CAMPFIRE CIRCLE

HEALING THROUGH HAPPINESS

Gratitude Report 2026



Growing **Stronger** *Together*

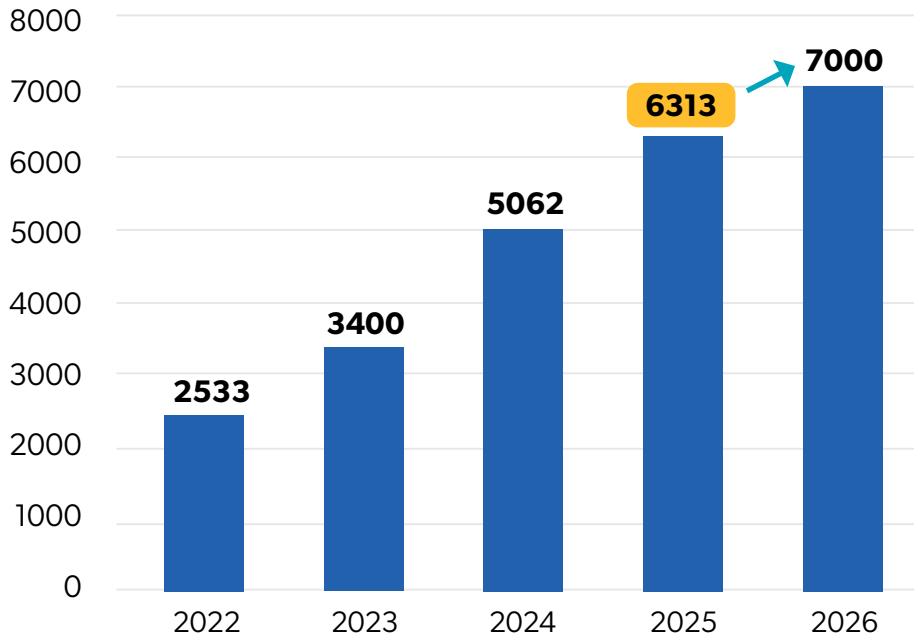
To our community of supporters,

This time of year invites reflection and gratitude, and I want to thank you for your incredible commitment to Campfire Circle. Your support is helping to make 2026 our biggest year yet: **we're on track to welcome 7,000 campers and deliver 36,000 camp experiences to kids with cancer or serious illness and their families across Ontario.**

One thing I hear time and time again from those who meet our campers is: "They're so strong. They're so resilient." And it's true. As they navigate growing up, they're also navigating hospital stays, invasive treatments, and long stretches of time away from school, friends, and the everyday experiences of childhood.

More Campers

Served Year Over Year Across All Programs



For these kids, camp offers a profound shift: from patient to camper. Instead of hospitals, surgeries, and medical appointments, there are canoes, campfires, and sing-alongs.

At camp, kids build friendships with peers who understand their journey. They try new things and discover strengths they didn't know they had. They gain confidence, build independence, and experience the simple joy of being kids.

Looking forward, I am more convinced than ever that every child living with serious illness deserves to experience this joy. That's why we are boldly expanding our reach to serve 10,000 campers annually by 2030 through expanded in-hospital programs, renovations at Rainbow Lake, and building a brand-new medical camp in Prince Edward County.

Once again, thank you for being an integral part of our circle and this exciting journey.

Alex Robertson
CEO, Campfire Circle



Building Resilience



Serious illness affects every aspect of a child's life. Across Ontario, more than 40,000 families are navigating these challenges, often experiencing lengthy hospital stays, intensive treatment schedules, disrupted schooling, isolation, and financial strain.

At Campfire Circle, we work to better understand and strengthen support for children during this critical time for social and emotional development.

Kids facing serious illness are often isolated from friends and miss out on opportunities due to their prolonged treatment, resulting in negative self-perceptions, academic delays, and weakened confidence. For these kids, it's important to introduce experiences to foster developmental growth.

Our free, medically supported programs help to fill this gap. We know that kids with serious illness need more than medical treatment—they need opportunities for childhood, connection, and belonging.



We conceptualize resilience as the strengthening of four interconnected constructs.

