

ANNUAL REPORT

CACTUS CANCER SOCIETY

2021 - 2022



WHAT WE DO

Cactus Cancer Society is an innovative 501(c)(3) nonprofit serving young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers, ages 18-45. We encourage, empower, and connect a diverse and growing community of YAs around the world, 24/7.

Cactus Cancer Society is the leader in online wellness and survivorship support programs and resources. We provide a full spectrum of free, ground-breaking online wellness and support programs for young adults facing cancer, enabling them to have access to the age-appropriate psychosocial survivorship support they deserve through a medium that fits their lifestyle. All of our programs and resources are delivered either directly through our website or through Zoom and are uniquely accessible regardless of a patient's specific diagnosis, geographic location, financial situation, or inpatient status.



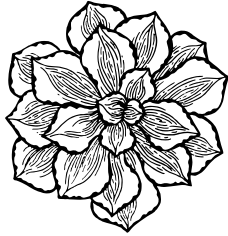


OUR MISSION & VISION

Cactus Cancer Society's mission is to provide a safe space where young adults facing cancer can connect, cope, and thrive with one another in an online community through creativity and expression. Our vision is to end isolation among young adults facing cancer.

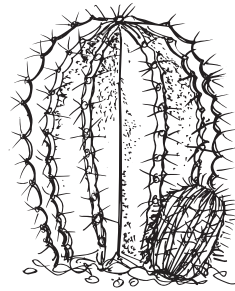


OUR VALUES



COURAGEOUS CREATIVITY

We believe there are an infinite number of ways in which we can use creativity and expression as a means to make sense of our realities, to spark new thinking and problem-solving, and to reimagine what is possible for us and the future we want to live in. We also believe that creativity is an important method for courageously processing our experiences and learning to cope with the difficulties that life and cancer can bring.



INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

We are a virtual community that doesn't believe in borders or walls. We transcend boundaries and celebrate diversity. We believe young adults facing cancer should have access to support and resources no matter where they are or who they are. We embrace individual thought and believe connection and creation have the power to reset biases and catalyze change, allowing us to express our truths and promote belonging, understanding, and collaboration.



RESILIENCE & FORTITUDE

Like the cactus in our name and logo suggests, we believe the young adults in our community are tough; they are strong, adaptive, and resilient. We empower them to thrive in the midst of challenging situations through finding their voice and telling their story.

OUR STAFF



**Mallory
Casperson, MS**
Chief Executive
Officer &
Co-Founder



Aerial Donovan
Chief Program
Officer &
Co-Founder



**Lauren Creel,
MSW, MPH**
Chief Operations
Officer



Christina Kosyla
Program
Coordinator

OUR FACULTY



Jean Rowe
LCSW, OSW-C, CJT



Dennis Heffern
LCSW



**Tara
O'Donoghue**



Bekah Jordan



A NOTE FROM OUR CEO


MALLORY CASPERSON

The other day, I was thinking back to our first Board of Directors meeting. We convened for the first time over the phone, while I kneeled on the floor of my mother-in-law's house with our IRS nonprofit paperwork spread out around me. We approved those very early policies and documents, set up a cadence for future meetings, talked through some early strategic planning work, and had fun dreaming of the future of Cactus Cancer Society (then Lacuna Loft).

Looking back, 7 years later, this year has been our biggest year yet. We hired our 3rd, full-time employee, our Chief Operations Officer, as well as a part-time, Program Coordinator. Growing our internal team has been a source of immense pride for me. It's amazing to look back on our first board meeting and realize how far we have come.

Virtual connections continue to be vital to providing accessible survivorship support to young adults facing cancer. I am immensely grateful for my team, and for all of you, who drive this crucial work forward every day. While the world opens up, little by little or sometimes all at once, we will continue to provide those safe, virtual spaces.

