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Extreme Makeover: Ellie Fund Edition

by *Andrea Pyenson*

At the risk of sounding sexist, sometimes it's all about the power of women helping women. Last May when Beth Miller, president and co-founder of GoodDeeds LLC, a lifestyle management services company, met Julie Nations, executive director of The Ellie Fund, an organization dedicated to fighting breast cancer and easing its effects on patients and their families, she asked how she could help the organization in advance of its upcoming Kelley for Ellie fundraiser.

Donating GoodDeeds' services for the event's online auction was a no-brainer. But having just lived through breast cancer with a close family member, Miller wanted to do more. Jeff Popkin, one of The Ellie Fund's founders, had just given the organization new office space in Needham. But it needed some work. Nations mentioned that she could use help renovating, and that's when things kicked into gear.

Two members of Miller's staff, Jennifer Conley and Deb Lowe, worked with Nations to turn the narrow, cluttered 200 square-foot space with bright-blue walls into an oasis of calm and efficiency. In addition, they organized a storage closet that Nations shares with Popkin's business.



"[Beth's] staff is out of control. They are the most talented women I've ever seen," Nations enthuses. "You should have seen them attack the storage room. They told me, 'You're going to be able to work even more efficiently because we're going to create a system.'"

To begin the project, “we wanted to find out what she’s using the space for - how many people are in the office, how often Julie is working in there by herself,” Jennifer Conley explains. Once they had established how the space would be used, Conley and Lowe divided it into work, conference, kitchen and waiting areas. “We really tried to differentiate those areas. We did a lot with area rugs and a room divider.”



“They took the time to learn about the Ellie Fund and how we operate,” Nations says. They focused on me and my style and my needs.”

Conley and Lowe took Nations shopping at IKEA to select furniture (which The Ellie Fund paid for). They worked with her to determine the office’s layout. And they found a carpet cleaner, seamstress and painter who donated their services. Some other service providers, like an organization to dispose of the old metal desks and other things that had been in the space, deeply discounted their rates. GoodDeeds also found high school students to assemble the new furniture.

“[The makeover is] not just what it appears to be. It’s a capacity-building thing,” Nations says. “Because of the office makeover, I’m going to be able to expand the Ellie Fund services beyond what I ever thought was possible.”

The Ellie Fund’s Care for the Caregiver program provides support services - like transportation to and from medical appointments, day care, housecleaning and meal preparation - free of charge for women with breast cancer and their families. Before the makeover, Nations was the only paid staff person, and she was assisted solely by volunteers. Since the makeover, she has hired two women who are job-sharing a part-time patient services coordinator position, and a part-time bookkeeper.

The staff has grown just in time for The Ellie Fund’s next event, “Fighting & fabulous,” on October 20 at the Back Bay Events Center. The event will honor National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and honor individuals and organizations that are making a significant impact on the fight against the disease. It should be a terrific evening. “We don’t do our events like everybody else does,” Nations says. “We do really good drinks, really good chocolate desserts, really good music and dancing.”

For tickets to Fighting & Fabulous, visit <http://www.elliefund.org> or call 781-449-0100.