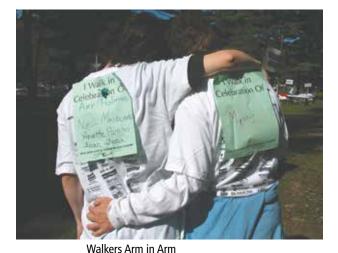




Friends of Myra 2014

Group Shot from 1995

Support-A-Walk 1995





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Ilene Cohen, 25 year volunteer



Barbara Cervoni, Director of Services and Communication

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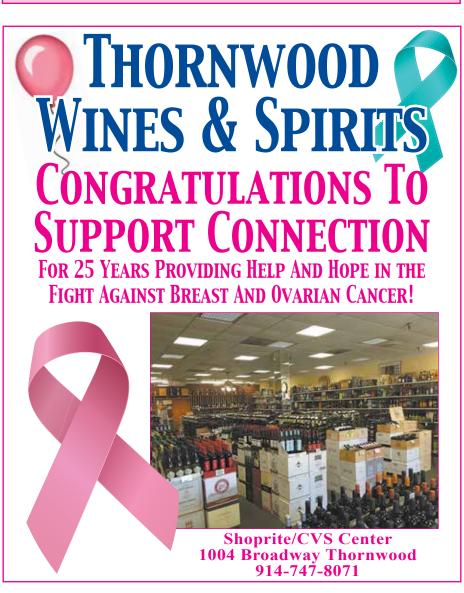
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Peer Counselors Provide Invaluable Behind the Scenes Support

By Rick Pezzullo

They are the voices on the other end of the phone, offering a sympathetic ear and words of comfort at a trying time of unchartered water for women recently diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer, or for family members uncertain of how to help a loved one.

And they speak from experience, having gone through the scary struggle themselves.

They are the peer counselors at Support Connection---the often faceless, behind the scenes foundation of the non-profit organization that strive to accomplish the core mission of offering free and confidential services and, more importantly, hope.

'Sometimes all they need is to talk and listen to someone who can understand what they're going through," said Marlene Stager, a peer counselor since 2012. "I certainly hope I have helped them feel less alone and hold on to threads of hope."

At the age of 38 in 1998, Stager's life changed forever when she was diagnosed with breast cancer "truly out of the blue." Married with three young children at the time, Stager admitted she "poo-poohed" changes in the contour of her breasts for a while, until one day she stepped out of the shower and came to the realization she had to do something about it.

"I was very fortunate. We had a tremendous amount of support from three



(L-R:) Peer counselors Robin Perlmutter, Marlene Stager and Andrea Karl (recently retired).

different communities of friends to help us get through this difficult time," she said. "Once you have been diagnosed it takes time to regain confidence in your body and that every ache and pain is not (something to worry about)."

Stager, who lives in Dutchess County, said she was unaware of Support Connection until 2008 when she heard Executive Director Kathy Quinn speak a brunch. Four years later, a peer counselor position opened at Support Connection, she applied, and she has been helping women deal with their diagnoses ever

"My goal was to be in a position to be helping women navigate the struggles of life," she said. "There are tough days, but I have tremendous belief in our mission and the value in the service we provide."

Stager and the other counselors on staff are available to chat Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Support Connection does have an answering service where people can call 24 hours and leave a message for the counselors, and there is also a contact form online.

The calls can last anywhere from five minutes to a couple of hours, Stager noted.

'They find there's a lot inside that they need to bring out," she said. "That what they're feeling is normal. It's rewarding, it's uplifting. It's wonderful because so many women take the time to thank us. We get notes, we get emails. Regardless of their situation, they appreciate having a place to go. We let the callers decide when they have had enough of the conversation. There is tremendous value in just listening. It's what we're here for."

During her nine years at Support Connection, Stager estimated she has been on the receiving end of hundreds of calls, with an increase in younger women reaching out. She also conceded how challenging the job can be at times.

"It's very unpredictable. On any given day we can get some very sad news (of someone dying) and a caller who is newly diagnosed," she said. "We (counselors) also support each other. We each have our own strategies in navigating. We are the service providers. I think the services this organization provides is invaluable."



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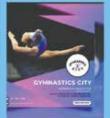
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