

A SEASON OF FIRSTS

GRATITUDE
REPORT 2024



CAMPFIRE
CIRCLE

HEALING THROUGH HAPPINESS

To our community of supporters,

At Campfire Circle, we're dedicated to providing life-changing firsts: the first time being away from parents; the first time getting chemotherapy outside of the hospital; the first time making friends who truly understand the challenges of a serious childhood illness.

This summer, in addition to serving more oncology campers than ever, we offered a week of camp to children with heart disease and serious blood disorders—many of whom experienced the benefits of camp for the very first time. These moments of “firsts”—from canoeing to climbing our accessible high ropes course—are not just milestones; they are life-changing experiences that build confidence, courage, and resilience. And they were made possible by donors like you.

In this year's report, we're also excited to share findings about our In-Hospital Programs from a new research collaboration with Trent University, showcasing how our impact is not only visible; it's measurable.

On behalf of everyone at Campfire Circle, I want to extend our deepest gratitude to you, who help bring our mission to life every day.

Together, we are truly providing healing through happiness.

With gratitude,



Alex Robertson
CEO, Campfire Circle



OUR BIGGEST SUMMER EVER



OVERNIGHT CAMP AT MUSKOKA

At Campfire Circle Muskoka this summer, 713 patients, siblings, bereaved siblings, and teens experienced healing and joy through our medically supported overnight camp programs.

We offered unique experiences to campers, such as a dance party, which transformed the barn into a vibrant disco complete with lights, staging, and dancers. This was especially memorable for participants in our 7Scape teen program for youth with cancer, where we welcomed the most medically complex group to date.

Our senior campers (ages 12-14) enjoyed a new three-day co-ed camping trip in Algonquin Provincial Park. More than 30 campers developed essential outdoor skills, learning to collaborate, make fires and set up tents. Even campers with significant medical needs — such as a camper on oxygen whose tank was waterproofed for the trip — fully participated and were supported by our medical team, which included two trip nurses.

We doubled our Leadership-in-Training (LIT) spots, offering the program to twice as many teens and this year included siblings, further strengthening the sense of inclusion and support for families impacted by cancer.

“I honestly think that going to this camp is the best thing that's ever happened to me. All the amazing people I met here, and the wonderful positive energy is such a great change of pace that I really needed.”

— Leadership Camper

OVERNIGHT CAMP AT RAINBOW LAKE



This summer, we welcomed 709 campers (or 177 families) across nine incredible sessions of family camp. Thanks to your support, we created unforgettable experiences for families—helping them heal, bond, and make cherished memories.

Recognizing the importance of caregiver support, we created a special “Caregivers’ Café,” a Starbucks-style experience, so parents could take a break and connect. We also added a Caregivers Climb—a high-ropes activity that gave adults the opportunity to challenge themselves and bond while conquering their fears.

“This was my first family camp, as well as my child’s. I felt supported, from staff and from other parents. The talent show was the most supportive thing I’ve ever seen. Seeing my six-year-old up there performing, living, thankful to have them alive, it brought up a lot of emotions. For me it was a realization that maybe things will be okay. For my child, I think it meant a lot as well. It was an amazing experience. Thank you.” — Camper Dad

Thanks to innovations like canoe stabilizers, campers with complex medical needs were able to join water activities for the first time. New medical advancements at camp, such as on-site bloodwork testing, ensured that campers undergoing treatment could stay at camp without needing to leave for routine medical tests.

Your support made this transformative summer possible for families who need it most.

SERVING MORE KIDS WITH SERIOUS ILLNESS

This August, Campfire Circle, in partnership with Camp Jumoke and Camp Oki, hosted a week-long overnight camp session for more than 100 kids with heart disease and serious blood disorders such as sickle cell disease.

“The day I arrived at Campfire Circle was the first time I had met anyone with my condition,” says 13-year-old Sarah*. “When my cabinmate told me she has sickle cell disease too, and that most people at camp here do, it made me feel at home.”

“For a lot of our families, there’s a stigma attached to some chronic illnesses, especially hereditary illnesses,” says Dr. Melanie Kirby-Allen, a haematologist at SickKids. “So, it’s good for the kids to get out and share and know that they’re not alone. It builds confidence and self-esteem. We see children coming to camp and blossoming.”

The week had many highlights for Sarah including canoeing for the first time, getting to climb on the high ropes, and swimming in the lake. For many kids, swimming can be a challenge as their symptoms can be triggered by cold temperatures, so campers were carefully monitored by medical staff and we set up a warming cabin for kids to take breaks, dry off, and stay warm.