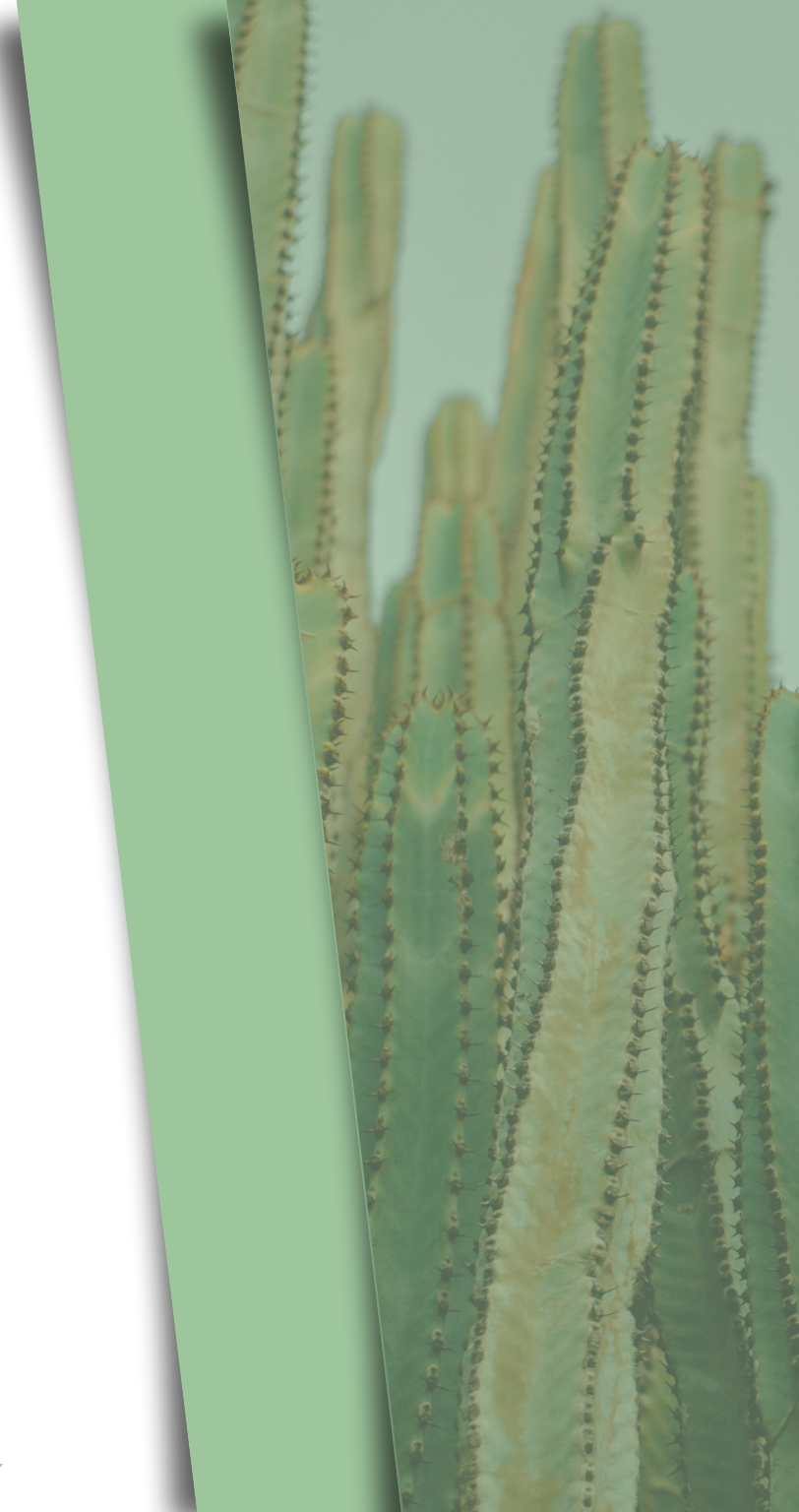
Thank you for joining us and for making this a better, more connected world for young adult cancer survivors and caregivers.

With gratitude, 



OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Patricia McDonald, MBA** - Senior Director of Advancement at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
- **Shelly Whitsitt, MBA** - Director of Research and Strategy at Fusion Hill
- **Kelly Miragliotta** - Director of Customer Success at FeeX
- **Bryan Walker, MS** - Business Development Manager at Maxim Healthcare Services
- **Vikki Christian** - Executive Communications Consultant





OUR YOUNG ADULT CANCER SURVIVOR ADVISORY BOARD

- Brandie Langer
- Bryan Walker
- Chris Stroh
- Christian Bullock
- Christina Kosyla
- Claire Greco
- Deltra Kroemer
- Diana Cejas
- Erin Leibowitz
- Kelly Miragliotta
- KM Hammond
- Kyle Smith
- Marnie Norris
- Nick Ross
- Stephen Heaviside
- Yamilet Cendejas
- Yolanda Murphy

OUR SCIENTIFIC & MEDICAL ADVISORY BOARD

- **Marcie Ellis** - Program Supervisor, Supportive Oncology Program at UC Davis Medical Center
- **Cassandra Falby, MS, LMFT** - Psychotherapist at Cassandra Falby Psychotherapy
- **Karla Hitchcock, MPH** - Oncology Services Consultant at SSM Health St. Louis
- **Cathy Moe, EdD** - University of Illinois-Chicago College of Nursing
- **Diane Radford, MD** - Associate Professor of Surgery at Cleveland Clinic Lerner College
- **Kelly Tschannen** - Nurse Administrator at Siteman Cancer Center



OUR IMPACT



41,908

unique visitors to our website



174

programs held



3,014 / 48 / 16

program participants from 48 states and 16 countries



97%

want to participate in other Cactus Cancer Society programs



85%

felt more connected to other young adult cancer survivors after participating in one of our programs



