Erika's personal cancer journey began in 2015, after finding a lump in her breast while in the shower. She had already faced undue hardship as this occurred just one year after losing her husband due to an unexpected motorcycle accident. At the time the lump was discovered, she was a single mother, working full time as a public health educator for the Macomb County Health department and caring for her 4-year-old Caleb. She had no family history of breast cancer specifically, yet her oldest a brother was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma at the age of 35. While still grieving the loss of her husband, Erika quickly began a round of testing that lead to a diagnosis of stage 3 triple-negative breast cancer. She was 35 years old.

Despite the intensive nature of her journey, Erika’s spirit persevered. She constantly gave herself pep-talks. “I’d tell myself to ‘pull it together’, and ‘you’ve got this!’ The one thing that kept her focused and fighting it all: her son, Caleb. “I’m still here for a big reason: to raise my son and to be a good mom. I’m all he’s got.”

Today, Erika is a fierce advocate for cancer prevention and survivorship. She advocates for patients. She has worked with her healthcare team at Henry Ford Health System, readily providing feedback regarding programs and services for breast cancer patients. She persistently urges the health and medical community in our region to consider the long-term effects of cancer treatments when engaging with survivors. She is an active member of the Colorectal Cancer Awareness Network (CRAN) of Southeastern Michigan, a multidisciplinary coalition dedicated to promoting and increasing awareness of colorectal cancer through public education. She chairs the CRAN Screening Initiatives sub-committee, working to find new and innovative ways to build screening partnerships. In fact, Erika serves as an essential member of the team that introduced the regional FluFIT screening initiative, that won an honorable mention at the MCC Conference in 2017. When southeastern Michigan began actively working to address the Hepatitis A outbreak, she inquired “Well, what about Hep A/FIT?”! She actively seeks opportunities to educate the community and is frequently requested to speak at regional events. In Fall 2017, she was the survivor speaker at the American Cancer Society’s Making Strides Against Breast Cancer event in Macomb County, delivering a message of hope to all survivors in the county. Her motto, “I’m still here to help others. Use me. Use my story.”

Erika looks at surviving as a verb. An action. Getting through the day-to-day. Waking up and living one day at a time. “If you want your life back you need to be a warrior.” Erika Lojko is certainly a warrior. She exemplifies the true spirit of inspiration, courage, hope and advocacy.
In October 2015, at 32 years old, Jessica was diagnosed with Stage 4 Colorectal Cancer. She was told it was inoperable and incurable. Her social worker at Karmanos Cancer Institute said to her, "cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence and one can learn to manage and handle it like any other chronic disease". Jessica went on to complete 12 aggressive rounds of chemotherapy and remains on a maintenance treatment today.

She has continued to work full time and with her passion to help others, Jessica decided to speak out. Jessica applied to become an ambassador for the Fight Colorectal Cancer Organization and flew to Missouri for a training program. She and her husband Aaron were selected to be ambassadors for the organization. As part of this effort she was featured on the Jumbotron in Times Square, New York City so that everyone could see that you are never too young to get colorectal cancer.

Jessica was also successful in the initiative to have Governor Snyder proclaim March as Colorectal Cancer Month in Michigan 2017. Additionally, she will be one of the featured survivors in On the Rise magazine that helps spread awareness that colorectal cancer is not limited to older men but effects men and women of all ages and that it is on the rise with those under 50.

Jessica is a participant in a young adults with cancer support group at Karmanos Cancer Institute’s Weisberg Center where she mentors other recently diagnosed. During March 2017, she and her social worker created a campaign/public education event about early detection of colorectal cancer and encouraged people to be aware of signs of colorectal cancer and receive screening. Art groups at the center created boxer short posters that were placed around the building with message to the public around symptoms and screening using catchy phrases like, “Save the Butts” and “Get your Rear in the Clear;” literature was made available to the public as well. Weisberg Center staff participated as well by wearing boxer shorts over their scrubs as a reminder of the importance of screenings. This event received local media coverage and Jessica was interviewed along with her oncologist; she was receiving treatment at the time.

She is an inspiration for her efforts locally and nationally to spread awareness about colorectal cancer and to educate the public. When it comes to cancer, she believes, "Never give up, and never give in".
Since her breast cancer diagnosis in 1995, Cecilia has made a significant impact as a leader in community-based breast cancer prevention and control in the metro Detroit area.

She is a member of WAVE (Women Achieving Victory and Esteem), a local breast cancer support group and has formed strong bonds with survivors. She is a founding member of the Sisters Network – Greater Metropolitan Detroit Chapter and has served as Treasurer and Vice-President providing an impact of breast cancer awareness in the Detroit area. She is also a frequent walker and fundraiser for the American Cancer Society-Making Strides against Breast Cancer and Komen Detroit, Race for the Cure.

Cecilia continues to make a significant difference in the community through the Witness Project of Detroit, a breast and cervical cancer outreach and education program based in Karmanos Cancer Institute. She was part of the first group of “Witness Role Models” who were trained and asked to witness or share their personal stories of diagnosis, treatment and survival. In turn, encouraging women to be screened regularly. She has reached over 1200 women as of August 2016.

“Cecilia has been a leader in metro Detroit in terms of mobilizing groups to address cancer disparities, raising cancer awareness and supporting women in overcoming cancer-related fears, especial in the African American community. She is extremely knowledgeable about breast cancer and women in the community view her as a trustworthy source of information. Interpersonally, she is kind and generous.”