



ANNUAL REPORT

CACTUS CANCER SOCIETY

2022 - 2023



About Us

What We Do

Cactus Cancer Society is an innovative nonprofit serving young adult (YA) cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers, ages 18-45. Through our creative and supportive online programs and resources, we encourage, empower, and connect a diverse and growing community of YAs around the world, 24/7. All of our programs and resources are delivered online free of charge and are uniquely accessible regardless of a patient's specific diagnosis, geographic location, financial situation, or inpatient status.

Our Vision & Mission



Vision

Cactus Cancer Society's vision is to end isolation among young adults facing cancer.



Mission

Our 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 Values

- Courageous Creativity
- Inclusive Community
- Resilience & Fortitude

A NOTE

FROM OUR CEO



Mallory Casperson
Co-Founder & Chief
Executive Officer

Over the last 8 years, we've continued to grow. We've grown our staff, our programs, our program capacity, and we've grown our connections and influence in the world of young adult cancer. We've grown into a new online space, Cactus HQ, where programs feel even cozier and inviting. Growing, growing, growing.

One of the things that I've been remarking on most over the last few months is our community's ability to do hard things. The staff does the hard work of intentionally designing programs and events to bring together broader groups of young adults facing cancer, making sure the space is safe, inviting, and helps the cancer survivors feel less anxious, less isolated, and less alone. The community does the hard work of bringing themselves to programs and showing up for one another, making sure that the group they are with in a program feels included, heard, and seen. It has been one of the greater honors of my life so far to play a part in all of this and I am so excited for what comes next.

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

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mallory", written in a cursive style.

