

ANNUAL REPORT

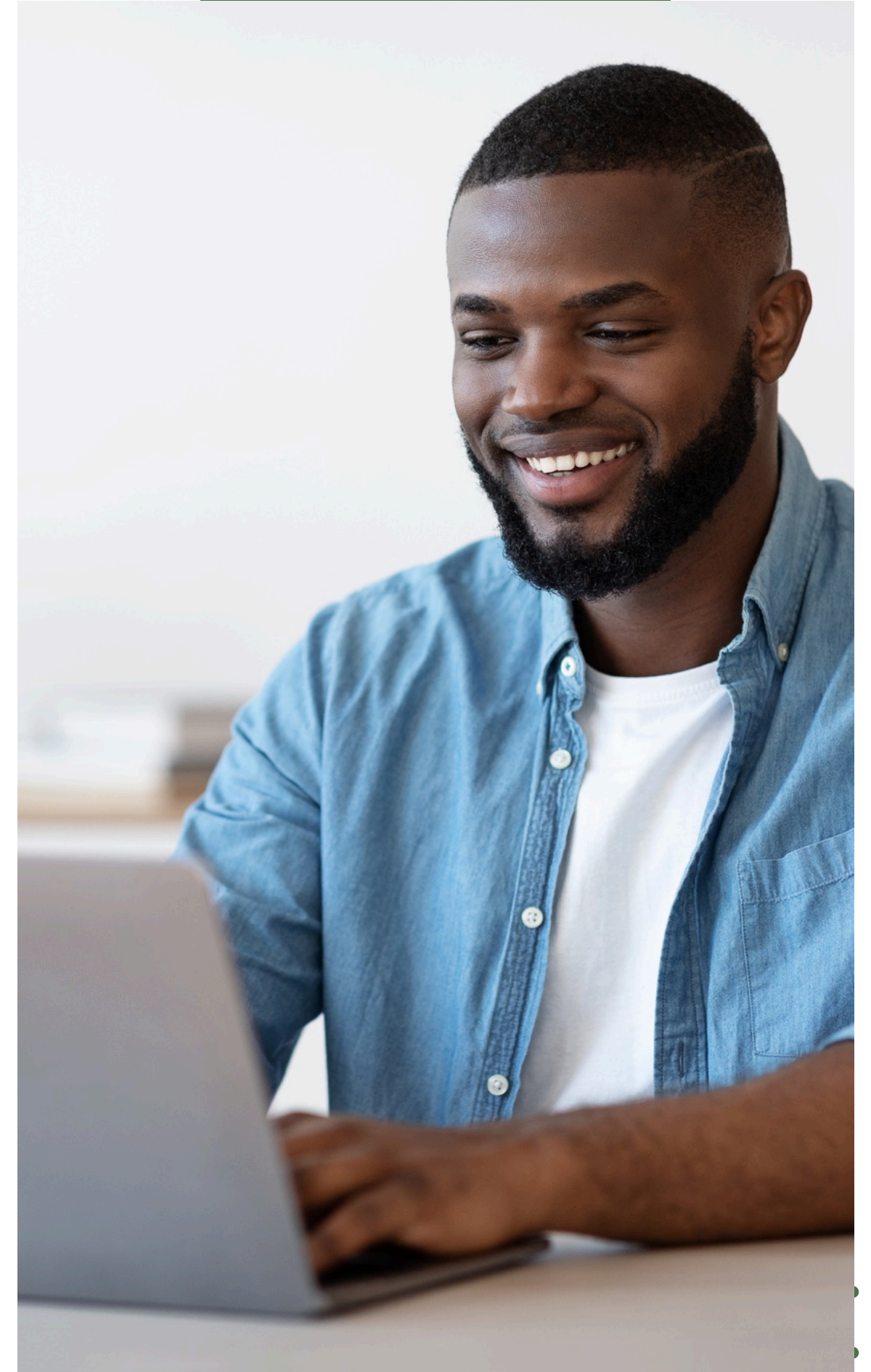
CACTUS CANCER SOCIETY

2023 - 2024

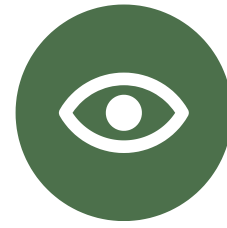
About Us

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 cancer diagnosis, geographic location, financial situation, or inpatient status.



Our Vision, Mission, & Values



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.



Values

- Courageous Creativity
- Inclusive Community
- Resilience & Fortitude

A NOTE FROM OUR CEO



Mallory Casperson
Co-Founder & Chief
Executive Officer

For young adults, cancer disrupts a pivotal stage of life - a time meant for exploration, growth, and laying the foundation for the future. At Cactus Cancer Society, we deeply understand the unique challenges that come with a cancer diagnosis at this age and we provide innovative programs that empower, inspire, and foster resilience and community. Our mission, 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, has never been more vital.

