

THE DREAM CATCHER

GOLD CREEK, MONTANA

Connected Through Compassion

The original idea to create a retreat specifically targeted at supporting caregivers came from our participants. We heard resounding feedback from survivors across the country that they were struggling to find support and resources for their caregiver.

A caregiver can be a spouse, partner, parent, adult sibling or friend. Reliable caregiver support is crucial to sustaining the physical and emotional well-being of the survivor throughout their cancer journey (American Cancer Society, 2019). Caregivers take on many roles during their partner's treatment and recovery. In addition to providing companionship, they may serve as a home health aide, schedule doctor's appointments, pick up medications, manage insurance, and take care of the household duties and other family members. Caregivers also frequently must continue working full time to support their family, and ultimately are left with little time to tend to their own needs. This can lead to exhaustion, depression and frustration. Caregivers have been shown to have less distress and feel less burdened when they have social support (American Cancer Society, 2019). Human connections can help both the survivor and the caregiver stay strong and feel supported as they navigate this unexpected life event together.



The Caregivers Retreat at Camp Mak-A-Dream is designed to provide opportunities for caregiver and survivor pairs to organically connect with one another, reflect on their shared experiences, build relationships with others experiencing similar journeys, and reenergize through engaging discussions and fun activities.

We are excited to share a few of the stories from participants of our inaugural Spring and Fall Caregivers Retreats this past year. Rachel was diagnosed with cancer at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, which compounded the impact of fear and uncertainty the whole world was experiencing. Her husband Brandon reflects, "We immediately sought out online resources, but it was difficult for me as the caregiver because there typically wasn't much engagement from the other caregivers in the virtual support groups, if they even bothered to attend and turn on their webcam. It is easy to avoid tough conversations on Zoom, but being at Camp together forced us to face these conversations head on. We were surrounded by people who understood our situation, and it was really rewarding to engage on that deeper level." Brandon continued, "We often try to control every aspect of our lives, but cancer is something

that is so out of your control. There is not a manual for dealing with cancer and everybody's situation is different, but this retreat helped provide perspective and acceptance through the genuine connections I built with other caregivers." Rachel adds, "Camp was a reminder that we aren't alone. In my experience, one of the hardest aspects of cancer is after the chemo and surgeries are complete. People don't understand the aftermath and how cancer continues to impact your life. It was nice to feel like I didn't have to 'just get over it' at Camp; I could sit with other people and talk about real feelings and experiences."

When John's daughter Liz was diagnosed with cancer at nine years old, it turned their lives upside down. Liz is now an adult in remission, and John continues to serve as a caregiver in her life amidst the ongoing effects of life as a cancer survivor. Liz reflects, "Cancer had significantly changed my relationship with my dad, who was one of my main caregivers during treatment. This retreat gave us the opportunity to explore our emotional traumas, let loose from the hardships and experience joy together again."





John shared, "My experience at the Caregivers Retreat was absolutely incredible. I went there expecting it to be a mini vacation with my daughter, but it turned out to be an awakening in myself. I was astounded by the fact that even though the ages, sexes, cancer types and cultures were different, the stories, fears and problems we all expressed were the same." Liz fondly recalls, "The joyful and emotionally positive experiences that we had at Camp Mak-A-Dream have given both of us beautiful memories to coexist with the traumatic and challenging ones we both experienced during cancer. Plus, it's always a heart swell when we tell people about how my dad and I hiked a huge mountain, tackled the high ropes course, and climbed the rock wall. We were scared, but we did it together! I will treasure this experience for years to come."

"Camp was a reminder that we aren't alone."

"There were so many activities and other fun ways to connect with both your partner and your new friends. It felt good to laugh and have fun and feel free from our daily worries," Rachel expressed. "You have to find the joy in life when going through cancer, and we found that at Camp!"

Brandon adds, "I would highly recommend this retreat, especially to caregivers who don't have as much of an outlet or opportunity to lean into that deeper level of trust and connection with other people in their situation. It can be tough to keep the rest of life going as the caregiver, and it was helpful to take a timeout and travel to a place where we could fully focus on each other."

If the past few years have taught us anything, it is the importance of genuine human connection and the immense strength, joy and resilience it brings. We are honored to be a small part of our campers' cancer journeys and hope to continue fostering those connections for years to come.

Source: "If You're About to Become a Cancer Caregiver" American Cancer Society, 2019



Applications for Fall Retreats open May 15.

Camper Testimonials: Connected Through Experience

We could talk about Camp Mak-A-Dream forever, but our Campers say it best...

"I've met other cancer survivors, but I have never had that instant connection that I felt here. Camp really is a place like no other. You can feel completely alone out in the real world, but then as soon as you come here there's a whole family that becomes your friend group. They all want the best for you and that's so special."