Our Staff



Mallory Casperson
Co-Founder & Chief
Executive Officer



Aerial Donovan
Co-Founder & Chief
Programs Officer



Lauren Creel
Chief Operations Officer



Christina Kosyla
Program Coordinator

Our Faculty



Dennis Heffern
LCSW



Anne Katz
PhD, RN, FAAN



Tara O'Donoghue
C-IAYT, TIYT



Jean Rowe
LCSW, OSW-C, CJT

Our Board

Of Directors



Vikki Christian

Executive Communications Consultant

Patricia McDonald, MBA

Senior Director of Development,
Southern Illinois University

Kelly Miragliotta

Director of Customer Experience,
Pontera

Bryan Walker, MS

VP of Business Development,
SnapNurse

Shelly Whitsitt, MBA

Director of Research and Strategy,
Fusion Hill

Betty Roggenkamp, MSHC

AYA Program Development Strategist,
Teen Cancer America

Our Young Adult

Cancer Survivors 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

Mary Clare Bietila

Nick Ross

Stephen Heaviside

Yamilet Cendejas

Yolanda Murphy



Our Scientific & Medical

Advisory Board



Marcie Ellis

Program Supervisor, Supportive Oncology
Program, UC Davis Medical Center

Cassandra Falby, MS, LMFT

Psychotherapist,
Cassandra Falby Psychotherapy

Karla Hitchcock, MPH

Retired Oncology Services Consultant,
SSM Health St. Louis

Cathy Moe, EdD

University of Illinois-Chicago College of
Nursing

Diane Radford, MD

