



photo: John Bayles

THE TEAM: Karrie Robinson, Duncan Darrow and Heather Matthews

## 5 Years of Giving A Fighting Chance

BY JOHN BAYLES

FIGHTING CHANCE has moved from a tiny space behind the Kramoris Gallery to a traditional, beautiful Sag Harbor home on the corner of Jermain Avenue and Route 114. They may have a swank new place, but they're not letting it go to their heads. Their mission remains the same — to provide help to those who need it most.

Fighting Chance was founded five years ago by Duncan Darrow and on Saturday, they will hold a ribbon cutting ceremony for their

new offices. Fighting Chance is growing into a non-profit that Darrow hopes will one day be synonymous with his hometown.

The name came from a prayer. In 2001 Darrow's mother was diagnosed with lung cancer.

"My brother and I ran around for five months trying to deal with the logistics," said Darrow. "Frankly I was pissed off."

"Dear God, all we're asking for is a fighting chance. That was my prayer every night," said Darrow.

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small group of Darrow's friends, some of whom were cancer survivors, who gathered to brainstorm on ways they might be able to help cancer patients. Today Fighting Chance can proudly say that in five years they have helped approximately 2,000 cancer patients and caregivers, they have distributed over 10,000 resource guides and have over 5,000 visitors a month to their website.

"The guide is organized in order of how the disease attacks you," said Darrow, who explains that the initial idea to provide patients with a resource kit "snowballed" into the resource guide. "The table of contents is the arc of the disease."

They have updated the guide four years in a row. It contains useful resources such as transportation options to and from hospitals, information on available clinical trials for new cancer drugs and a list of pharmacies that take Medicare, have home delivery and speak Spanish. Many such resources can be found online, but a guide with all the resources in one place had never existed.

Director of Clinical Programs at Fighting Chance Karrie Zampini Robinson pointed out another benefit of the resource guide.

"A lot of older people don't go online," said Robinson. "The guide is good for them."

"We basically started as a clearing house," said Darrow. "Then one day I looked up and this little foundation had a Sloan Kettering Counselor and a National Cancer Institute Patient Navigator."

Patient Navigator Heather Matthews joined Fighting Chance in 2005 from the National Cancer Institute where she was trained as a cancer information specialist. Robinson also had 16 years of counseling care and oncology social work experience at Sloan Kettering. Darrow said without them Fighting Chance would not be what it is today.

"Cancer patient navigation will evolve into the next health care specialty," said Darrow.

The typical patient shows up at Fighting Chance's front door usually within 48 hours of diagnosis.

"They come in and we sit them down in the living room," said Darrow. "We show them a half hour video on their disease."

Robinson said the video might be the first time the patient really "heard about their cancer."

"When the doctor tells you," said Robinson, "you're in shock and you're not really listening."

From the living room the patient is led into the cancer library where a "wall of hope" has been constructed showing the 10 best clinical trials currently underway in the country.

"A lot of people let go in this room," said Darrow. "They cry a lot."

The library also has cancer literature in Spanish. Darrow pointed out that a patient might spend an entire day trying to locate a guide for lung cancer in Spanish. Fighting Chance has taken this into account and has a number of guides in Spanish in their library.

The foundation has acknowledged certain facts: cancer isn't going any-

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where, hospitals are doing less and less for the patients, hospitals only treat the tumor.

At Fighting Chance, Robinson and Matthews treat the patient, the "whole patient," and the family.

In the next five years Darrow hopes to see their model catch on in other communities. More importantly Darrow hopes they "continue to service an underserved community — his hometown."