This year has been transformative. Thanks to your unwavering support and generosity, we have expanded our reach and have taken strides to reduce the number of participants on our waitlists, opening up more program spots as quickly as possible to meet the needs of more and more young adults facing cancer. Our creative coping programs have not only reduced self-reported levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, but have also provided thousands of young adults with an outlet to express their emotions, connect with peers, form a community, and reclaim their narrative.

None of this would be possible without you—our dedicated supporters, volunteers, and partners. Your belief in our mission, in the knowledge that it isn't enough just to survive cancer, fuels our passion and drives our progress. Together, we are making this a better, more connected world for young adult cancer survivors and caregivers.

With heartfelt gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Mallory".

Our Staff



Mallory Casperson

Co-Founder &
Chief Executive Officer



Aerial Donovan

Co-Founder &
Chief Program Officer



Lauren Creel

Chief Operations
Officer



Scarlett Callahan

Development Coordinator



Christina Kosyla

Program Coordinator



Stephen Heaviside

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

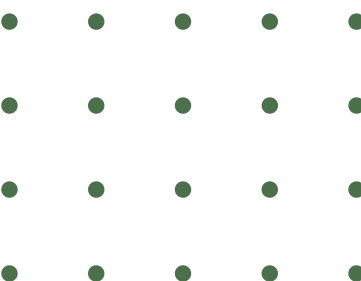
VP of Business Development,
SnapCare

Shelly Whitsitt, MBA

Director of Strategy,
Fusion Hill

Betty Roggenkamp, MSHC

AYA Program Development Strategist,
Teen Cancer America



Our Young Adult

Cancer Survivors Advisory Board

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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

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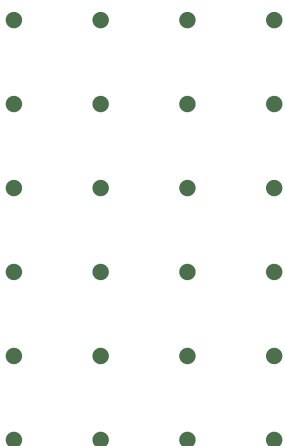
Marlaine Figueroa Gray, PhD