– Camper, Teen Heads Up Conference

"Being in a community like Camp makes you realize that you're a part of something bigger than yourself. Camp may be composed of individuals, but it thrives on group healing and shared experiences. We're here not only for our own escape, but to provide support to those in need; a need in we completely understand and have lived through."

– Camper, Teen Siblings Camp



"This camp changed so many things for me. I have felt so incredibly alone on my cancer journey before attending Camp Mak-A-Dream, and now I feel like I am connected to a support network that I will have for the rest of my life. I'm so grateful for my week here at Camp."

– Camper, Young Adults Conference

"Camp Mak-A-Dream has done so much for my daughter. After everything she has been through, it is great to see her have these experiences and meet teens going through similar things. They can connect better with peers at Camp than with their peers at home."

– Camper Parent, Teen Camp

All of our campers who have passed away are remembered in the Granader Gardens at Camp. Use this link to view more information about those we lost this past year.



Campers
Remembered

Mission Statement

Our mission is to empower survivors and their families to live with and beyond cancer through life-changing Montana experiences where they strengthen life skills, gain resilience, and develop lasting relationships.

Welcome to the Team!



Kelsey Werner (Assistant Camp Director) grew up in California at the beach but moved up to the mountains in Missoula in 2016 after graduating with her BA in Sociology from Point Loma Nazarene in San Diego, California. She has a background of administrative roles in social work related fields. In her free time, Kelsey enjoys hiking, rafting, reading and sharing meals with friends.

Erin Benson (Camp Chef) grew up in Alaska and received her degree in Culinary Arts in Oregon. She moved to Montana in 2007 and worked at Camp until 2012. Erin now lives in Helena with her husband, son and pets. She enjoys cooking, baking, bowling and quilting. "Camp has always been a special place for me. I am happy to be returning to a place that brings me and so many others happiness."



Upcoming Event

June 24, 2023 | Dillon, MT

RATPOD is a one-day, 127 mile charity cycling ride benefiting Camp Mak-A-Dream. Join the fun and register on our website!



www.RATPOD.org



Alexa Martinez (Assistant Camp Chef) grew up in Deer Lodge, MT and her goal in life is to spread love and joy through food. She is passionate about wholesome ingredients and supporting people through local food systems. Alexa attended the Culinary Institute of Montana and has been involved with Camp for as long as she can remember. In her free time, she enjoys painting, quilting and gardening.

Jenny Baker (Board of Directors) is currently a pharmacist at Community Medical Center in Missoula, MT and is focused on developing their oral chemotherapy program. She also has an MBA and a past career running a medical device company. Jenny herself is a cancer survivor, and is passionate about supporting Camp given her life experiences and commitment to helping others!



2023

Cost-Free Programs

Open to cancer patients in or out of treatment

Spring Sessions

Caregivers Retreat April 20-24

Cancer survivor and their caregiver (ages 21+)

Ovarian & Women's Cancer Retreat May 4-8

Women diagnosed with any type of cancer (ages 21+)

Summer Sessions

Heads Up Conference June 8-13

Young adults diagnosed with a brain tumor (ages 18-35)

Partner program with Children's Brain Tumor Foundation

Young Adult Conference June 15-20

Young adults diagnosed with any type of cancer (ages 18-35)

Teen Camp June 27-July 2

Teens diagnosed with any type of cancer (ages 13-18)

Teen Heads Up Conference July 7-12

Teens diagnosed with a brain tumor (ages 13-18)

Partner program with Children's Brain Tumor Foundation

Kids Camp July 15-20

Children diagnosed with any type of cancer (ages 6-12)

Teen Siblings Camp July 23-28

Teen siblings and/or children of cancer patients (ages 13-18)

Young Siblings Camp July 31-August 5

Cancer survivor and their care giver (ages 21+)

Family Camp August 10-14

Families (parents/siblings) affected by cancer (survivor <12)

Fall Sessions

Caregivers Retreat August 24-28

Cancer survivor and their caregiver (ages 21+)

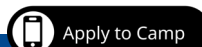
Ovarian Cancer Retreat September 7-11

Women diagnosed with Ovarian cancer (ages 21+)

Women's Cancer Retreat September 14-18

Women diagnosed with any type of cancer (ages 21+)

Scan this QR Code to learn more about our programs and APPLY!



Live with. Live beyond.



Children's Oncology Camp Foundation
 P.O. Box 1450
 Missoula, MT 59806-1450

How to Support Camp



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Supplies Wish List



Thank you to our 2023 Camp Event Sponsors for their generous support



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