94

posts published to our Young Adult Voices Blog



60

books sent through our Young Adult Cancer Book Club

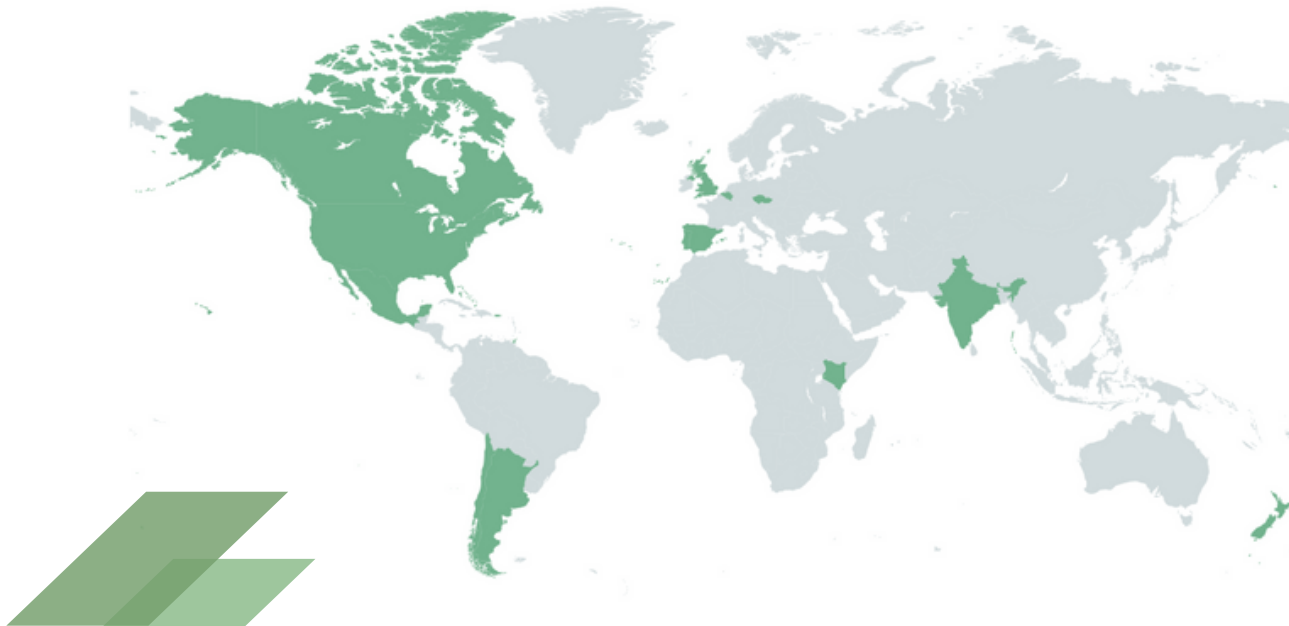
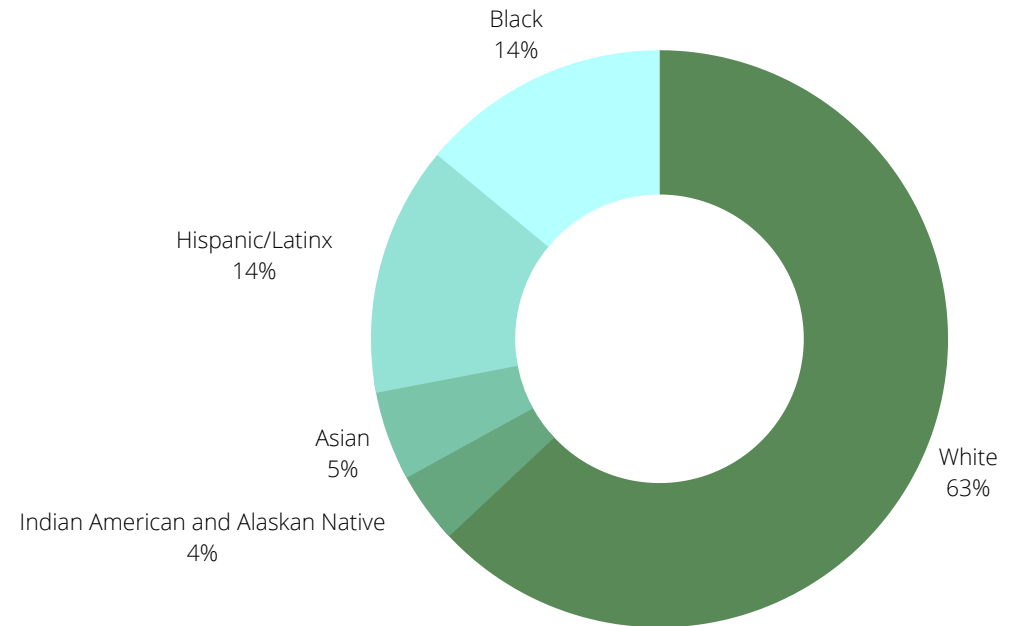


