

2023 DONOR IMPACT REPORT

# GO BEYOND

WITH kesem.





**99%**  
My child felt included at camp

**99%**  
Would recommend Kesem to other families

**98%**  
Kesem gave my child a community of support

**98%**  
My child seems more confident in their ability to address their experience with cancer

**98%**  
My child has improved mental health

Letter from the CEO and Board Chair

# Go Beyond.

Five million children in the United States alone are impacted by a parent’s or guardian’s cancer. That’s 1 child in 15 – about one child in each classroom across the country.

Many of these children have taken on the role of a caregiver, tending to a sick parent and attending doctor appointments. They are often also helping to raise younger siblings and running errands. This means that these youth caregivers are missing out on their childhood – a time that should be filled with fun, exploration, and adventure.

This came to light at camp this summer, when one of our teens firmly insisted on participating in activities with the younger children, instead of joining the teen programming. Why? She didn’t get to do “kid things” when she was younger, because she had to care for her sick parent. Before this camper graduated high school and went off to do “big things as an adult,” she wanted a little more time to still be a kid. We were happy to oblige.

More than ever, kids need Kesem. In 2023, we took significant steps to come closer to supporting every child impacted by a parent’s cancer. We completed several months of research rooted in diversity, equity and inclusion. This research included ethnographic research, quantitative surveys, and focus groups of families not currently served by Kesem.

**What did we learn and what are we doing about it?**

We learned that families want us to “meet them where they are,” with more frequent opportunities to connect in person and virtually. As a result, we created three new programs, one virtual and two in-person. These new programs are generally monthly, and although they won’t be focused on camp, they will still have the same Kesem feel and magic.

We also learned that families seek increased psychosocial support to help children navigate isolation and challenging times. To address this, we’re increasing awareness of our existing mental health and grief support service, Kesem by Your Side. We’re also providing more resources for families, directly through Kesem and through our community partners.

Starting in 2024, the breadth and depth of our support goes well beyond Camp Kesem. We are striving to serve more of the five million children impacted by a parent’s cancer. It’s an exciting time here at Kesem, and we cannot provide these critical, transformative programs without you. Thank you for being a part of our community and for generously supporting our mission.

With Gratitude,

*Alicia Kabir*  
Alicia Kabir  
Chief Executive Officer

*Jay Stilwell*  
Jay Stilwell  
Chair, Board of Directors



Alicia Kabir  
Chief Executive Officer

Jay Stilwell  
Board Chair

“I want to say thank you. I don’t think I’d be alive or pursuing my dreams without this camp. I learned empathy, emotional maturity, and acceptance for not only others but for myself. I couldn’t have asked for a better family to raise, love, and encourage me. You prepared me for my future better than anyone else. Thank you for everything.”

**KESEM CAMPER**

*At Kesem, mental health support comes in the form of care packages, grief support, and campfire gatherings. We deliver the perfect balance of having fun first, but then also taking the time to talk about hard things. As a result, the kids we support know that the Kesem community is there for them, in good times and in hard times.*

< Source: 2023 Parents Survey

## Kesem is a Lifetime of Support

“My entire perspective in life has changed for the better as a result of Kesem. Each conversation I have with a Kesem camper across the nation leaves me inspired and full of a new wave of motivation, perseverance, and strength. I would not be who or where I am today if it were not for my time with Kesem.”

KESEM CAMP ADVISOR

Kesem’s approach is to support children through CARE and fun.

**CONTINUOUS LEARNING** - We help children understand how to process their parent’s cancer journey by modeling coping mechanisms and providing ways to share their experiences.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** - We help children be responsible for how they choose to respond to a parent’s cancer journey.

**RESILIENCE** - We help children emotionally navigate their most difficult days, knowing there will be better days ahead.