Creating Opportunities for Joy

We know that resilience is critical to a child's long-term developmental outcomes. Our programming seeks to reinforce this skill through powerful childhood experiences that kids facing serious illness would not otherwise be able to access.

At Campfire Circle, kids with serious illness build friendships and experience a sense of belonging through shared experiences with peers who understand their journey. They develop confidence and self-esteem by trying new things, taking healthy risks, and discovering what they're capable of. They grow their independence through age-appropriate choices and responsibilities. And they improve their emotional well-being through joy, play, self-expression, and respite from the challenges of their illness.

Children become stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to adapt, cope, and even thrive, despite the difficulties they are facing.

Impact That Endures

Year after year, Campfire Circle's survey results confirm that our programs contribute to improved well-being and resilience. **Following just one camp session, aggregate resilience scores demonstrated a statistically significant increase.**

We saw the largest gains in social functioning and self-esteem. These scores reflected campers' confidence in forming friendships, engaging socially, and feeling connected to others. Campers also reported stronger beliefs in their competence and personal worth following camp.

Campfire Circle's evaluation findings show that camp is not only joyful, it can be transformative. After camp, children reported feeling more connected, more confident, more independent, and stronger emotionally than before camp.

A complete summary of 2026 program results will be availablein our Annual Report, to be published in spring 2027.





From Chemo to Campfire

Nine-year-old Kursten was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma in late 2025. For mom Kriszella, Kursten, and her two younger brothers, everything changed very suddenly. Life was quickly consumed by treatments and hospital visits.

Campfire Circle's in-hospital programming at SickKids has been a lifeline for the family. "It's really become part of her routine whenever she goes to the hospital," says Kriszella. "She's made friends with everybody there."

Kriszella says Campfire Circle gives Kursten something to look forward to. "It gave her the chance to be a kid again even while doing these treatments," she says.

The family has always loved camping and spending time outdoors, so when a nurse at SickKids mentioned that medically supported overnight camps might be a good fit, Kriszella was thrilled. Knowing that there would be medical professionals on-site was a huge relief.

This summer, Kursten and her family took part in their first full week of family camp at Rainbow Lake. It was exactly what they needed.

The adventures were nonstop. "Kursten went up the high ropes, she did archery, arts and crafts, and swimming; she went canoeing and fishing," says Kriszella. "To be honest, I did not expect us to be able to do all of this because of her diagnosis."

With every activity Kursten tried and every challenge she conquered, her confidence grew.