Associate Professor of Surgery,
Cleveland Clinic Lerner College

Kelly Tschannen

Nurse Administrator,
Siteman Cancer Center



Our Impact

2022-2023



38,315

unique visitors to our website



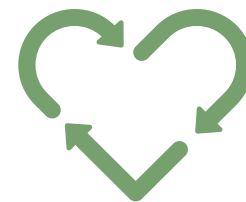
187

programs held



2,913 / 46 / 8

program participants from 46 states and 8 countries



99%

want to participate in future Cactus Cancer Society programs



159

posts published to our Young Adult Voices Blog



92

books sent through our Young Adult Cancer Book Club and Prickly Rebels Club



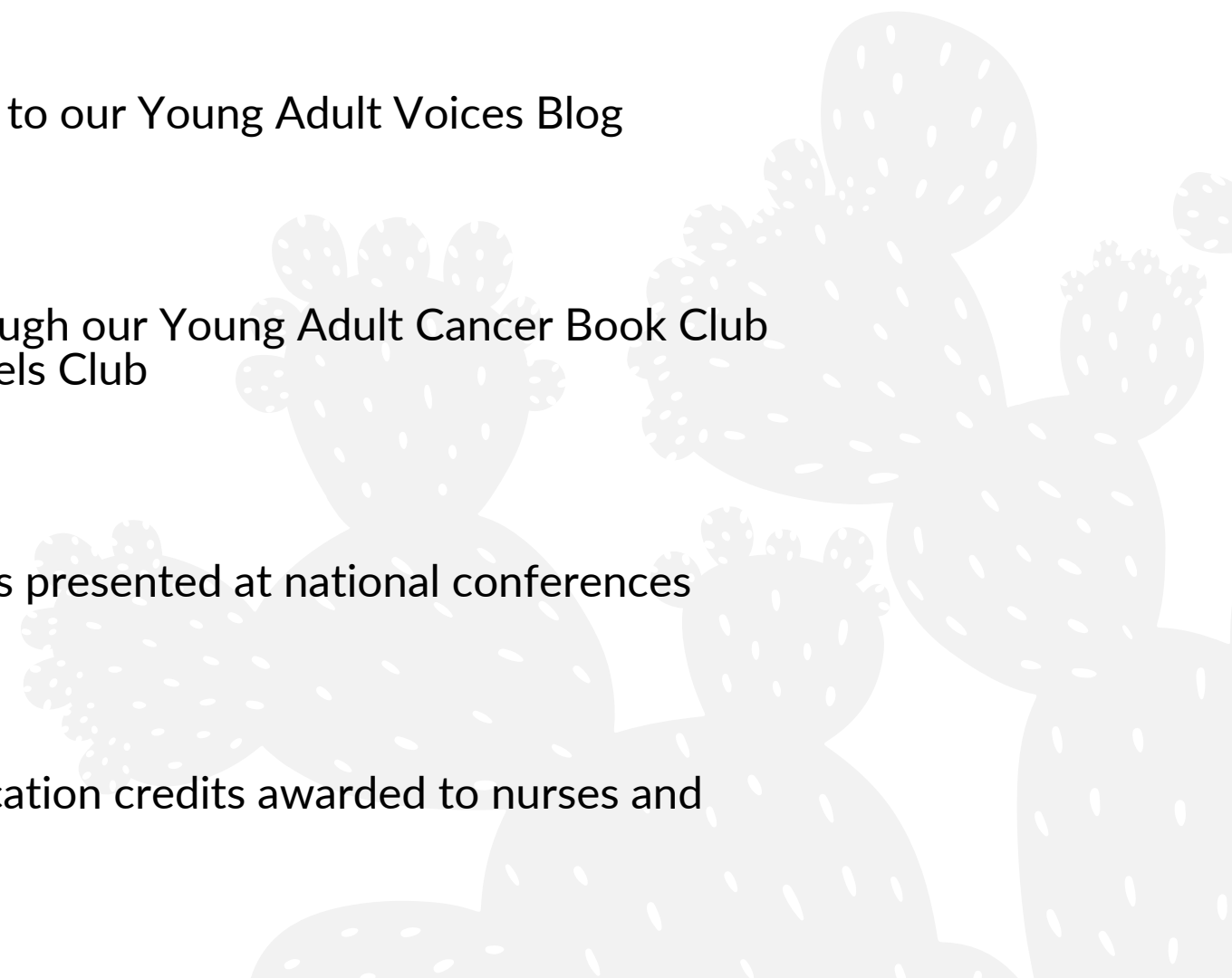
3

research posters presented at national conferences



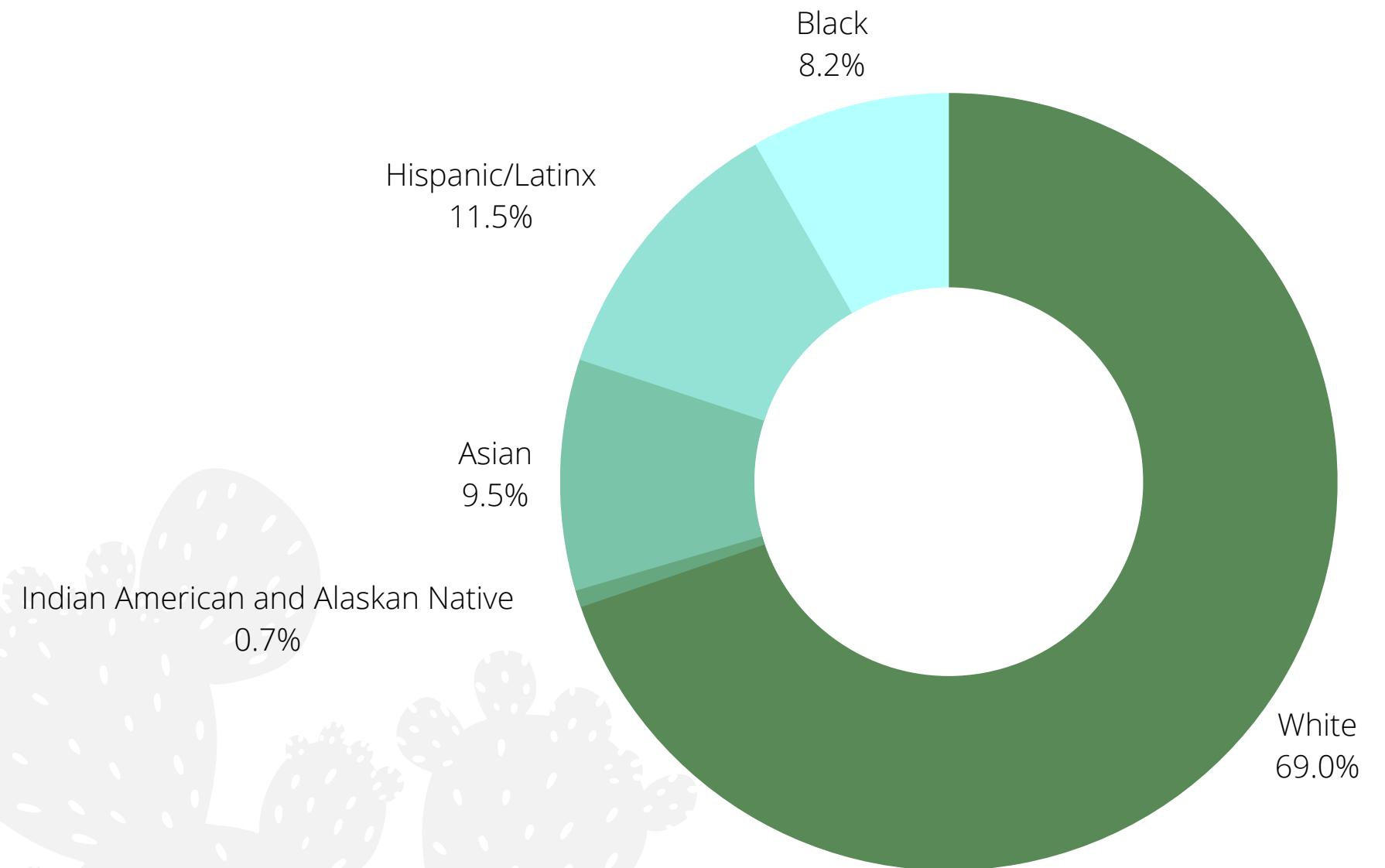
873

continuing education credits awarded to nurses and social workers

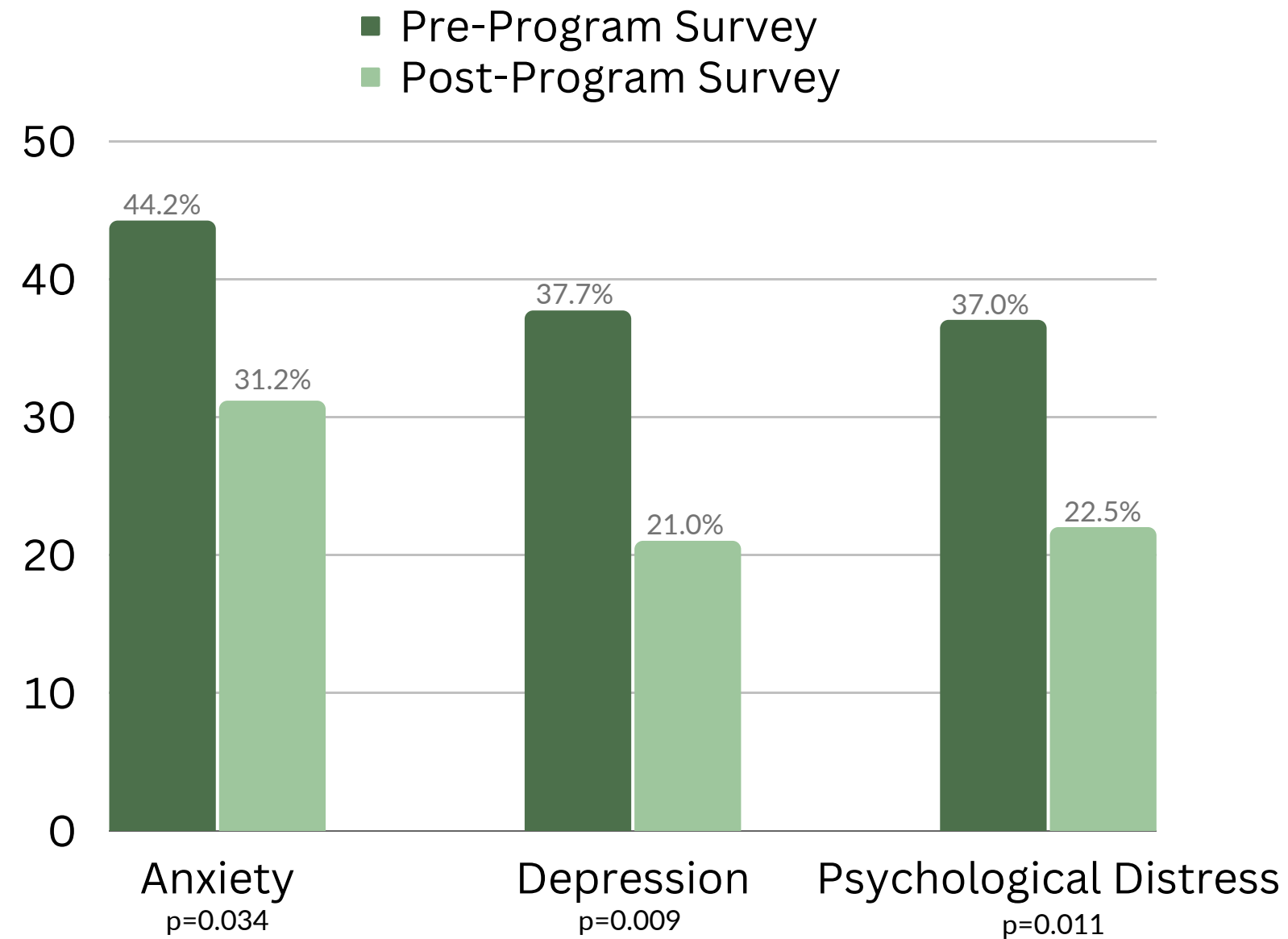


Our Participants

This year, we had 2,913 program participants from 46 states and 8 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, 24% of our program participants self-identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.



Program Results



I feel less isolated after participating in this program.



I am able to express my real feelings through art, crafting, and/or writing.



Art, crafting, and/or writing helps me feel better.



I feel more connected to other young adult cancer survivors after participating in this program.



I am definitely interested in other groups and creative workshops facilitated by Cactus Cancer Society.



Cactus HQ

Our Virtual Online Space

We were so excited this year to move into a new online program space, Cactus HQ. With the help of an innovative platform called Kumospace, we've configured a virtual office space into so much more. Cactus HQ has given us a sense of place that we were previously missing and makes you feel like you've finally arrived into our collective home. Our new online headquarters allows for deeper connections and more authentic community for those struggling with the isolation that comes with a cancer diagnosis at a young age. It also creates a place for staff to work even more collaboratively and has given us the home-base that we were missing before.



What They're Saying

Program Participant Testimonials

”

Through CCS, I feel uplifted and positively affirmed about my cancer experience, like I'm being held up by others in our community.

”

Cancer is difficult, but especially for young adults who are just coming into their own. These programs are liberating and enjoyable in a time when those things are hard to find.

”

Connection matters. I've made friends through this group that help me feel less alone.



