



Care Camps
Foundation

Pediatric Oncology Camps Innovations Summary Report

Background

In 2024, Care Camps Foundation piloted a new grant opportunity for selected members of the Children's Oncology Camping Association (COCA) to further develop innovative camp programs. Pediatric oncology camps that were currently offering innovative programs were eligible to apply. Examples of innovative programs included (and NOT limited to) STEM/STEAM education, mental/emotional health programs, diversity programs, school programs, hospital/clinic programs, and any program that is 'out-of-the ordinary' from traditional camp programs.

After disseminating an Innovations Grant application to all COCA members, ten individual pediatric oncology camps were selected to receive \$1,500 to:

1 Enhance their respective innovations during 2024, and

2 Provide a written summary that would be disseminated to all COCA member camps.

How this came about: Over the past several years, Care Camps Foundation has been intrigued to learn about various innovative programs, that were offered by COCA member camps in addition to their 'regular' camp activities. We also heard that many camps aspired to provide more innovative programs and wanted to learn about what other camps were offering. Therefore, our purpose in offering this PILOT grant opportunity was to elevate innovative camp programs being offered to children living with cancer and disseminate these best practices to all COCA members *so everyone benefits*.

The requirements to apply for the Innovations Grant were as follows:

- ▶ The camp was a current member of COCA and received a Care Camps Foundation Operational Grant in 2024.
- ▶ The camp was currently offering their innovative program in 2024.
- ▶ The innovative program was replicable or adaptable for other pediatric oncology camps to implement.
- ▶ The camp agreed to provide a written description of their innovative program.
- ▶ The camp would be willing to present their specific innovative program at a future COCA webinar.

The following report is a summary of the innovative programs from the ten camps who received grant funding from Care Camps Foundation in 2024.

Innovations Grant Recipients

The following is a summary of the ten pediatric oncology camps selected and their innovation.

CAMP	LOCATION	INNOVATION
Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Foundation of Southern Arizona	Arizona, U.S.	Essential Household Supply Program – distribution of food boxes, paper goods, diapers, cleaning supplies for families experiencing financial and logistical challenges
Campfire Circle	Ontario, Canada	Hospital-based Camp Program – dedicated program space “The Cabin”; bedside and group activities, some televised over SickKids CCTV
Project C.A.M.P <i>(The Center for Courageous Kids)</i>	Kentucky, U.S.	Sensory Room – a safe space to interact with a range of stimuli and obtain respite from the sensory overload of other camp activities; designed for campers with sensory processing impairments and similar challenges
Aurora Day Camp	Georgia, U.S.	Teen Board – a leadership program designed to develop the next generation community leaders and volunteers who will contribute to supporting families dealing with pediatric cancer
Horizon Day Camp	Maryland, U.S.	STEAM Education – an opportunity and access point for guiding campers’ inquisitive nature, critical thinking, creativity, and connection
Camp Hobé	Utah, U.S.	Beads of Courage – campers and counselors give and receive beads in recognition of their courage in facing their own challenges, and their support for other campers; the beads are strung onto a necklace that becomes ‘something tangible’ to show and tell their experiences and relationships with other campers
Camp Quality USA	Michigan, U.S.	Zen Den – a space and specialized team offering core psychosocial programming (e.g., therapeutic breathing, yoga, fidget games, and creative expression) designed to enhance social and emotional exploration
Camp Casey	Michigan, U.S.	Horses in the Hallway – visits to the classrooms of children with cancer to educate their peers using interaction with a therapy horse to encourage empathy while also celebrating the sick child
Camp One Step <i>(Children’s Oncology Services, Inc.)</i>	Illinois, U.S.	CONNECTED – a virtual camp program designed to reach children who cannot attend in-person camps; features activities they can do online with staff and other campers, and offline on their own; includes a box of supplies need for each activity
Arizona Camp Sunrise & Sunrise Sidekicks	Arizona, U.S.	STEM Education – an all-camper evening program of entertaining/ educational STEM activities called ‘Alchemy Night’ that includes chemistry experiments, physics demonstrations, and electromagnetism; designed to encourage curiosity and natural discovery

Innovation Accomplishments

Based on the final reports from the ten pediatric oncology camps, the following are four overall themes of their accomplishments.

1

Practical and Logistical Support for Children and Families

Several programs focus on providing assistance or enrichment outside of in-person camps for children with cancer and their families. They emphasize aiding families through financial, logistical, or emotional challenges.