Michael Fu, MD, MBA

Mindy Buchanan

Paige Malinowski, MSW, LCSW

Rebecca Block, PhD, MSW





Our Impact

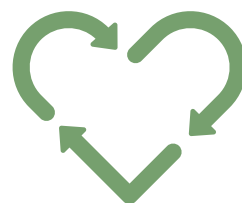
2023 - 2024



193
programs held



3,529 / 49 / 12
program participants from 49 states and 12 countries



97%
want to participate in future Cactus Cancer Society programs



148
posts published to our Young Adult Voices Blog



126
books sent through our Young Adult Cancer Book Club and Prickly Rebels Club

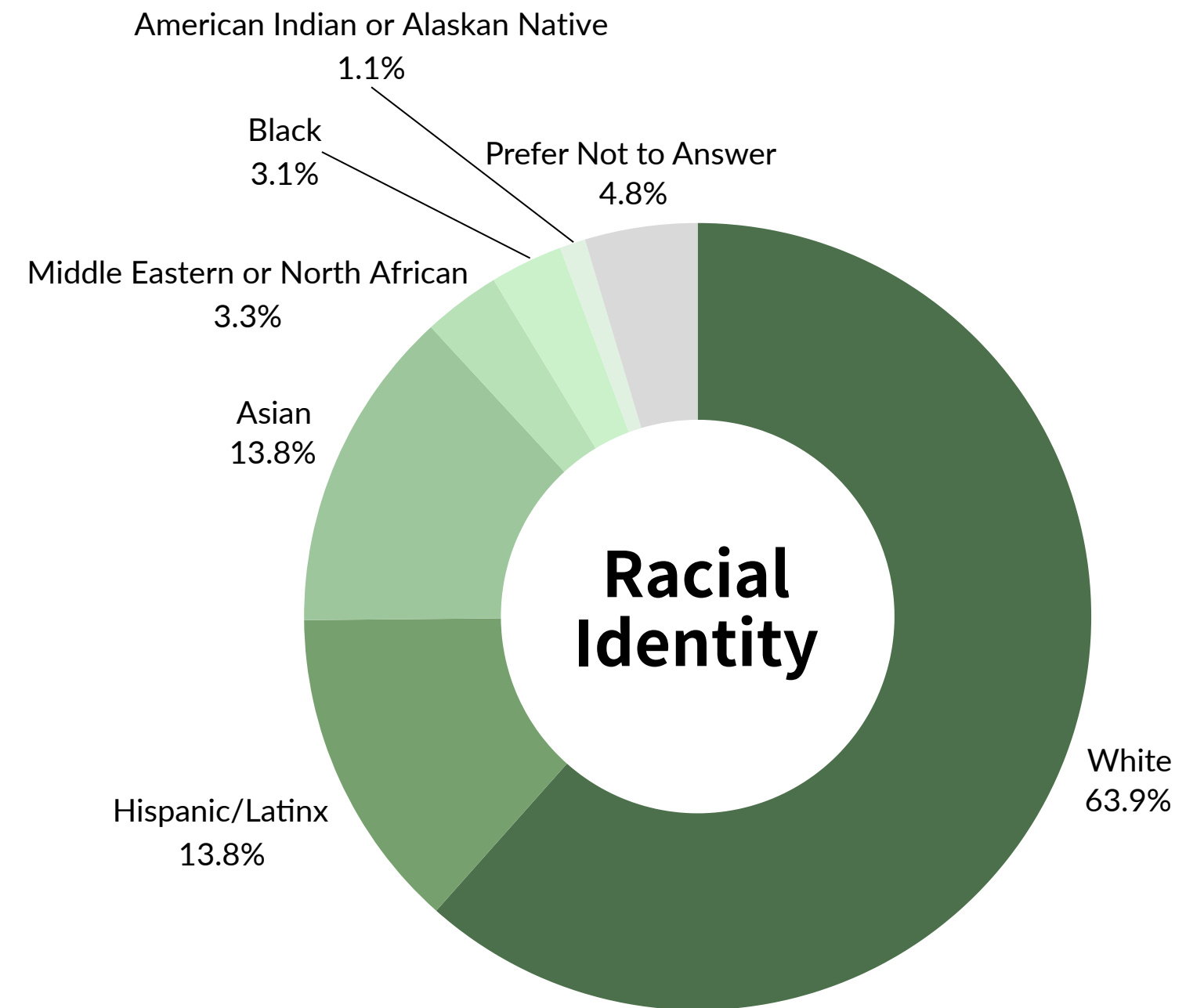


3,555
continuing education credits awarded to nurses and social workers

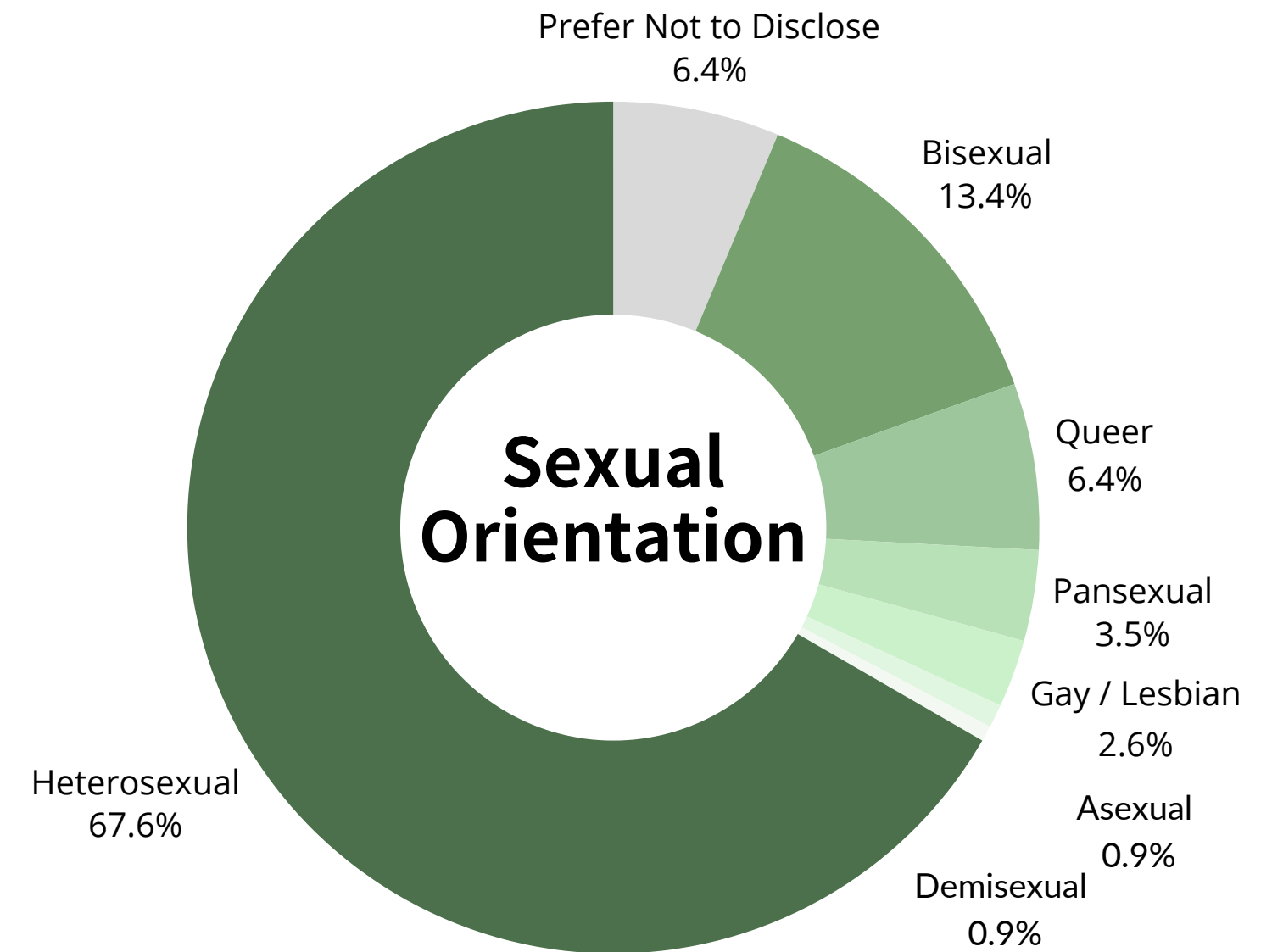
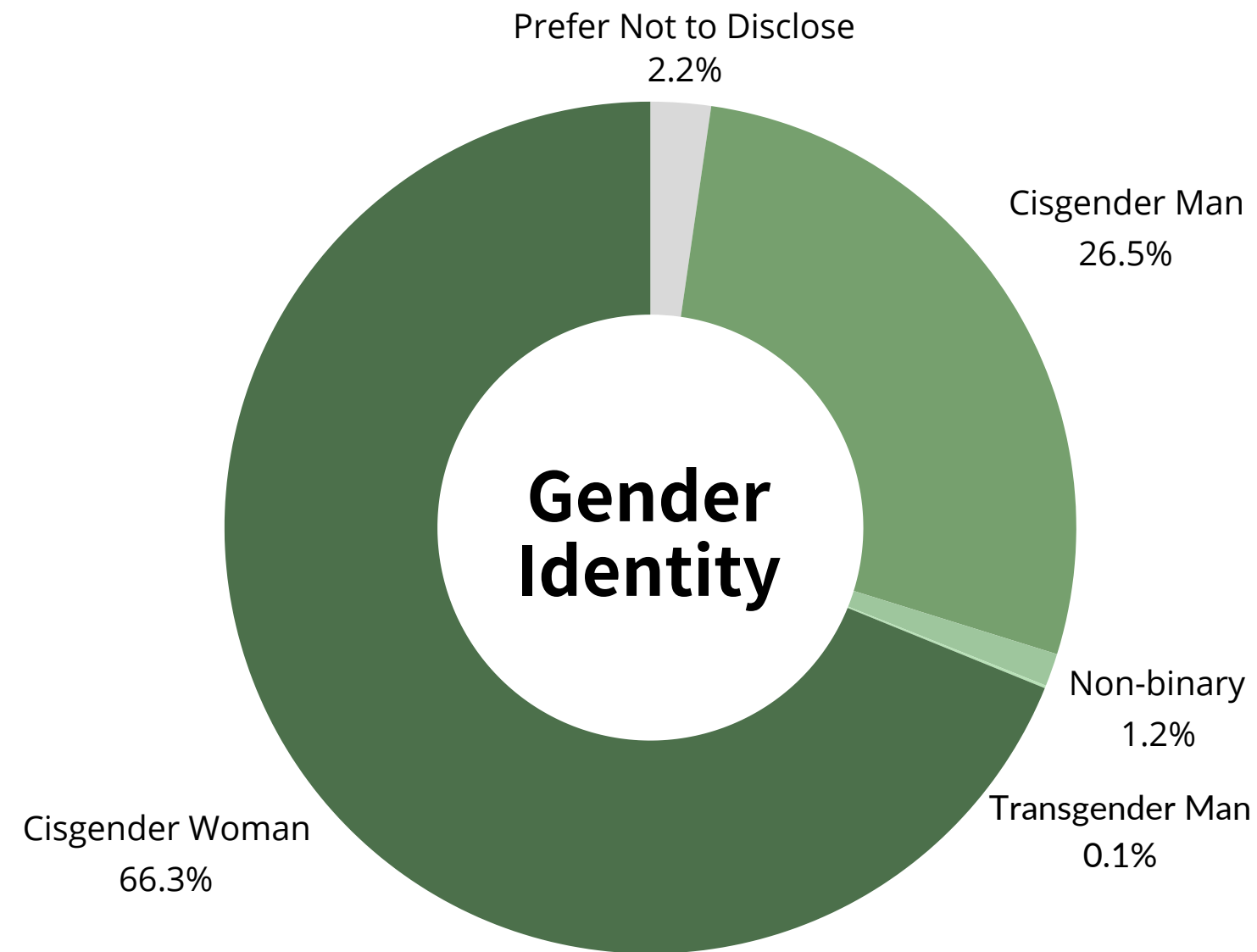


Our Participants

This year, we had 3,529 program participants from 49 states and the District of Columbia, and 12 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.