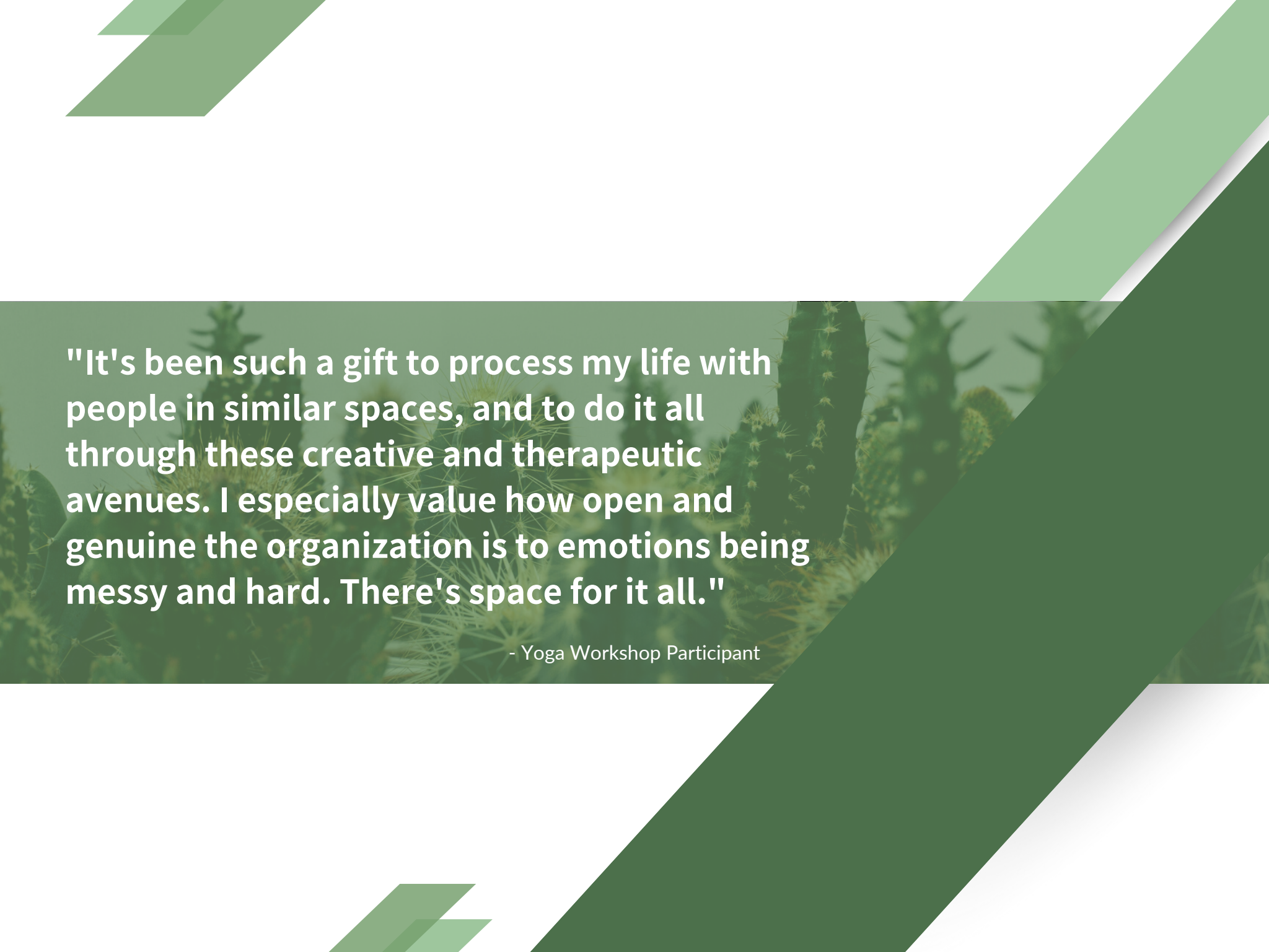

288

continuing education credits awarded to nurses and social workers

OUR PARTICIPANTS

This year, we had 3,014 program participants from 48 states and 16 countries. Cactus Cancer Society intentionally designs programs to bring together young adult cancer survivors of all racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Our unique, interactive, all-online programs open up access to much-needed cancer survivorship support for absolutely any young adult cancer patient, survivor, or caregiver with an internet connection, regardless of a patient's specific diagnosis, geographic location, financial situation, or inpatient status. Because of this, the racial demographics of our participants mirror that of the US population. In addition, 12% of our program participants self-identify as LGBTQ+.





"It's been such a gift to process my life with people in similar spaces, and to do it all through these creative and therapeutic avenues. I especially value how open and genuine the organization is to emotions being messy and hard. There's space for it all."

- Yoga Workshop Participant



OUR 2021-2022 PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

30 Minute Tune Up
Adventure Guide Passports
Art Workshops
Grief to Gratitude
Guided Yoga Nidra Meditation with Mamma G
Guys Discussion Group
Inside the Terrarium: A Day of Restoration
It's a Wonderful Life: Taking Care During the Holidays
Journaling Prompts
Lost and Found
Mind, Body, Soul Series
Nourish, Nurture, and Renew
Oodles of Thoughts: A Doodle Journal Workshop
Photographs of Meaning Workshop
Sephora Brave Beauty
Sunday Reset
Survivorship Series
The Bridge
YA Cancer Gabfest
Unspoken Ink
Young Adult Cancer Book Club
Young Adult Cancer Hangouts
Young Adult Voices Blog



30 MINUTE TUNE UP

30 Minute Tune Up is a widely popular weekly journaling drop-in session led by certified journal therapist and social worker Jean Rowe, LCSW, OSW-C. In the chaos of everyday life, ranging from global pandemics and racial tensions to navigating how best to safely connect with one another, young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers are invited to spend 30 minutes each week journaling and connecting with each other via Zoom. At the beginning of each session, Jean presents a brief journaling prompt and then gives time for each person to journal their response. Participants are then given a few minutes for personal reflection, followed by a time of sharing aloud and reflecting on each participant's writing. **This past fiscal year, Jean led 43 sessions for 550 participants.**

ADVENTURE GUIDE PASSPORTS

This year, we launched the Cactus Cancer Society Passport, our adventure guide to all things Cactus Cancer Society! Participants use this fun checklist to stamp their way through various activities and earn fun things like stickers, t-shirts, and more! Activities include writing a post for our blog, participating in our book club, volunteering in our programs, and much more! **This past fiscal year, 76 young adults facing cancer have participated in the program.**