**EMPATHY** - We allow children to heal by connecting them with other children navigating the same situation.

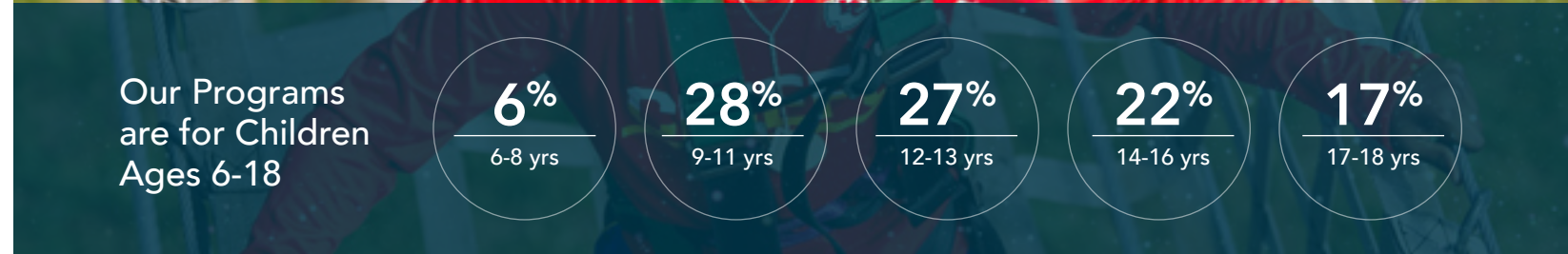
**FUN!** - We know that there are measurable links between fun and mental health, and that people who laugh together create deeper personal connections.

### The Kesem Journey

Kesem is unique in that children can return year after year from elementary, through middle school, and until they graduate from high school, all at no cost to families. Each year that a child attends our programs, kids’ connection with Kesem, each other, and their families deepens.

Our volunteer base is college students from over 120 chapters across the country. Once the children we serve turn 18 and finish high school, those who attend a college or university often select one where they can continue their Kesem journey as a leader and volunteer. After college graduation, many of our volunteers continue to serve Kesem for years as alumni.

As a result, Kesem is truly a lifetime of support.





KESEM PARENT

“Personally, I think Kesem has impacted me even more than my son. It has 100% given me a passion and a purpose.”

KESEM PARENT

“Sending my son to camp gave me a chance to breathe... It gave me a week to really ride that emotional rollercoaster that I had been bottling up for so long.”



### How Do Parents Benefit from Kesem?

#### “GETTING THEIR KIDS BACK”

Parents tell us that Kesem’s unique approach of empathy and fun unlocks joy in their children that they haven’t seen in a while.

#### THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Parents find peace in knowing that Kesem creates a lifetime of community for their children.

#### PEACE OF MIND

Families facing the financial toxicity of a cancer diagnosis know Kesem will be there at no cost to their family.

## Beyond the Numbers

### Kesem is for Families

In September 2020, our lives were forever altered when my husband Rob was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM), a fast-growing, aggressive brain tumor. Just eight weeks later, we faced the unimaginable reality of his passing. In the midst of our profound grief, Kesem entered our lives as a beacon of light.

The pandemic added complexities to our cancer journey, but it also allowed us to cherish moments as a family in the months leading up to Rob’s diagnosis. Despite the heartbreak, his mantra remained, “life is good.” Rob’s love for our children was boundless, and it became his wish that they experience the magic of Kesem. Kesem became a lifeline for us, offering invaluable support for our four children who were grappling with grief in the wake of their father’s terminal illness.

Rob’s legacy inspired the creation of the Four Lions Foundation, an organization that honors his life. Rob’s favorite pastime – golf – became the foundation’s conduit for a yearly tournament. This event is more than a gathering; it’s an opportunity to give back. Knowing the toll a cancer diagnosis takes on a child’s mental health and a family’s finances, Kesem became the chosen beneficiary for the tournament.

Kesem has been a transformative force in our lives, offering my children a sanctuary where they can be authentically themselves. As many of you probably know, it’s a place of belonging, fostering bonds with counselors and peers that extend beyond the campfire. For them, Kesem is a support system that bridges the gap of loneliness and isolation that often accompanies a parent’s cancer diagnosis.