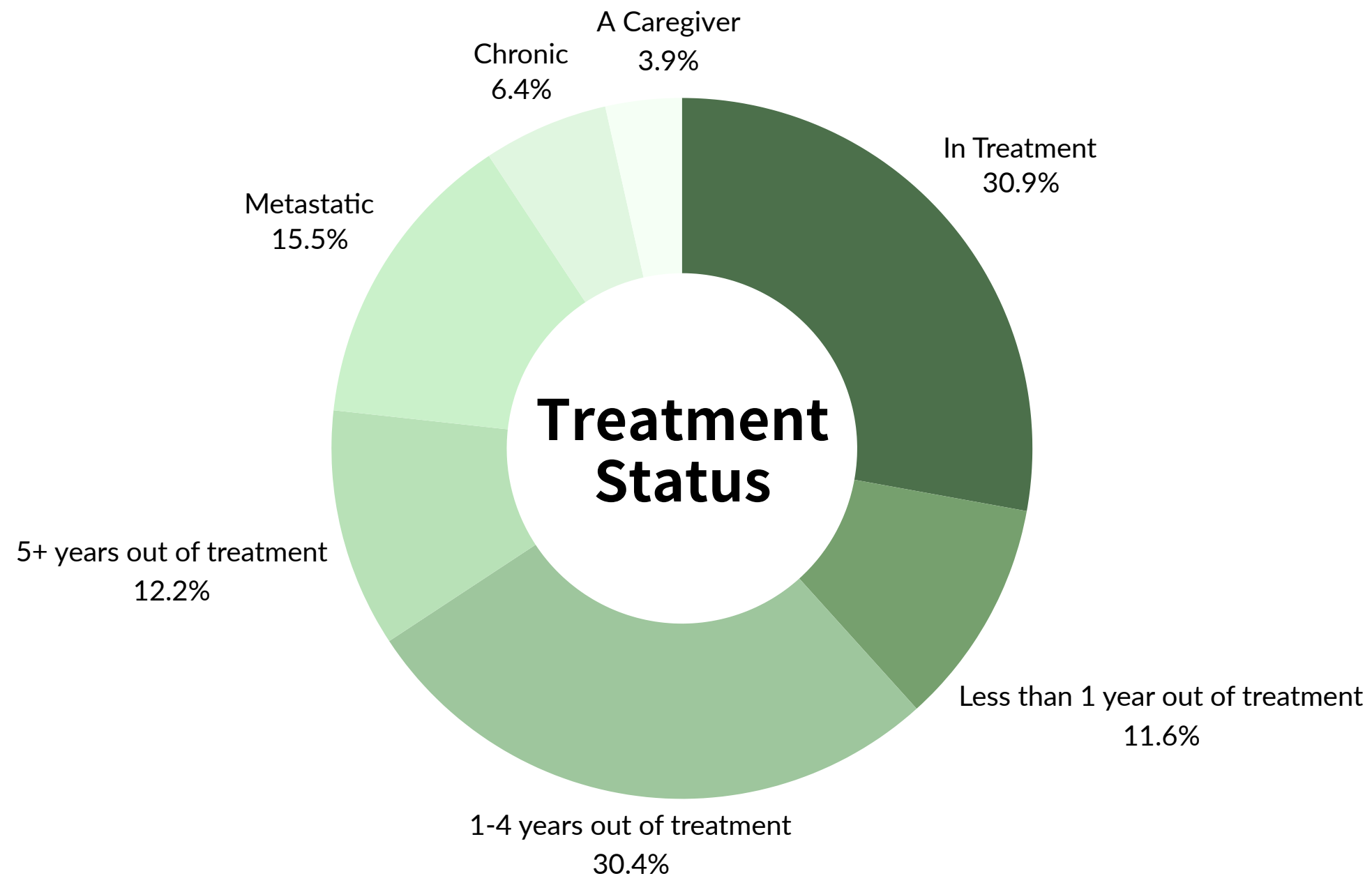
Our Participants



Participation from males is historically low in the cancer support space. This fiscal year, we focused intentionally on expanding our reach and our program offerings to attract and support more young adult guys who are facing cancer. As a result, we saw an increase in program participation among cisgender men from less than 4% last fiscal year to over 26% this fiscal year. In addition, 26% of our program participants self-identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.



Treatment Status



The young adults who participate in programs with Cactus Cancer Society vary widely in their treatment status, with 30.9% in treatment, 11.6% less than 1 year out of treatment, 30.4% between 1 and 4 years out of treatment, and 12.2% 5 or more years out of treatment. Additionally, 15.5% of our program participants are facing metastatic cancer and 6.4% are facing chronic cancer. In addition, 3.9% of our participants are young adult cancer caregivers.



What They're Saying

Program Participant Testimonials

“Through this program, I was able to connect to others with experiences very similar to mine as well as gain new friendships and additional knowledge that will help me navigate survivorship.”