ART WORKSHOPS

Cactus Cancer Society offers monthly art workshops. This program is a participant favorite and **this year, Cactus Cancer Society offered 11 workshops connecting 169 young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers** via online video chat, including a pride-specific workshop celebrating the LGBTQ+ community during the month of June. The Creative Art Workshops allow these young adults to connect with others facing cancer while expressing themselves and their journeys creatively. Cactus Cancer Society offers the supply box for each art workshop, free of charge to the young adults who participate. **Following the art workshops, 100% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in their crafting or artwork.**

GRIEF TO GRATITUDE

Grief to Gratitude is a 6-week yoga and mindfulness workshop focusing on processing grief. This program helps participants tune in and connect with their bodies, minds, and souls through yoga, breathwork, meditation, and other contemplative practice. Participants join together as a community to discuss, process, and move through their grief. **This year, we held one 6-session program attended by 14 young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers.**





GUIDED YOGA NIDRA MEDITATION WITH MAMMA G

In this program, which was a collaboration with our friends at Elephants and Tea, Angie Giallourakis (aka Mamma G) led participants in yoga Nidra meditation. Yoga Nidra is a meditative technique that focuses on breathwork and relaxation of the body. **This year, we held 7 sessions for 134 attendees.**

GUYS DISCUSSION GROUP

This year, we launched the Guys Discussion Group, a widely popular monthly group for young men affected by cancer, led by social worker Dennis Heffern, LCSW. Each month, the guys meet to discuss anything and everything in a safe space that fosters openness, vulnerability, and community. **This past fiscal year, Dennis led 11 sessions for a total of 83 participants.**





SCHEDULE

Creating a Terrarium of Your Own 8 AM PT/10 AM CT/ 11 PM ET

Your living space is an important part of your life. Join us to make a terrarium of your own while talking through what elements young adult survivor, Nubia, uses in her own at-home-oasis. This DIY project will leave you inspired to feel more creative and comfortable in your own space, where you can retreat to find solace in creative coping activities. We'll send the first 100 participants everything you need to participate and a list of supplies will be sent out to everyone else! *Please see care instructions for the airplant.

Using Fashion to Meet You Where You Are 9 AM PT/11 AM CT/ 12 PM ET

Grab a cup of coffee and enjoy a conversation about finding your new style post cancer. Whether you are flat, have an ostomy bag, or are adjusting to how you feel in your body despite cancer, these survivors are here to be real with you. Whether it's tips or tricks you're looking for, or just how to rock it all- there's lots to learn from this panel of young adults facing cancer!

Lunch with Your Fellow Prickles 10 AM PT/12 PM CT/ 1 PM ET

Sometimes it's really hard to feel inspired to cook at the end of a long day. Chat along with your and fellow attendees while we hangout, eat lunch, and fellow attendees walk us through his easy watch Justin Birchbickler walk us through his easy fish and chips recipe. He'll chat about tips he has and demonstrate techniques for this totally doable meal!

Finding Your Confidence 11 AM PT/1 PM CT/ 2 PM ET

Cactus. Tough. Resilient. A bit prickly. Words to live by after facing a cancer diagnosis. But when no one's looking, it's hard to remember how you were ever self confident before the Big C. Julie Larson, LCSW, will guide attendees through how to give yourself a much needed pep talk and how to remember that you are a confident, tough, resilient, (and maybe a bit prickly) badass.

Sun, Skincare, and Some TLC 12 PM PT/2 PM CT/ 3 PM ET

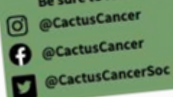
Learn ways to help nurture your skin! Treatment, age, and environmental factors can all take their toll. Show yourself some love and treat your skin with some tender loving care. Learn from a licensed esthetician suggestions for healthy skin care and components of beneficial sun protection!

Please note that each session is 55 minutes long and each session will begin at the top of the hour.

To care for your provided airplant, give it a thorough rinsing under running water or let it soak in a bath of water for 20-30 minutes. If your plant needs an in-between watering, misting it with a spray bottle is a great method.

Self-care is not a substitute for crisis support. If you are in a crisis, text HOME to 741741 (in the USA and Canada).

Be sure to follow and tag us on social!



#CactusThrivers
#InsideTheTerrarium

INSIDE THE TERRARIUM: A DAY OF RESTORATION

We launched the inaugural Inside The Terrarium: A Day of Restoration. This online day-long event was inspired by the five themes of the show *Queer Eye*: design and living space, fashion and personal style, cooking and nutrition, lifestyle and confidence, and skincare & TLC. The event consisted of 5 one-hour workshops each focusing on one of the themes. Participants received a cactus kit filled with art supplies, skincare products, and other goodies.

There were 168 registered participants for this year's inaugural Inside The Terrarium event.



