

**Why her
work matters
so much:**

Every year, nearly 80,000
Canadian women
are diagnosed
with cancer

Liz Ellwood

Cancer survivor and fertility
advocate, 26, Ottawa

Two years ago, when Liz Ellwood was diagnosed with cervical cancer – 24 years old and barely out of university – her immediate concern was for her future family, rather than her own mortality. “I wanted to have children,” recalls the Kemptville, Ont., native. But her oncologists were trained in chemotherapy and radiation, not egg preservation. That left Ellwood to do the research herself, while struggling through two surgeries and six weeks of aggressive treatment that left her uterus damaged. “I was really upset at the idea of never being able to get pregnant or feel a baby kick inside me,” she acknowledges. So Ellwood decided that helping other women would be the best way to move on.

Last year, on a shoestring budget, she founded Fertile Future in Ottawa. It’s a non-profit that educates doctors and counsels female cancer patients about the options available to preserve their fertility. “You lose your hair, get radiation burns and spend hours puking over the toilet from chemo,” Ellwood says. “So when you finally get to the other side, why shouldn’t you be able to have children and live the life you want?”

Because she preserved her eggs before undergoing chemotherapy, Ellwood and her fiancé are making plans to have a family using a surrogate. But she says her real joy will come when “a mom tells me she had her children because she found out about fertility preservation from Fertile Future. The day that happens, I’ll know everything was worth it.” >>