“Cactus Cancer Society’s programs help me feel less stressed, less isolated, and help me have an outlet for my emotions.”

“Coming to the programs really helps me remember I’m not alone. It’s something I can attend with little effort and without wearing myself out while also gleaning a lot from the sessions and leaving feeling less isolated.”

Our Programs

At A Glance

All of our programs are mission-centered and focus on creative expression and connection for young adults facing cancer. Our programs are free of charge and are offered online, so are accessible by any young adult facing cancer with an internet connection. In general, our programs fall within the following categories:

Art & Creativity
Writing
Storytelling
Community Building



90 MINUTE RESET

90 Minute Reset is a 90 journaling workshop 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 90 minutes journaling and connecting with each other via Zoom. During the workshop, Jean presents a series of 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 3 sessions for 29 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, 67 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 12 workshops connecting 185 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 one workshop 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, 94% of participants said they felt better after sharing their feelings in their crafting or artwork.**

ASK A CACTUS

In the Ask A Cactus 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 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 3 Ask A Cactus campaign focused on fertility and family building, side-effect management, and creative coping.** These campaigns live as evergreen content on our website, enabling young adults facing cancer to learn from others' expertise at any time of day or night.

BEGIN AGAIN

This year, we launched Begin Again, a new program facilitated by Tara O'Donoghue, C-IAYT, TIYT, of Lov Yoga. This hour-long monthly drop-in program encourages young adults facing cancer to hit the refresh button on their day, week, or month. Tara guides participants through mindfulness and breathing exercises, followed by the opportunity to journal and reflect on an intention they would like to bring to their month ahead. This program has drawn repeat participants who appreciate the ability to reflect month to month and measure their growth and change. **This past fiscal year, Tara led 9 sessions for 58 participants.**

BUILDERS WORKSHOPS

The Builders Workshops are a brand new program at Cactus Cancer Society. Each Builders Workshop is designed to bring together participants over a meditative lego building activity. Young adult cancer patients and survivors sign up for the workshop, Cactus Cancer Society sends them a supply box in the mail with everything they need to participate, free of charge to the young adults, and they join the video chat on the specified day and time for the specific, 2-hour Builders Workshop. These Builders Workshops allow young adult cancer patients and survivors to connect with their peers facing cancer while expressing themselves and their journeys creatively and learning calming coping skills. **This past fiscal year, we held 4 Builders Workshops for a total of 62 participants.**

CAREGIVER & SURVIVOR GAME NIGHT

Cactus Cancer Society Game Nights bring together young adult cancer patients, survivors, and their caregivers to join in some fun games together. This program was offered after receiving suggestions from caregivers about bringing both caregivers and patients into the same room, without the burden of discussing treatment, appointments, or health status. **This year, we hosted one game night for 14 young adult cancer patients and caregivers.**

COFFEE & OODLES

Cactus Cancer Society's most popular programs embody the crafts of journaling, writing, and creative expression through art. Coffee & 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 weekly 30-minute drop-in session includes an opportunity for participant sharing in a nurturing, supportive, safe environment among peers. **This past fiscal year, we held 47 sessions for a total of 265 participants.**

CREATIVE COPING SERIES

The Creative Coping Series brings together a cohort of young adults facing cancer for an 8-week program experience focused on creative coping. Cohorts participate in 8 creative projects designed to help them learn coping techniques. The same group of young adults participates the entire time, creating a tight-knit community. **This past fiscal year, we held our first 8-week series for 16 participants. After participating in the series, 100% of participants said they less isolated, and 100% felt more connected to other young adult cancer survivors.**



FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups bring together young adult cancer patients across a diverse spectrum of gender identity, diagnosis, treatment status, and geographic location to gather insight about key topics. **This year, we hosted 1 focus group with 16 participants on side-effects management.** Discussion surrounded topics including when a side-effect warrants going to the emergency room, mental health, the impact of side effects on patients' well-being, and finding the right support. This focus group generated insightful questions in the areas of communication, self-advocacy, and getting support that were then answered and shared with the broader community through our Ask A Cactus program.

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 one 6-week session for a total of 9 participants.**

GUIDED YOGA NIDRA MEDITATION WITH MAMMA G

In this program, which is a collaboration with our friends at Elephants and Tea, Angie Giallourakis (aka Mamma G) leads participants in yoga Nidra meditation, a meditative technique that focuses on breathwork and relaxation of the body. Sessions focus on four different themes: connecting to the energy within; coming to awareness; the objective observer; and tapping into your joy. **This year, we held 8 sessions for 195 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 140 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 13 young adult cancer patients and survivors.**

JOURNALING PROMPTS

Participants sign up to receive a journaling prompt sent periodically to their email inbox. Each prompt is written by a Certified Journal Therapist and 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 48 journal prompts to 859 young adult cancer survivors and caregivers via email, with a total of 17,170 email opens.**