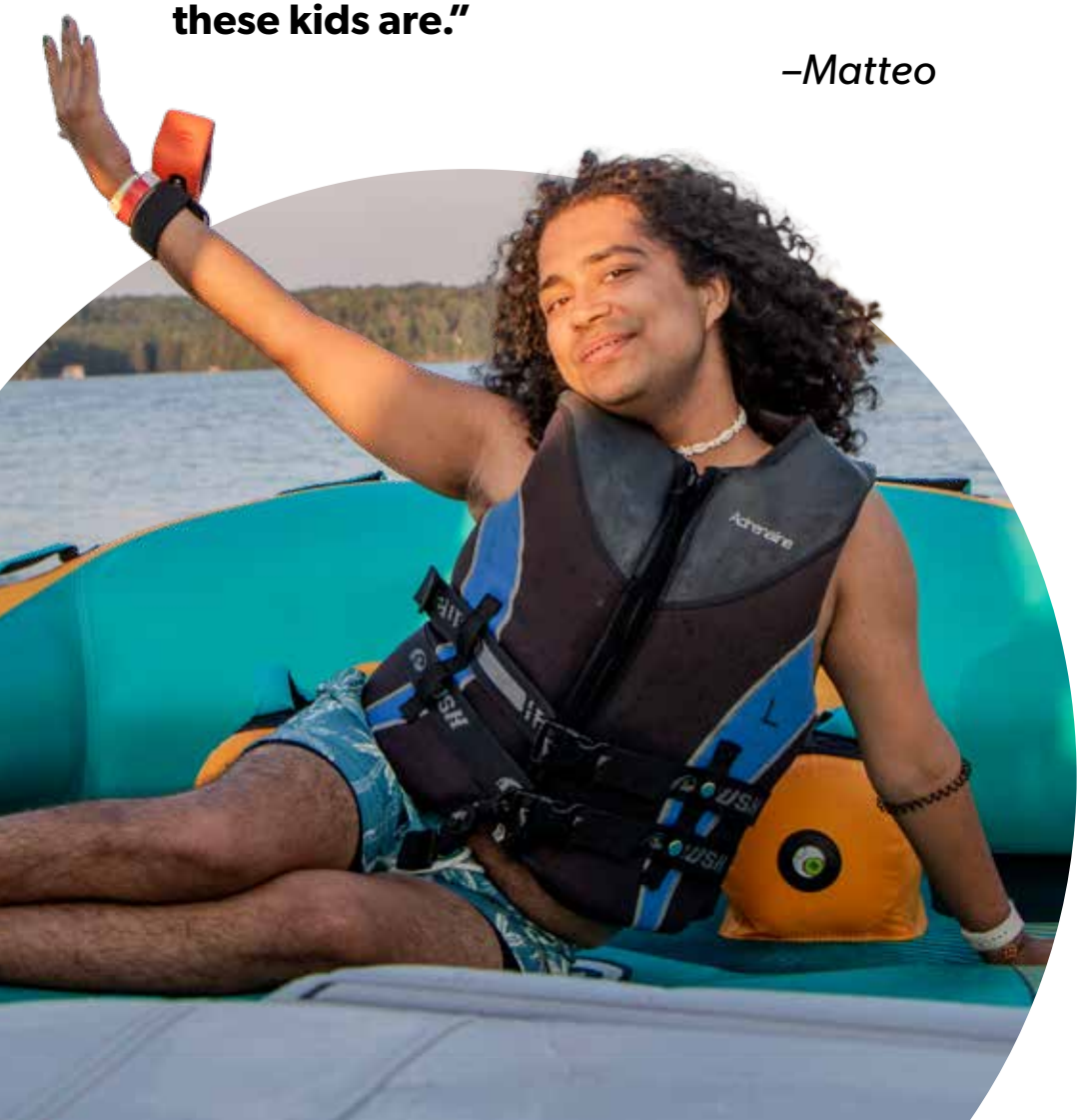
> **"At camp, she became more optimistic that she's capable of doing things that she thought she couldn't. It gives her a lot of hope."**
>
> *–Kriszella*



Leading with Purpose

“At camp, I see so much resilience around me—I’m brought to tears by how strong these kids are.”

–Matteo



Eighteen-year-old Matteo was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease at age eight and received a kidney transplant from his mom when he was 10 years old. This summer, he attended Campfire Circle Muskoka as a Leader in Training (LIT), helping younger campers build their own confidence and independence.

Matteo says that camp is about more than a summer experience. For young people living with chronic conditions, who face a higher risk of mental health challenges, camp offers a critical opportunity for reprieve.

For kids living with critical illness, “there’s so much going on in the real world,” explains Matteo. “When we come to camp, it's truly an escape—a place where you can just breathe a sigh of relief.”

Matteo was particularly impressed by the accessible infrastructure at Muskoka, which offers an inclusive environment for kids with a wide range of mobility needs. “They've worked the hardest to break down any barriers that there might be,” he says.

As an LIT, Matteo’s goal is to foster a vibrant, welcoming environment, one where anyone can strike up conversation with anyone and feel welcomed and supported. Above all, he hopes every camper leaves with unforgettable memories, meaningful friendships, and a renewed sense of hope.

“Camp gives some children who've had to grow up too fast a chance to be kids again—a chance to have more joy.” –Matteo





A **Second** Home

Back in 2010, at 10 years old, Imo felt a sharp pain in his abdomen and ended up at SickKids. He was diagnosed with liver sarcoma, a rare type of cancer.

After many difficult months of chemotherapy and surgery, he was discharged, but he faced a new challenge: Summer camp.