To me, #GoBeyond with Kesem means giving back when and HOW you can. I’ve seen Kesem reshape my children’s lives, providing them with a sense of belonging and purpose on their grief journey.

JENN REX  
KESEM PARENT



The Rex Family (left to right): Taylor, Katie, Jenn, Grayson, Luke.

## Leading to Build a Better Future

Your generosity has positioned Kesem to be a leading service provider for children facing a parent’s or guardian’s cancer. We are committed to using our position to raise awareness of this community and help improve and expand support and resources with a greater understanding of families’ needs.

### Unlocking Insights to Accelerate Our Impact

Kesem published a series of Insights Papers to showcase what we’ve learned over the years, quantify impact, and define new opportunities.

Specifically, these papers featured Kesem parent testimonials of how Kesem supports the whole family, a deep-dive into how Kesem’s unique college student volunteer model is creating tomorrow’s leaders today, and DEI research that is helping to shape our growing portfolio to broaden support for families.

### Driving Our Mission Through the Exchange of Ideas

We’re committed to expanding our impact through stronger network connections and knowledge sharing.

This year, we deepened our investments in reaching new populations across the country with what we’re learning through our work, helping to grow support and deliver more positive outcomes for children and families facing parental cancer.

### Growing a New Generation of Leaders

Kesem hosted 450 of our College Student Leaders for a 3-day training at the National Leadership Summit. These impressive college students networked with their peers from across the country while participating in learning tracks focused on fundraising and financial management, programming, DEI, risk management, marketing, and more.

Our college student volunteer training builds on the inherent leadership qualities of every student volunteer to further cultivate the core skills and competencies essential to deliver transformative experiences for the children and families we serve today and to lead in the future.

“Leading like a kid means leading with humility and curiosity, seeing the world with wonder and awe, and feeling the freedom to be creative and to also play within structure and boundaries. When you lead like a kid, that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re immature or not respected or young even. To me it just means putting your best foot forward every single time.”

KESEM COLLEGE STUDENT LEADER ALUM



4

#### PODCASTS

(incl., Harrington Cancer and Health Foundation, notesfromcancerworld.org)

4

#### NATIONAL CONFERENCE PANELS

(incl., LUNGeVity HOPE Summit, American Camp Association, and other professional industry conferences)

3

#### CONFERENCE EXHIBITS

(incl., Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators and the Association of Oncology Social Work)

3

#### WEBINARS

(incl., Jasper Health and Cancer Support Community)

Kesem volunteers participate in various local activities including podcasts and webinars extending our outreach and knowledge sharing in communities nationwide.

## Reconnecting with Alumni

When our student leaders graduate college, they become Kesem alumni. Just as our youth participants have shared experiences with what they’re facing, our alumni have the commonality of guiding children through that uncertainty as beacons of light. All that they manage as student leaders and all that they continue to give back to Kesem is inspiring and powerful.

In the second year of our Alumni Membership Program, we’re excited about our 322 members and look forward to working with them on increasing awareness for Kesem, supporting mission delivery, and raising critical resources to sustain and grow our work. Being an Alumni Member is one of the easiest ways to support Kesem and stay in the know. Our members’ annual dues will build upon Kesem’s legacy, along with their own, in the years to come.

In addition to our membership program, hundreds of our Alumni continue their Kesem journey by serving as Camp Advisors, Chapter Advisory Board Members, Intake Volunteers, Hotline Volunteers, and Health & Wellness Team members. Their continued volunteerism in these areas demonstrates the invaluable experience they possess and their commitment to our mission. We’re grateful to this community and all they do to support the children we serve.

## Celebrating our Seniors

The 2023 National Leadership Awards winners represented a diverse group of graduating student leaders from across the country nominated by members of our Kesem community for their embodiment of our Core Values and exceptional leadership.

Join us in recognizing these outstanding leaders and their contributions to Kesem’s mission.