OODLES OF THOUGHTS

Cactus Cancer Society presented a session called Oodles of Thoughts, a doodle and journaling workshop, at Stupid Cancer's annual in-person conference, CancerCon. In this workshop, participants receive a prompt to spark their imaginations and creativity: a quote, a photo, a song lyric, or a piece of art. From that prompt, participants respond with writing, doodling, or a combination of both. While sharing is not required, it is enthusiastically encouraged. After each share, the facilitator asks the group to reflect on the piece and share their feedback, which, when guided by our facilitators, is always positive and uplifting. **This year, we presented 1 session for 35 participants.**

PRICKLY REBELS CLUB

The 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, 19 free Rebel Badge Books were sent to young adults facing cancer, and 11 "Prickly Rebels" participated in our two Prickly Rebels Club meet-ups.**

RSVP

RSVP: An Invitation to Shift Into Living is a new 4-week journaling workshop led by certified journal therapist and social worker Jean Rowe, LCSW, OSW-C. This workshop explores ideas of choosing to live with humor, forgiveness, gratitude, and self-love so that young adults facing cancer can shift from a place of just surviving to actually thriving. **This past fiscal year, Jean led one 4-week session for 16 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, 32 young adults facing cancer participated in the program and received Brave Beauty Kits.**

STORY MAPPING

This year, we launched a brand new Story Mapping workshop, which combines the power of storytelling with the art of graphic representation. This 3-part workshop is about empowering young adults who are at any stage of their cancer experience to find their voice, tell their story, and thrive by appreciating the challenges and gifts inherent in any cancer experience. By creatively and courageously processing experiences, our community members open themselves up to all the lessons coping with cancer and the difficulties of life can bring. By sharing their stories, our community members promote healing through connection. **This past fiscal year, we led our first 3-session Story Mapping series for 16 participants.**



SURVIVORSHIP SERIES

The Survivorship Series combines some of our most popular programs into an 8-week program. In this program, a cohort of young adult cancer patients and survivors attend a series of programs together, including 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 8-week series for a total of 86 participants. After participating in the series, 100% of participants said they felt less isolated, and 93% 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 4-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 4-week program which served 26 participants. 100% of participants said they were definitely interested in participating in other groups and creative workshops with Cactus Cancer Society after participating in this program.**

THE FULL PICTURE OF AYA CANCER

This year, we launched an online, on-demand version of 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 consists of 6 90-minute lessons and 9 continuing education credits are offered. A total of 395 nurses and social workers completed the entire course and a total of 3,555 continuing education credits were awarded.**

UNSPOKEN INK

Unspoken Ink: Young Adult Cancer Creative Writing Workshop continued as a favorite program this year. 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. **Unspoken Ink was delivered via online video chat to 13 young adult cancer survivors through one 4-week session.**

UNSPOKEN WHISPERS

Unspoken Whispers is a weekly 30-minute drop-in version of our popular Unspoken Ink program. In each 30-minute session, participants are given one writing prompt and asked to share their writing aloud after a 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. **This fiscal year, we held 25 sessions of Unspoken Whispers for 89 participants.**

YA CANCER GABFEST

YA Cancer Gabfest is a week-long online conference for young adults facing cancer, presented in partnership with Elephants and Tea. 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 session. **There were 805 registrants and 356 unique participants for this year's YA Cancer Gabfest conference. Participants received the 52-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 four books together: Under the Whispering Door, by TJ Klune; Mom's Marijuana, by Dan Shapiro; Portrait of a Thief, by Grace D. Li; and A Psalm for the Wild-Built, by Becky Chambers. 107 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 hosted our annual Holiday Party Hangout for 15 young adults facing cancer.** In this celebrated annual event, our program participants joined for an evening of casual catch ups, games, and a lot of laughs. It's an uplifting way to mark the holiday season with joy and others who "just get it."

Summary Of Revenue

Corporate Gifts	\$300,793	75%
Indiviual Contributions	\$50,662	13%
Foundation Contributions	\$47,500	12%
Special Events	\$1,866	<1%
Shop Revenue	\$412	<1%

Total Revenue **\$401,232**

29% growth in revenue
over fiscal year 2022-2023

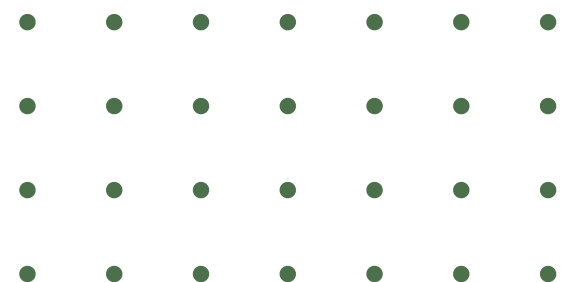
Cactus Cancer Society was supported by **137** generous donors this fiscal year. We want to thank each and every one of you for joining us in this important work.