For Sarah, the week at camp was more than just an opportunity to experience new outdoor adventures. “The biggest lesson I’ve learned from coming to camp is inclusivity. I feel like I belong, and when you feel like you belong, you can do anything.”

During the serious illness session, our medical team included **3 cardiologists, 2 haematologists, 8 nurses, and 1 pharmacist.**

More than **1,590 medications** were administered.



MAKING CAMP ACCESSIBLE TO COMPLEX CAMPERS

In September, Campfire Circle was thrilled to offer a weekend at camp for 16 families of kids with medical complexities. Our team worked in partnership with Emily's House Children's Hospice in Toronto and our medical advisors from SickKids Complex Care team and SickKids Paediatric Advanced Care Team (PACT) to ensure it was a safe and successful experience.

"These children, given their underlying medical fragility, their technology dependency and their need for caregiver and nursing support, often up to 24 seven hours in a day, they really can't have that experience in other environments," says Dr. Julia Orkin, the Medical Director of the Complex Care Program at SickKids. "So, the opportunity to be at a camp outside of the city, by the lake with their siblings, and their parents enjoying the special opportunities that come with camp is just remarkable. And really, there's no other place in Canada and maybe even the world that offers this for children that we care for."

"I think most of these families could never even imagine their child going to camp," says Dr. Adam Rapoport, the Medical Director of PACT at SickKids, and the Medical Director of Emily's House Children's Hospice.



And so, the fact that Campfire Circle put together this camp, just says to these families, 'You matter,' and says to these kids, 'You matter, and we're going to make this happen. We know how beneficial our programs are to all these other kids and families we serve. We're going to do the same for you.'" – Dr. Adam Rapoport



OUR IMPACT IN HOSPITALS

In partnership with Trent University, Campfire Circle participated in a study of our In-Hospital Programming to measure the psychosocial impact and long-term outcomes of our programs on the kids we serve.

Children and youth with serious illness often miss out on crucial childhood experiences during treatment. A diagnosis can significantly affect their psychosocial health and development, leaving them more vulnerable to anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress, and other mental health challenges.

This new research highlights the powerful impact of Campfire Circle's hospital programming. Led by Dr. Sarah West, Associate Dean of Science and Associate Professor of Kinesiology & Biology at Trent University, the research study's initial findings show that our programs not only bring joy and excitement to youth during tough times—they also provide vital emotional support.

Youth who participate in Campfire Circle programs demonstrate strong psychosocial health, displaying high levels of resilience, hope, and social connectedness, all things that can be negatively affected by cancer treatment.



YOUR IMPACT

THIS SUMMER BY
THE NUMBERS

9,375

DAYS OF CAMP

FOR KIDS WITH CANCER
OR SERIOUS ILLNESS,
AND THEIR FAMILIES

+1,500

CAMPERS AT OVERNIGHT CAMP
AT MUSKOKA AND RAINBOW LAKE

6,500

MEDICATIONS

DISPENSED BY OUR
MEDICAL TEAM

3 FAMILY TENT
CAMPING TRIPS

3 SUMMER
KICK OFF PARTIES

(OTTAWA, LONDON AND TORONTO)

85
CAMPERS

AT OUR DAY CAMPS
IN OTTAWA,
TORONTO, AND
MARKHAM

40%

OF OUR MUSKOKA
CAMPERS WERE
REFERRED
BY MEDICAL
PROFESSIONALS

1,050

EXPERIENCES

AT SICKKIDS DURING
OUR HOSPITAL-WIDE
CAMP WEEK

357

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS
HELPED MAKE IT POSSIBLE

HERE'S WHAT OUR CAMPERS HAD TO SAY:

“

I was so shy when it came to singing in front of people, but I sang a song at campfire with a counsellor, who made me feel confident and proud of myself. Now I feel like I can get up in front of large audiences and sing.”

“

As first-time campers, we had the experience of a lifetime!! Five days full of laughter, fun and relaxation. It truly made us forget about all the bad and what's ahead in the future and just focus on the now.”

“

This organization has gone above and beyond to make my family feel welcome and special. My child had a blast and we felt very safe having him participate in all the activities.”

“

We cannot express in words how grateful we are for Campfire Circle. It is the silver lining in the dark cloud of a childhood cancer journey.”

“

Camp was the only place he could go to with confidence after losing his sibling to cancer. Camp gave him his own life back after cancer took his brother's away.”

“

Camp is teaching both of us life's lessons: how to be away from each other and still feel safe and enjoy life. My child is learning to be independent.”

THANK YOU!

With your support, we are providing critical programming for children with cancer or serious illness and their families.

Thank you for your incredible generosity.



campfirecircle.org



**CAMPFIRE
CIRCLE**

HEALING THROUGH HAPPINESS