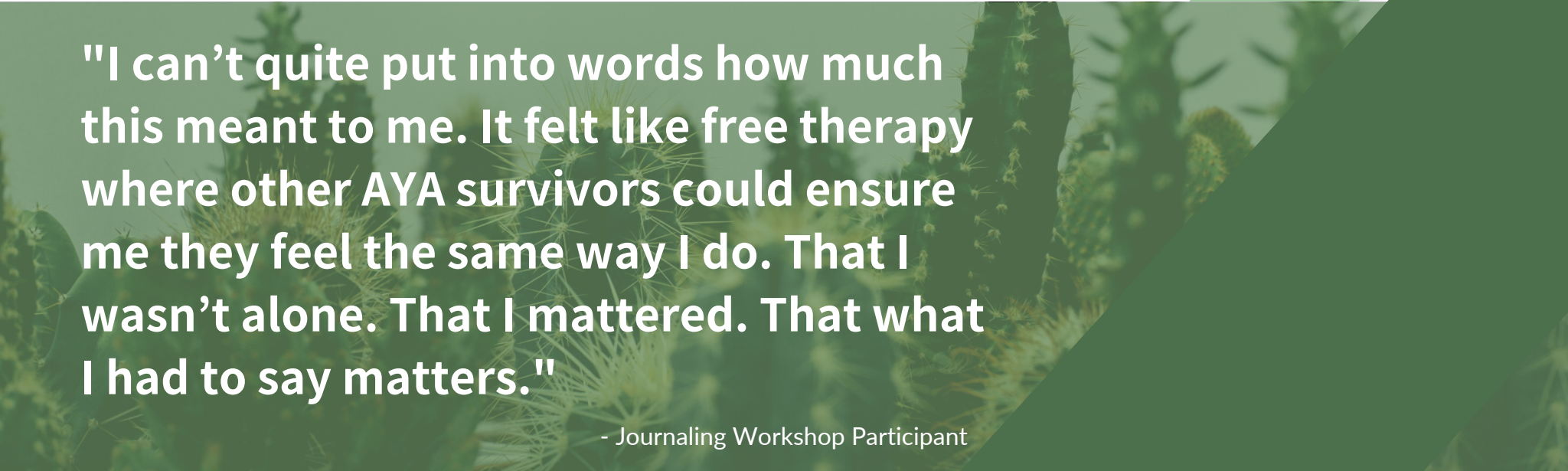


IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: TAKING CARE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

This 6-week holiday journal writing workshop helps young adult survivors design a plan for low stress, create or reconnect with meaningful traditions, and decorate your soul with a little TLC. The holiday season brings nostalgia (like a favorite song), connection to family and friends, and an undercurrent of expectation. There can be an added layer of managing expectations to be positive and happy – even in the middle of treatment or when everyone appears to look “fine” when, inside, they are not. Finding peace between the wrapping paper and the stuffing is within reach! **LCSW Jean Rowe facilitated this six-week program one time this fiscal year for 10 young adult cancer patients and survivors. Following the program, 100% of participants said they felt less isolated and more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.**

JOURNALING PROMPTS

Participants sign up to receive a journaling prompt sent periodically to their email inbox. The prompt is designed to help focus the chaos happening in their lives and minds to write away some of those cares and anxieties through a structured prompt. **This past fiscal year, Cactus Cancer Society delivered 44 journal prompts to 516 young adult cancer survivors and caregivers via email, with a total of 6,935 email opens.**





"I can't quite put into words how much this meant to me. It felt like free therapy where other AYA survivors could ensure me they feel the same way I do. That I wasn't alone. That I mattered. That what I had to say matters."

- Journaling Workshop Participant




LOST AND FOUND

Jean Rowe, LCSW, OSW-C, Certified Journal Therapist facilitates this meaningful and powerful program, which helps participants dip their toes back into the water of intimacy and dating after diagnosis and treatment. Using journal techniques and cultivating an action plan for self-care, in 8 weeks survivors have the opportunity to emerge from the water renewed, informed, and ready to reconnect. For young women cancer survivors who understand what you've gone through while learning how to reconnect, welcoming a compassionate understanding of their body now, and creating ways to open their heart to intimate opportunities after cancer. **This 8-week program was provided one time in the past year for 9 participants. Following the program, 100% of participants said they felt less isolated and more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.**

MIND, BODY, SOUL SERIES

In collaboration with the young adult cancer communities of Dear Jack Foundation, Elephants and Tea, and Lacuna Loft young adult survivors were invited to join our month-long, Mind, Body, and Soul wellness series for an opportunity to connect, grow, and stretch! We offered weekly, 90-minute sessions to help enhance the mind, body, and spirit and provide a chance to break down some of the isolation we've all been experiencing over the past few weeks. Whether a seasoned yogi, meditator, doodle genius, or a newbie to the world of mind and body care, young adult cancer survivors were invited to come and try something new in a safe, fun, and encouraging environment – their own home! **This 4-week series was held once for 82 participants.**





NOURISH, NURTURE, AND RENEW

Nourish, Nurture, and Renew: A Roadmap from Burnout to Self- Care is a 6-week workshop designed for social workers and nurses. This workshop is led by social worker Jean Rowe, LCSW, OSW-C, and is presented in partnership with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The workshop is built on evidence-based, peer-reviewed research that indicates that expressive writing has been successful as a therapeutic tool for improved health, wellbeing, and general functioning. This online, interactive workshop offers 12 continuing education credits for participants who attend all 6 sessions. **This past fiscal year, Jean held 3 6-week sessions. 38 nurses and social workers completed the workshop and a total of 288 continuing education credits were awarded.**

OODLES OF THOUGHTS

Cactus Cancer Society's most popular programs embody the crafts of journaling, writing, and creative expression through art. In this brand new program, we combined our fun art workshop environment with our popular writing techniques from Unspoken Ink and give participants a chance to respond to prompts with what speaks to them most, either drawing or writing. Like the other programs we offer, each session includes an opportunity for participant sharing in a nurturing, supportive, safe environment among peers. **This past fiscal year, the Oodles of Thoughts workshop was held 2 times for a total of 37 participants.**

Following the workshops, 100% of participants said they felt less isolated and more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.