Our Partners



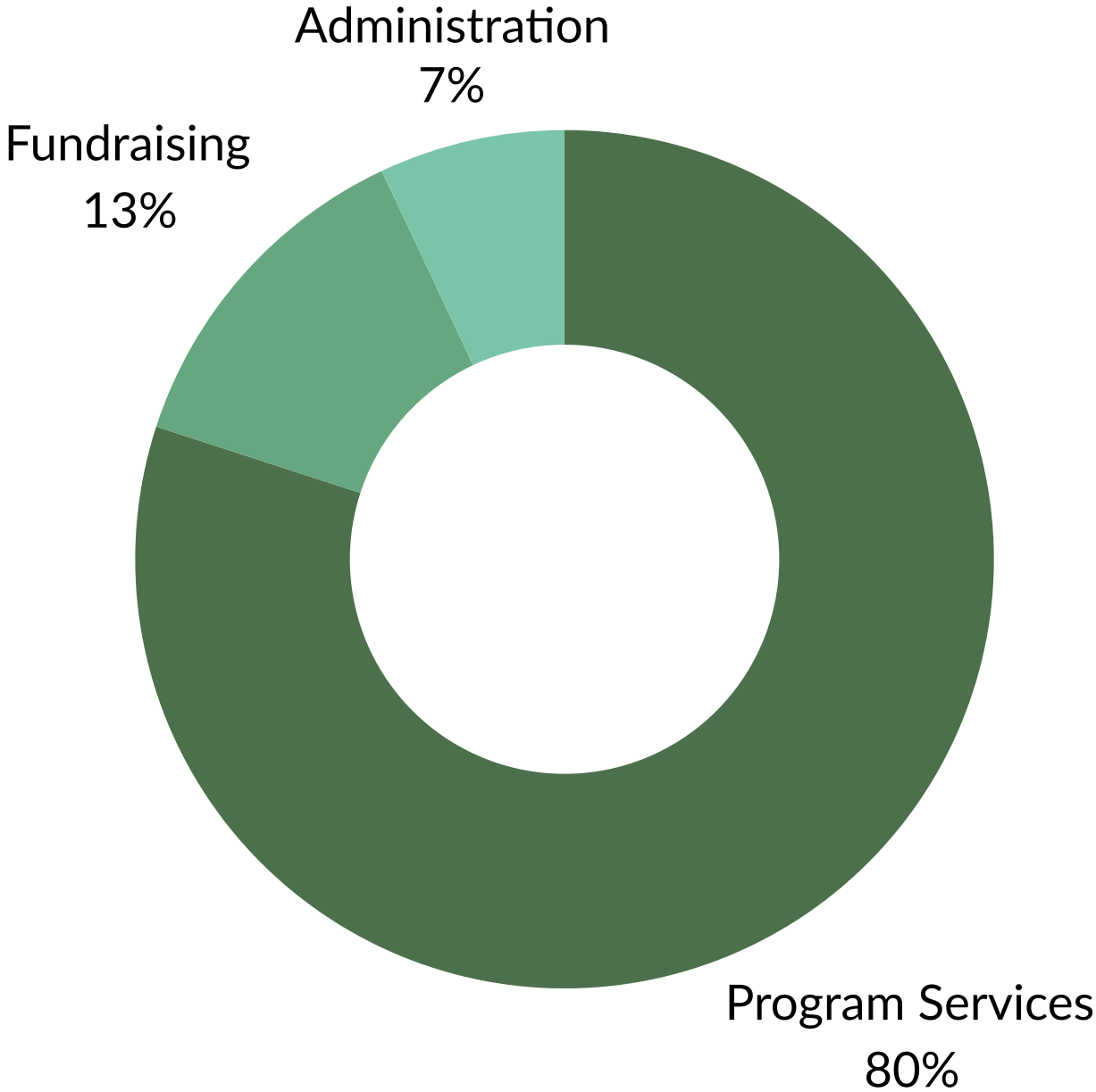
Our Community Partners





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

Over the last fiscal year, we've worked diligently to intentionally consider where we're adding value to the young adult cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers whom we serve and we've focused on where we offer unique contributions. We're moving toward our vision of the future where no young adult faces cancer alone — where they find a community of supportive peers the second they are diagnosed with cancer and survivorship support is offered as accessibly as ever before.

Moving forward into our next fiscal year, we'll continue to focus on reducing the number of young adults facing cancer who are on our waitlists, working to open up more and more program spots to them. We're hoping to expand our team to one additional full-time team member, offering us more resources and opportunities to continue to serve the young adults facing cancer that come through our virtual doors.

This next year is a huge milestone for us as a nonprofit — our 10th year! We'll be celebrating with an in-person 10th Anniversary Gala in the San Francisco Bay Area in April 2025 and are excited to see as many of you there as possible!

THANKS!

Stay Connected With Us



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