- ▶ **Essential Household Supply Program**
- ▶ **Hospital-based Camp Program**
- ▶ **CONNECTED**
- ▶ **Teen Board** (*trains the next generation of social service leaders*)

2

Well-being and Emotional Support

Two programs aim to provide emotional respite and support. They focus on improving the mental, emotional, or sensory experiences of children, offering a sense of safety, comfort, and community.

- ▶ **Sensory Room**
- ▶ **Zen Den**

3

Educational and Developmental Activities

Two programs focus on fostering curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity through structured and hands-on activities. In addition to being educational, these programs offer therapeutic engagement that can serve as a positive distraction from medical challenges.

- ▶ **STEAM/STEM Education** (*two camps*)

4

Connection and Community

Several programs foster a sense of belonging and connection among campers as well as some non-campers, both in-person and virtually. These initiatives allow for social interaction and shared experiences, encouraging empathy, communication, and friendship.

- ▶ **Horses in the Hallway**
- ▶ **Hospital-based Camp Program**
- ▶ **CONNECTED**

Recommendations for Designing an Innovative Camp Program

The following are suggested steps and specific tasks that camps indicated were helpful with designing their innovation (not necessarily in sequential order).

- ▶ **Clarify the nature and specific goals** of the innovation.
 - If possible, conduct research necessary for crafting the elements of the program.
- ▶ **Determine the resources needed** for implementation.
- ▶ **Consider partnering** with another organization, and if partnering, establish their role and create a plan for how you will work together.
- ▶ **Establish a budget** and secure funding.
 - Consider any capital expenses (building or renovating space(s), buying equipment that will be used over several seasons).
- ▶ **Secure specialized spaces** needed by designing and building, renovating/refurbishing, or arranging for rentals.
- ▶ **Recruit the people** who will lead the innovation, e.g., experts or people with specific skills, staff, volunteers.
- ▶ **Purchase and/or arrange for donation** of supplies and equipment.
- ▶ **Create any materials necessary** for implementation, e.g., curricula, guides for staff and/or volunteers.

Sources of Funding

The following were the various sources where camps secured funding for their innovations:

- ▶ Local and state foundations
- ▶ National foundations (including Care Camps Foundation)
- ▶ National corporations
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Individual donors
- ▶ Operating budget
- ▶ Fundraising events

Measuring Success

The following were metrics that some of the camps used to assess and track their outcomes.

- ▶ **Number of recipients** who actively participated in the innovation
- ▶ **Post-camp surveys** of, and other feedback from, campers, families, and/or staff/volunteers
- ▶ **Post-camp impact assessments** using measures of resilience, hope, and social connectedness

Specific examples:

Teen Board: Aurora Day Camp measured the number of Teen Board Members who serve as camp counselors; funds raised by members; numbers of volunteer hours contributed by members.

Hospital-Based Camp Program: Campfire Circle partnered with a Canadian university to study the impact of their hospital-based innovation.

Tips for Implementing a Successful Innovative Program

The following is a summary of specific tips that the camps stated were instrumental for the success of their innovations.

- ▶ **Capitalize on existing programs** in the community and/or other camps.
- ▶ **Form partnerships** with organizations whose mission complements your innovation goals.
- ▶ **Identify one or more champions** to excite “the troops”.
- ▶ **Start early to plan and strategize.**
- ▶ **Don’t get ahead of yourself.** Have the components of the innovation set up before introducing it into your programming (as best you can, knowing that you cannot anticipate every challenge that might arise).
- ▶ **Have an advisor or a leader** with the necessary expertise and skills as part of the project. (Sometimes, this means hiring an expert.)
- ▶ **Communicate early and often** with collaborators.
- ▶ **Be creative in sourcing supplies.** (Examples: approach local businesses for donations; set up a “Wishlist” on Amazon and let your board, donors, and other supporters know about it.)
- ▶ **Appoint a leader** who will take full responsibility for overseeing the program, and make sure everyone knows that this is the person in charge.
- ▶ **Get all parties on board early**, e.g., directors, counselors, volunteers. Give them the training, user-friendly guides and whatever else they need to feel confident about fulfilling their roles.
- ▶ **Assure inclusion** of all campers. Build in adaptations for campers of varying abilities and ages.
- ▶ **Brainstorm cost-effective ways** to get started for projects that are too expensive to launch all at once. Examples:
 - For STEM/STEAM programs, start with low-tech projects using cardboard and/or household objects, for engineering and art projects.
 - To replicate ‘Horses in the Hallway,’ consider using a therapy dog instead of a horse.

For More Information

For detailed descriptions of each Innovation, please contact Lexi Bickford, Care Camps Foundation Operations Manager, at lexi@carecamps.org.



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