

# Young Breast Cancer Survivors

*provide support for others*

Kim Hagerich's biggest worry was where to send her oldest daughter to preschool. . . until she was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 36. Suddenly, the stay-at-home mom was fighting to stay alive to raise her children, then ages 1 and 3.

Kim felt isolated. "None of my friends could understand," she relays. That's because less than 2 percent of breast cancer occurs in women under the age of 40.

Then Kim met two other women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in their 30s. "They mentored me through it," says Kim, whose treatment included a single mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

Stacey Sole, another young mom with breast cancer, wasn't as lucky. "I kept looking for other bald mommies, other women my age going through this," notes Stacey, who was 38 and working full time when she was diagnosed. Stacey's children were 8 and 10, old enough to know what cancer was – and to be afraid during her treatment, which included a double mastectomy and chemotherapy.

The two "bald mommies" met at church, and began getting together to share their experiences. This was so helpful that Kim and Stacey decided to help other young women with breast cancer connect.

They talked to Karen Quinlan, RN, MSN, OCN, at Doylestown Hospital's breast cancer support group, and staff at the local Gilda's Club (which provides meeting places for people living with cancer and their families and friends). Everyone agreed that young women with breast cancer need support.

In 2007, with the support of Doylestown Hospital, Kim and Stacey started the Greater Philadelphia Young Survival Coalition, a chapter of the international, nonprofit network that supports young breast cancer survivors.

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— Stacey Sole

Sixteen young women with breast cancer attended the first meeting in February. They shared their stories, and discussed issues that most women with breast cancer don't have to think about, like early menopause, parenting, working, dating, pregnancy and sexuality. Within a few months, the group had 50 members.

The coalition also sponsors quarterly seminars for anyone dealing with cancer (e.g., talking to your children about cancer) and holds monthly "networking nights" in Philadelphia, advocates for funds for breast cancer research and educates young women about their risk of breast cancer.

"We're creating a community of young breast cancer survivors. As they finish treatment, we want them to know that their lives are just starting," says Stacey.

For more information about the Greater Philadelphia Young Survival Coalition, call 215-766-8907 or 215-345-4370.