At the recommendation of his healthcare team, Imo hesitantly tried his first week of medically supported kids' camp in Muskoka. "I was a city kid," he jokes. "Hiking, fishing, sleeping in the woods? Absolutely not my thing."

Slowly, though, Imo fell in love with camp. "Camp taught me to swim, to try new things," he explains. "Most importantly, it gave me a community I could trust—a place filled with joy and adventure."

Throughout Imo's preteen and teen years, Campfire Circle became his second home. "It helped rebuild my confidence and reminded me of who I was and what I loved," he says. "I learned how to be brave and put myself out there."

Campfire Circle ignited such a passion within Imo that he came back as a volunteer. "I learned so much about these kids, and about myself at the same time," he says. "Allowing these kids to fully express themselves, giving them opportunities to be leaders, it was amazing."

Today, Imo works as an In-Hospital Specialist with the Campfire Circle team at SickKids, spending time with kids at their bedsides and in group settings, making crafts, playing games, and creating moments of joy during treatment.

"These programs allow campers to simply be themselves," he explains. "Just like they did for me."

Q&A with Campfire Circle's **Medical Director**

We asked Dr Paul Gibson, Campfire Circle's Medical Director and Chair of the Medical Advisory Committee, to share how our programming has a long-term impact on campers.

Q: Why is camp important for kids with serious illness?

A: Camp provides a break from having to worry about medication times, procedures and testing, and allows them the freedom to be kids. It allows them the freedom to swim, to play, to craft, to make music, and probably most importantly, it allows them the chance to make connections and relationships that will serve them for years.

Q: What makes our overnight camps unique?

A: Kids with complex and serious medical conditions require a lot of support, and quite frankly, it's not feasible for most summer camp experiences to allow those campers a safe experience at camp. The medical supports at Campfire Circle take those worries away, providing not only the day-to-day care they need, but also the safety net of being there to deal with any emergencies or urgencies that come up.

Q: How does our in-hospital programming make a difference?

A: Campers at the hospital and their family are under incredible pressure. They may have been newly diagnosed or may be facing a complication of their disease.

The camp program gives the camper and their family a moment to take a break, a moment to focus not on what's happening medically, but to just focus on fun.

Q: What impact does camp programming have on children's health and well-being?

A: The impact of camp programs on our campers is immense. Not only do they get the fun and opportunity to live in the moment the moment, but they come home with new friends, new relationships, and amazingly often a new sense of independence and some ownership over their own medical needs and their own health.

Childhood cancer and other childhood chronic illnesses have a lifelong impact on our campers. The same can be said for Campfire Circle's programs. Yes, it might just be a community program, a day camp, or a week of overnight camp, but the relationships, the independence, and the confidence our campers build serve them not just in the days they're at camp, but for years beyond.



With your support, by 2030, we will grow to serve 10,000 campers annually through:

A Bold Vision

Expanded Year-Round Hospital Programs

Reaching more children across Ontario through bedside and group programs at The Hospital for Sick Children, McMaster Children's Hospital, Children's Hospital at London Health Sciences Centre, Kingston Health Sciences, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, and satellite centres across the province—reducing isolation, supporting development, and complementing clinical care.

CHEO

Children's Hospital
London Health Sciences Centre

KHSC Kingston Health Sciences Centre

McMaster Children's Hospital

SickKids

Serving More Illness Groups

Growing to support kids with serious illness beyond cancer such as: sickle cell disease, heart disease, serious blood disorders, organ failure and transplants, gastrointestinal disorders, and other complex conditions.

Increasing Overnight Capacity

Building overnight capacity by expanding our Rainbow Lake facilities and building a new medical camp in Prince Edward County, so we can ensure we're a part of every sick child's medical journey.



Thank You!

Your generosity helps ensure that more kids with cancer or serious illness can access Campfire Circle programs each year, at no cost to families.

Whether through a bedside activity at the hospital, a week at overnight camp, or friendships that last long after treatment ends, these experiences help kids develop the strength they need to navigate through difficult challenges.

Thank you for bringing confidence, connection, and joy to families across Ontario.



CAMPFIRE CIRCLE

HEALING THROUGH HAPPINESS

campfirecircle.org