### 2023 NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARDS

**Continuous Learning Award**  
Kyle “Alpine” Meng,  
Western Carolina University

**Accountability Award**  
Clayton “Tulo” Sumer,  
California Polytechnic State University

**Resilience Award**  
Lilly “Moana” Swanz,  
University of Kentucky

**Empathy Award**  
Kenzie “Cactus” Huot,  
University of Vermont

**Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award**  
Karan “Magic Conch” Mirpuri,  
Vanderbilt University

Tyson “Slapshot” Suggs,  
University of Michigan

**Through & Beyond Award**  
Liam “Dash” Walsh,  
University of Toledo

**Iris Wedeking Award for an Exceptional Founding Leader**  
Elizabeth “Dunks” Staub,  
Towson University





# year-round services

## Kesem By Your Side

Provides customized, personal support needed during a parent's cancer journey, including difficult news, recurrence, loss, and anniversaries.

*We anticipate supporting over 500 Kesem by Your Side requests in 2024.*

## Friends + Family Days

Generally twice a year, brings together existing and interested families, Kesem student leaders and alumni, and local supporters for a day of activities, fun, celebration, and community building.

*We'll have over 8,500 participants at our 2024 Friends + Family Days.*

## Special Deliveries

Provides children with personalized greetings such as birthday cards, delivered either by traditional or electronic mail to remind all Kesem families that they are a part of our community.

*We'll send over 8,000 Special Deliveries in 2024.*

## Warm Welcome

Provides every child a friendly welcome to Kesem to immediately bring them and their families into our greater community in a personal and supportive way.

*We'll send over 8,000 Warm Welcomes in 2024.*

## Investing in a New Future

We recognize that every family's experience with parental cancer is different, and different types of support are needed to meet families where they are. In this moment, we are focused on continuing to drive enduring positive outcomes through free offerings including our signature program, Camp Kesem, and legacy services while bringing about new and innovative programs that meet the unique and changing needs of this community.

### Our Flagship Program

**Camp Kesem**, a week-long sleepaway summer camp, is hosted by Kesem chapters across the country. Our student leader volunteers and professional staff, deliver a fun, empowering and safe experience for children and adolescents facing a parent's cancer to escape and rediscover the joy of their youth.

### New Virtual and In-Person Programs Nationwide

In the summer of 2023, we launched the pilot of **Club Kesem**. This program is an age-based national virtual meet up for children and youth ages 6-18 impacted by a parent's cancer to build connections, relationships, and have fun with kids their age who are going through similar experiences. The program became available to all families in the U.S. in January 2024.

We are also offering two pilot in-person programs, **Kesem Better Days** and **Kesem Gatherings** in 13 markets. The full-day Better Days programming allows Kesem kids and volunteers to have more extended time together year-round, while our monthly Gatherings allows Kesem kids and volunteers to get together more regularly to build relationships and have fun.

### Year-Round Services

We are moving our mission forward by building on the traditional ways we have advocated for these children and their families in the past. We are grateful for all you've done to advance our mission over the years and for your support as we create a world where no child facing a parent or guardian's cancer is ever alone.

Learn more about our path forward in our Three-Year Strategic Plan at [kesem.org](https://kesem.org).

"There's a benefit of being able to say that Kesem will not be a burden financially for your family. You can instead say that this will be a time of joy for your family, this will be a time of feeling normal, this will be an adventure that they won't forget, this will be a time of building lifelong lasting relationships and friendships. Kesem is a gift. I can't thank you enough for that gift."

KESEM PARENT



## National Board of Directors

Neha Biggs	Jerry Katz	Chris Berry Solomon
Elise Cornille	Tonya Kinlow, <i>Treasurer</i>	Jay Stilwell, <i>Board Chair</i>
Sam Dorison	Dr. Eric McGary	Pamela Tom
Betina Evancho	Betsy Morton	Iris Rave
Matt Hanley	Mark Luck Olson	Wedeking, <i>Founder</i>
Dr. Brent Iverson, <i>Secretary</i>	Rob Plotkowski	Fred Williams

“When [my kids] they left for Camp Kesem, it was finally an opportunity for them to take a break. To leave all of that sadness, that grief, that deep burden of not knowing what the future would look like for them - all behind - at least for a week. They weren't defined by being 'different' because of this enormous tragedy they had endured. They weren't pitied. They were magically morphed back into just being kids. Just kids. The same as everyone else in the group.”