Our Programs

At A Glance

30 Minute Tune Up
Adventure Guide Passports
Art Workshops
Ask A Cactus
Game Night
Get Your Groove Back
Guided Yoga Nidra Meditation
Guys Discussion Group

It's A Wonderful Life
Journaling Prompts
Lost and Found
Nourish, Nurture, and Renew
Oodles of Thoughts
Photographs of Meaning
Prickly Rebels Club
Program Spectacular

Sephora Brave Beauty
Survivorship Series
The Full Picture of AYA Cancer
Unspoken Ink
YA Cancer Gabfest
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 37 sessions for 264 participant participants.**

ADVENTURE GUIDE PASSPORTS

This year, we continued 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 prizes 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, 83 young adults facing cancer 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 14 workshops connecting 240 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 and two workshops specifically for parents in partnership with The Bright Spot Network. 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.**

ASK A CACTUS

This year, we launched the new Ask A Cactus program. In this program, an important topic is selected, we introduce our community to an expert on that topic, and then invite young adults facing cancer to submit questions to be answered by them. The expert then partners up with a few young adult cancer survivors to answer all the questions. The experts will create small videos and short written excerpts addressing questions, one at a time, and together our community will start learning about everything from nutrition to pharmaceutical research, fertility concerns, different lived experiences, and more. **This year, we launched our first Ask A Cactus campaign focused on nutrition with expert Alison Meagher, MS, RDN, from Scripps MD Anderson Cancer Center.**

GAME NIGHT

Cactus Cancer Society Game Nights bring together young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers to join in some fun together. We mix it up by sometimes playing Jackbox, CrowdParty, trivia, or other fun games.

This year, we hosted one game night in collaboration with Savvy Cooperative for 12 young adults facing cancer.

GET YOUR GROOVE BACK: CANCER CAN'T STEAL MY MOJO

This 6-week program inspires young adults facing cancer to reconnect with their innate magic power or “mojo.” During this series, participants learn tools to restore balance and peace, set meaningful intentions, create healthy routines and habits, find a sense of motivation and self-empowerment, use cancer to spark creativity, and learn self-care strategies including breath-work, meditation, mindful movement, yoga postures, and self-reflection. **This year, we held two 6-week sessions for a total of 27 participants. 100% of participants said they felt less isolated after participating in this program.**

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 4 sessions for 101 attendees.**

GUYS DISCUSSION GROUP

This year, we continued 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 12 sessions for a total of 121 participants.**

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! **Jean Rowe facilitated this six-week program one time this fiscal year for 18 young adult cancer patients and 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 49 journal prompts to 649 young adult cancer survivors and caregivers via email, with a total of 13,273 email opens.**

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 10 participants. Following the program, 100% of participants said they felt less isolated.**

NOURISH, NURTURE, & 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. A total of 60 nurses and social workers completed the workshop and a total of 516 continuing education credits were awarded.**

OODLES OF THOUGHTS: A DOODLE JOURNAL WORKSHOP

Cactus Cancer Society's most popular programs embody the crafts of journaling, writing, and creative expression through art. Oodles of Thoughts combines our fun art workshop environment with our popular creative writing techniques from Unspoken Ink and gives participants a chance to respond to prompts with what speaks to them most, either drawing or writing. Each session includes an opportunity for participant sharing in a nurturing, supportive, safe environment among peers. **This past fiscal year, we held one 2-hour Oodles of Thoughts workshop and 37 30-minute drop-in sessions of Coffee & Oodles for a total of 229 participants. Following the workshop, 88% 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 4 participants.**

PRICKLY REBELS CLUB

The new Prickly Rebels Club program brings together young adult cancer survivors to complete The Rebel Badge Book, a choose-your-own-adventure badge book for adults. Young adult cancer patients and survivors join an online quarterly meet up hosted via video chat where they share progress, design badge stickers, and hear from folks in our community who have a knack for a certain badge skill. They connect over shared experiences, anxieties, joys, and so much more through the lens of a shared activity book. Cactus Cancer Society donates books to survivors upon request. **This fiscal year, 34 free Rebel Badge Books were sent to young adults facing cancer, and 23 “Prickly Rebels” participated in our first quarterly meet-up.**