PHOTOGRAPHS OF MEANING

This 8-week program provides a space for young adult cancer survivors to share their cancer stories through the use of photography. Each week, participants share their photographs and a brief description of how these photographs relate to the theme for the week. Some examples of themes are: “Who Am I”; “What Matters Most”; “Coping with Bad Days”; and “Living Life to the Fullest”. At the end of the program, group members display their photos in an exhibition and raise awareness about their experiences as a young adult with cancer. This program is part of a research study in collaboration with oncology social workers at Colorado State University and University of St. Francis, assessing if the sharing of photographs and personal writing can improve young adults’ quality of life and sense of meaning/purpose. **We held one 8-week program for 14 participants.**

SEPHORA BRAVE BEAUTY

Cactus Cancer Society has partnered with Sephora to provide Brave Beauty Kits, packages of skincare products that are sent directly to participants! These kits include a whole host of fabulous products, curated with young adult cancer and the effects it has on our skin and appearance in mind! Participants share what they do for self care in exchange for one of the kits. Sephora has also developed an online series of video tutorials specifically for those facing cancer. **This year, 86 young adults facing cancer participated in the program and received Brave Beauty Kits.**





SUNDAY RESET

Sunday Reset is a longer version of our popular 30 Minute Tune Up journaling program. Led by certified journal therapist and social worker Jean Rowe, LCSW, OSW-C, young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers are invited to spend 90 minutes journaling and connecting with each other via Zoom. During each session, Jean presents several brief journaling prompts and then gives time for each person to journal their response. Participants are then given a few minutes for personal reflection, followed by a time of sharing aloud and reflecting on each participant's writing. **This past fiscal year, Jean led 7 sessions for 57 participants.**

SURVIVORSHIP SERIES

The Survivorship Series combines some of our most popular programs into a 6-week program. In this program, a cohort of young adult cancer patients and survivors attend a series of programs together, at a cadence of one every two weeks, for a total of seven weeks. Cohorts participate in an art workshop, a game night, a journaling workshop, and a hangout. The same group of young adults participates the entire time, creating a tight-knit community similar to that which we have seen in other long-term programs at Cactus Cancer Society. **This past fiscal year, we held two 6-week series for a total of 46 participants. After participating in the series, 100% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in their art, crafting, and writing, and 100% felt more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.**






THE BRIDGE

The Bridge: When Before and After Meet is a journal workshop for Grief, Loss, and Healing. This is a 6-week workshop using journal techniques to recognize, embrace, and cultivate acceptance around the themes of grief, loss, and healing. Of particular focus is the “before” and “after” of a cancer diagnosis and the multilayered impact it brings. **This fiscal year we held one 6-week program which served 8 participants. 100% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in writing and 86% reported feeling less isolated and more connected to other young adult cancer survivors after participating in a writing workshop.**

UNSPOKEN INK

Unspoken Ink: Young Adult Cancer Creative Writing Workshop continued as a favorite program this year. **Unspoken Ink was delivered via online video chat to 48 young adult cancer survivors through two 8-week sessions and 3 one-night Unspoken Ink Express nights.** Participants are given a few writing prompts each session and asked to share their writing aloud after each quiet reflection period. Sharing is voluntary, though reading their work aloud helps participants process their journey and connects them more intimately to the other participants in the group. The Amherst Writing and Artists (AWA) Method is used, facilitating a trusting and inclusive environment where the participants can share pieces of their cancer journeys without fear of judgement. **90% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in writing and 90% reported feeling less isolated and more connected to other young adult cancer survivors after participating in a writing workshop.**



YA CANCER GABFEST

Gabfest is a week-long online conference for young adults facing cancer, presented in partnership with Elephants and Tea. Young adult cancer patients and survivors are the experts in their own care, so along with experts in their fields, Gabfest combines and elevates the individual voices of the young adult cancer community. The week includes survivorship crash courses, interactive panels, and informal hangouts. The entire event was offered through zoom, and our top priority was creating space for interaction between patients, survivors, caregivers, and experts. Participants were face-to-face with one another in each and every crash course, panel, and hangout. Each day encompassed a different theme: storytelling, wellness, health insurance, caregiving, sexuality and relationships, burnout among healthcare and nonprofit professionals, and using your voice as a tool. **There were 567 registered participants for this year's Gabfest conference. Participants received the 50-page Gabster Magazine, which served as the conference program and included articles from speakers and members of the AYA community.**





YOUNG ADULT CANCER BOOK CLUB

The Young Adult Cancer Book Club brings together young adult cancer survivors and caregivers together over a good book. They connect over shared experiences, anxieties, joys, and so much more through the lens of a shared book. Cactus Cancer Society donates books to survivors and caregivers upon request. A chapter is discussed each week on our blog. Upon completion of the book, survivors and caregivers join an online book club discussion hosted via video chat. **This fiscal year, we read two books together: *Between Two Kingdoms*, by Suleika Jaouad, and *Wild*, by Cheryl Strayed. 60 free books were sent to young adults facing cancer.**