KESEM PARENT

## Upcoming Events

### THE MAGIC BALL

**Chicago**  
Saturday, March 16, 2024  
Sarabande

**Boston**  
Friday, April 26, 2024  
City Winery

### THE MAGIC MAKERS BALL

**Los Angeles**  
Saturday, October 5, 2024  
The Jonathan Club

### TEAM KESEM: MARATHON

**Disney Princess Half-Marathon Weekend**  
Thursday, February 22 -  
Sunday, February 25, 2024  
Orlando, FL

**United Airlines NYC Half**  
Sunday, March 17, 2024  
New York City, NY

**Schneider Electric Marathon de Paris**  
Sunday, April 7, 2024  
Paris, France

**BMW Berlin Marathon**  
Sunday, September 29, 2024  
Berlin, Germany

**Bank of America Chicago Marathon**  
Sunday, October 13, 2024  
Chicago, IL



**Accelerating Our Impact**  
Your gift ensures that Kesem programs remain free to families.

*\*These figures are estimated.*

**80%**

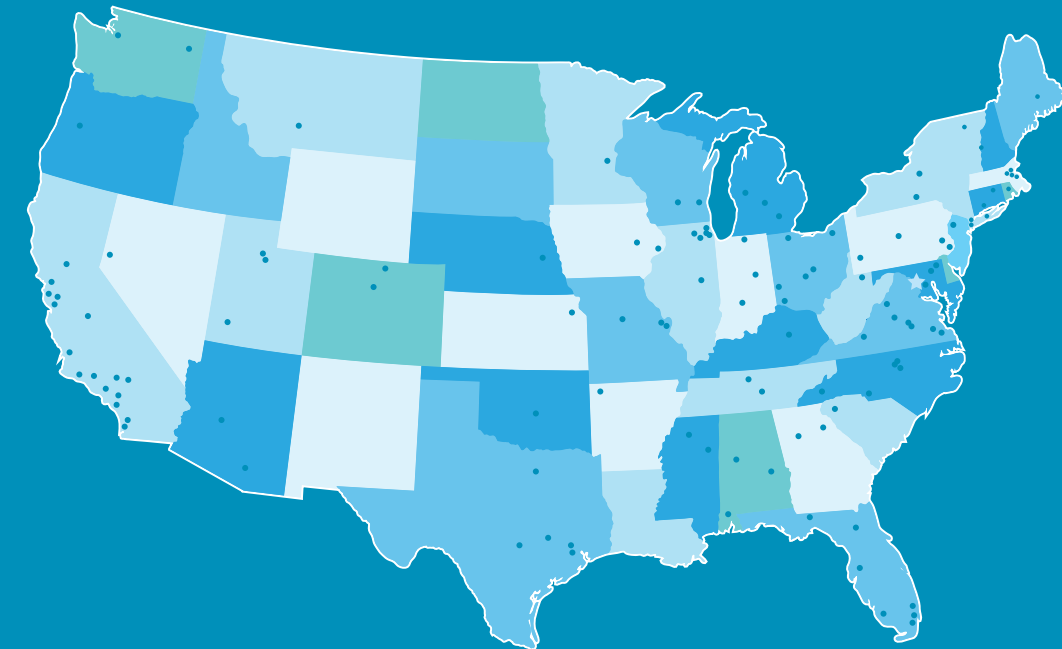
Kesem Programs

**8%**

Management + General

**12%**

Fundraising



**122**

Kesem Chapters

**41**

States

**4,758**

College Student Volunteers



Arizona State University  
Auburn University  
Augustana College  
Ball State University  
Berkeley  
Boston University  
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Central PA  
Chapman University  
Chestnut Hill  
Christopher Newport University  
Claremont Colleges  
Clemson  
Colorado State University  
Columbia University  
Cornell University  
Dartmouth College  
Denison University  
DePaul University  
Duke University  
East Atlanta  
Florida Gulf Coast University  
Florida International University  
Florida State University