PROGRAM SPECTACULAR

This year, Cactus Cancer Society hosted our first ever Program Spectacular. This special one-day event featured three speakers each focusing on a different method of using creativity as a way of coping through cancer. Matt Mewhorter, prolific artist and author of the Cancer Owl comic guided us through a comic drawing workshop. Cancer survivor Justin Birckbichler engaged us in the kitchen with a cooking demonstration. And Simone Barnes led us in a joyful time of Laughter Yoga. **This event brought together 24 young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers.**

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, 61 young adults facing cancer participated in the program and received Brave Beauty Kits.**

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 four 6-week series for a total of 53 participants. After participating in the series, 100% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in their art, crafting, and writing, and 95% felt more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.**

THE FULL PICTURE OF AYA CANCER

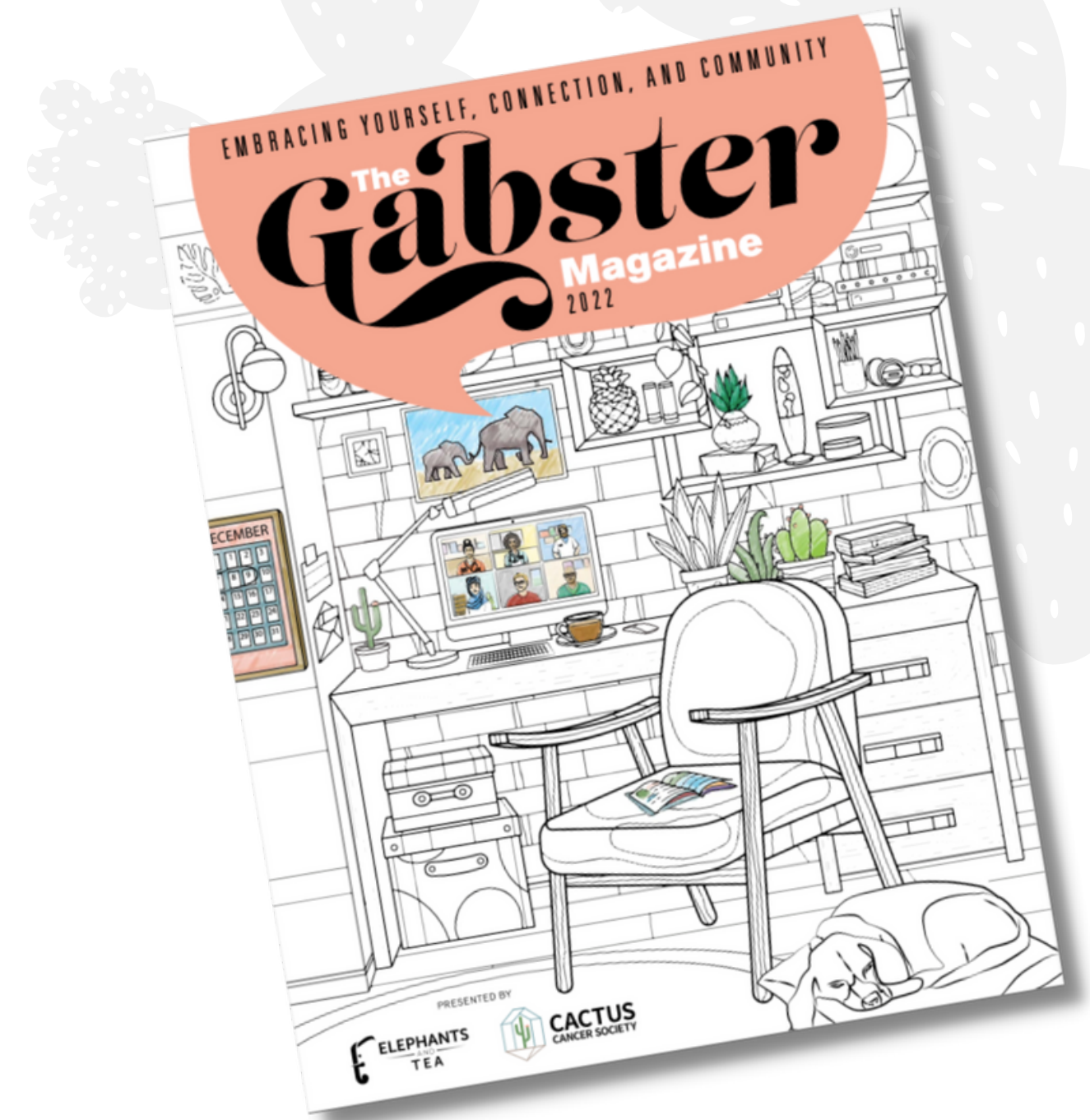
This year, we launched The Full Picture of AYA Cancer, a continuing education program for social workers and nurses presented in partnership with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. This 6-session series brought together a group of expert guests to teach attendees why experiencing cancer as an adolescent or young adult is so unique from other ages and how practitioners can best meet the need of this special population. Each session touched on a different topic related to AYA cancer, including sexuality, fertility, emotional health, survivorship, and resources specifically for AYAs. **This series consisted of 6 two-hour sessions. A total of 238 nurses and social workers attended the series and a total of 357 continuing education credits were awarded.**