YOUNG ADULT CANCER HANGOUTS

Young Adult Cancer (YAC) Hangouts bring together young adult cancer survivors and caregivers twice monthly in an informal, online video hangout. Whether they talk about cancer or anything else under the sun, they meet in an atmosphere with others who understand what it is like to go through young adult cancer. The YAC Hangouts are guided by a Cactus Cancer Society staff member or volunteer but they are not a support group and are not facilitated by a healthcare provider. **This past fiscal year, we connected 124 young adults facing cancer through 20 YAC Hangout sessions, including one session for YA parents facing cancer and one session for members of the LGBTQ+ community.**





SUMMARY OF REVENUE

Restricted Corporate Gifts	\$208,490	70%
Individual Contributions	\$46,260	16%
Unrestricted Corporate Gifts	\$21,210	7%
Foundation Contributions	\$15,215	5%
Special Events	\$5,045	2%
Shop Revenue	\$530	<1%



Total Revenue	\$296,750
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45% growth in revenue
over fiscal year 2020-2021

Cactus Cancer Society was supported by
175 generous donors this fiscal year.
We want to thank each and every one of you
for joining us in this important work.

*includes accounts receivable as of 6/30/22





"Thank you for investing in an often forgotten group of individuals: young adults with cancer. The impact that these programs have made in my life allow a ripple effect to take place with those around me. You have made a difference in my life. Thank you!"

- Journaling Workshop Participant

OUR PARTNERS

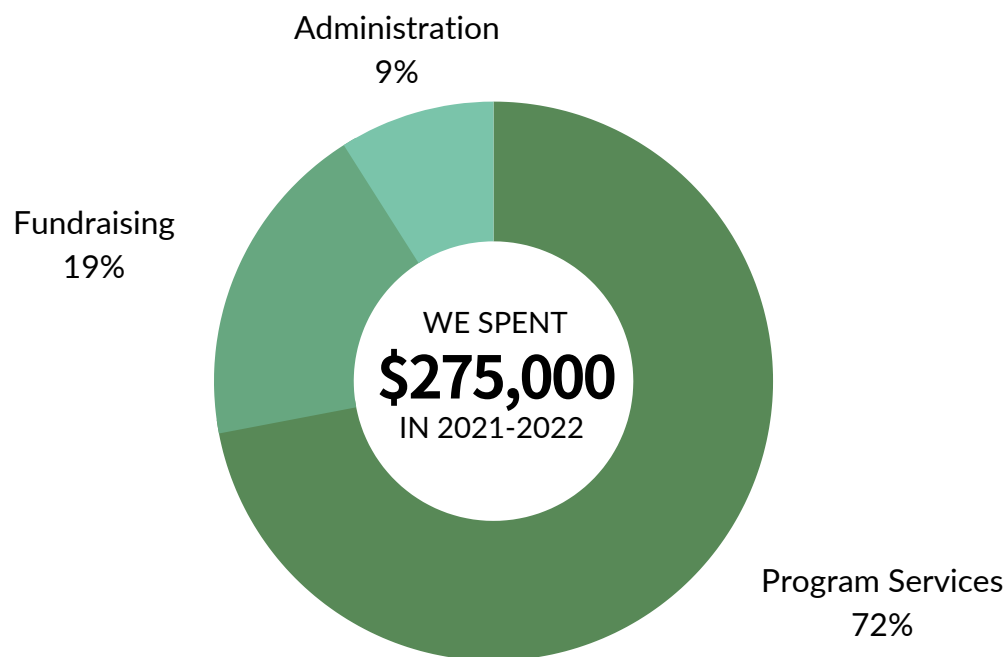


SEPHORA STANDS
Classes for Confidence



SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES

All of our expenses support our mission of connecting young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers through dynamic and interactive online programs. We're more focused than ever, investing in work that directly reduces isolation among young adults facing cancer.






WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Last year, we undertook a lengthy rebranding process. We spent 9 months asking questions and listening to our community. We hosted a large survey, had discussions with key community members, held small creative focus groups, and took the time to really learn what it is about our work that stands out to the most important among us, the young adults facing cancer whom we serve.

At Cactus Cancer Society, young adults facing cancer can breathe easier within our virtual walls knowing that there are others here who understand what they are facing. Like a cactus, these young adults are tough. They are strong, adaptive, and resilient. They thrive in unlikely conditions.

Cactus Cancer Society's new logo and visual identity are inspired by the core principle and spirit of being a pioneer in the young adult cancer survivorship space – the first to offer an online, interactive escape from the harsh realities of cancer, and an opportunity to cope through creativity and expression, where young adults facing cancer can get the support they need, no matter who they are or where they are.

Into this next fiscal year, we will continue in this same vein. We will continue listening to our community and lifting their stories to the highest levels of what we do and we will continue to be a pioneer. We're excited to explore new ways of being online that are interactive, engaging, and meaningful and we're going to move forward, every step of the way, while in conversation with our amazing community of young adults facing cancer.





THANK YOU!

Stay Connected

cactuscancer.org
hello@cactuscancer.org