Fresno State  
George Washington University  
Grand Valley State University  
Greater Cleveland  
Hamline University  
Harvard Undergraduate  
Indiana University  
James Madison University  
Johns Hopkins University  
Long Beach State  
Marquette University  
Miami of Ohio  
Michigan State University  
Middle Tennessee State University  
Mississippi State University  
MIT  
Mizzou  
Montana State University  
New York University  
North Carolina State University  
Northern Illinois University  
Northwestern University  
Notre Dame  
Nova Southeastern University

Ohio State University  
Princeton  
Rhode Island  
Rice  
Saint Louis University  
San Diego State University  
San Francisco  
Santa Clara University  
Seattle University  
Southern Utah University  
Stanford  
Stony Brook University  
Syracuse University  
Temple University  
Texas A&M University  
Towson University  
Tufts University  
UC Davis  
UC Irvine  
UC Riverside  
UC San Diego  
UC Santa Barbara  
UC Santa Cruz  
UCLA  
UNC - Chapel Hill  
University of Alabama

University of Arizona  
University of Arkansas  
University of Chicago  
University of Cincinnati  
University of Colorado Boulder  
University of Connecticut  
University of Georgia  
University of Houston  
University of Illinois  
University of Iowa  
University of Kansas  
University of Kentucky/Bellarmine  
University of Maine  
University of Maryland  
University of Minnesota  
University of Mississippi  
University of Nebraska  
University of Nevada, Reno  
University of Oklahoma  
University of Oregon  
University of Pennsylvania  
University of Pittsburgh  
University of Richmond  
University of South Alabama  
University of South Florida

University of Southern California  
University of Texas - Austin  
University of Texas - Dallas  
University of Toledo  
University of Utah  
University of Vermont  
University of Washington  
University of Wisconsin - Madison  
Utah Valley  
Vanderbilt University  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Virginia Tech  
Washington University in St. Louis  
West Virginia University  
Western Carolina University  
Whitworth University  
William & Mary  
Yale University  
University of Florida  
University of Miami  
University of Michigan  
University of Virginia

## Kesem's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commitment

Kesem's mission of supporting children through and beyond a parent's cancer, and our vision of ensuring that every child impacted by a parent's cancer is never alone, can only be realized through an ongoing, steadfast commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in every part of our organization. To that end, Kesem makes the following commitments:

- To continually expand the communities we support and work with - our Kesem families, volunteers, staff, alumni, partners, donors, and boards - with attention to engaging communities we are not currently reaching.
- To strive for equity in delivering a transformative, fun, and empowering community that recognizes and embraces our differences.
- To aspire to create shared spaces that are safe for every member of the Kesem community to feel valued and respected.
- Kesem will engage in continued meaningful learning in order to better support our mission, and our growing Kesem community.

### All Kesem Programs Are Open Now!

Join now to also receive our year-round services!

STARTING JANUARY 2024

Club Kesem  
Better Days  
Gatherings

SUMMER 2024

Camp Kesem

Sign Up At  
[Kesem.org/Register](https://kesem.org/register)



grateful

Thank you for all you have contributed to Kesem - whether you've been with us from the beginning or you just found us, we're so glad you're here. Your belief in our work fuels us to do more, be more and serve more children who need the magic that only Kesem can provide. Our butterfly Kai reminds us of the transformation that is possible when children are given inclusive environments and unconditional friendship. Together with you, we are providing tens of thousands of life-changing experiences to children who really need us, need each other and need you. Thank you.



**Kesem**

*A child's friend through and beyond a parent's cancer.*

**VISION**

To realize a world where every child impacted by a parent's cancer is never alone.

**OUR MISSION**

To support children through and beyond a parent's cancer with free, fun-filled creative programs and a lasting community.

Platinum  
Transparency  
2023

**Candid.**

Charity  
Navigator



+ FOUR-STAR +

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