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 57 young adult cancer survivors through four 8-week sessions and 1 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. **93% of participants reported feeling more connected to other young adult cancer survivors after participating in a creative writing workshop.**

YA CANCER GABFEST

YA Cancer 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, YA Cancer 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 after hours session. Each day encompassed a different theme: boundaries and disclosure, self-care, sex and relationships, careers and education, caregivers, fertility and parenthood, and connecting community. **There were 550 registered participants for this year's YA Cancer Gabfest conference. Participants received the 64-page YA Cancer 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 few chapters are discussed each week on our blog with community members sharing their thoughts in the comments. 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: The Martian, by Andy Weir, and The House In The Cerulean Sea, by TJ Klune. 58 free books were sent to young adults facing cancer.**

YOUNG ADULT CANCER HANGOUTS

Young Adult Cancer (YAC) Hangouts bring together young adult cancer survivors 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 109 young adults facing cancer through 3 YAC Hangout sessions.**

What They're Saying

Program Participant Testimonials

”

Everyone deserves a place where they can be in community and share their voice without fear of feeling judged. This space allows the participants to share wholeheartedly and it provides relief of burdens you might not feel comfortable sharing with people who haven't gone through similar experiences as yourself as it is having a chronic illness.

”

Affordable, convenient, trauma-informed, and highly therapeutic without the awkwardness of a traditional support group. Your own creativity is centered as the source of therapy and healing, not the trauma.



SUMMARY OF REVENUE

Corporate Gifts	\$226,600	73%
Indiviual Contributions	\$44,088	14%
Foundation Contributions	\$35,100	11%
Special Events	\$3,878	1%
Shop Revenue	\$234	<1%

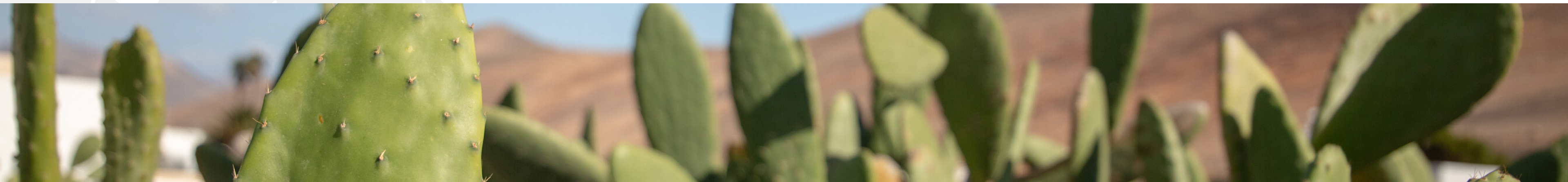
Total Revenue **\$309,950**

19% growth in revenue
over fiscal year 2021-2022

Cactus Cancer Society was supported by **151** generous donors this fiscal year. We want to thank each and every one of you for joining us in the important work.



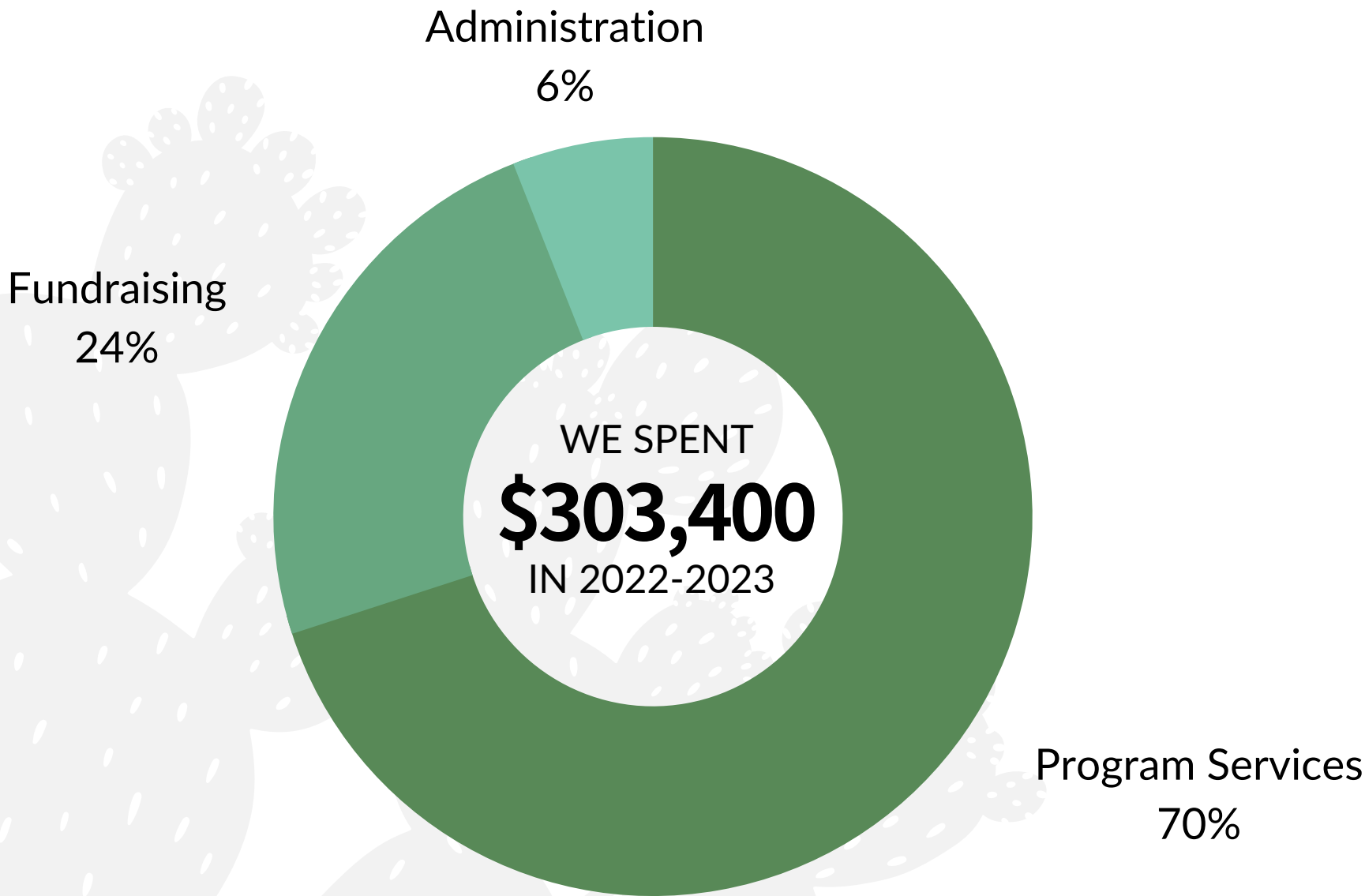
Our Partners



Our Community Partners



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.



SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES





WHERE WE'RE HEADED

In the midst of growing, we completed a strategic plan for the next couple of years and took a discerning birds-eye view of our work. As a staff and as a Board of Directors, we considered where we are adding value to the young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers whom we serve and what our unique contributions are.

While watching the ever-shifting landscape of in-person, online, and hybrid cancer support programs, our team began dreaming of ways we could make the online experience feel ever more like connecting in person. Our vision is to end isolation among young adults with cancer, so we are always looking for new ways to make our programs feel more immersive, more communal, and more conducive to building feelings of deep connection among young adults, even though they may be thousands of miles apart. We are dedicated to providing online survivorship support and have been looking for new ways to harness our strengths in creating safe space for courageous creativity, inclusive community, and practicing resilience and fortitude.

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 young adults facing cancer.



THANKS!



Stay Connected With Us



cactuscancer.org



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