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# FIRST DESCENTS

AN INTRODUCTION





# MISSION

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**FIRST DESCENTS PROVIDES LIFE-CHANGING OUTDOOR ADVENTURES FOR YOUNG ADULTS IMPACTED BY CANCER.**



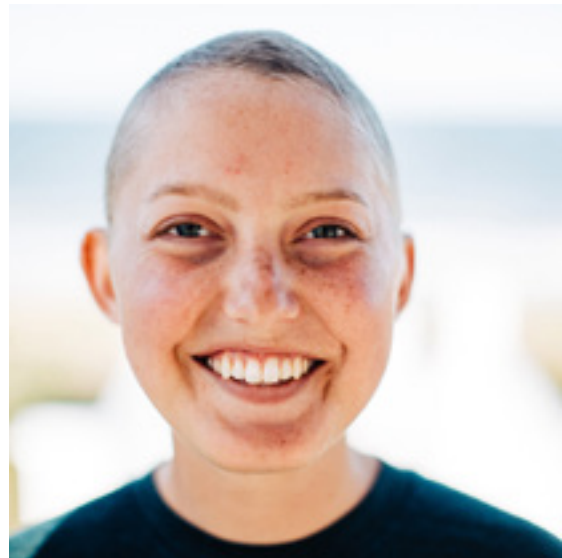





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“FD was an experience difficult to articulate. Since this adventure, I have truly tried to embrace the ‘out living it’ motto. I have been more present in everyday interactions in addition to making life choices with the goal of leading a fuller life.”  
Participant, 2015

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“I have noticed I feel more present... I feel generally less anxious. I also feel more free to discuss my experiences with cancer. It’s magic. There is something really special happening and it’s changed me.”  
Participant, 2015

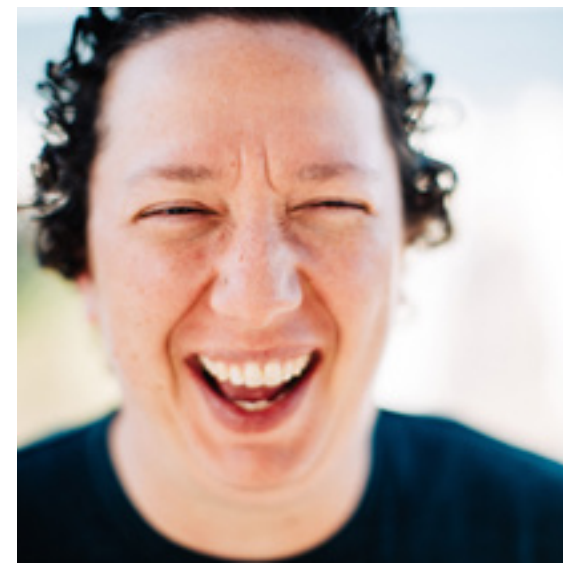
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“I don’t even know where to begin to thank you for the best week of my post cancer life! It was incredible and amazing from the people I met, support i had been searching for, physical challenge of surfing, beautiful locating, incredible fresh and healthy food, the community that was formed, the fun that was had, all the laughing and memories made and most of all decompressing from all the cancer treatments and just enjoying every second!”  
Participant, 2015

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# FOUNDER LETTER

I've come to know the river as our greatest teacher. She effortlessly carries us through landscapes, cultures and never-before-seen gorges. She teaches us about geology, lost civilizations and, most importantly, ourselves.

As a professional kayaker, I had experienced these teachings firsthand, and for all of those reasons, in 1998, I set out to connect young adults with cancer to the river in the hopes that she could provide transformation, perspective, and connection in a way that would be as meaningful and helpful for them as it had always been for me.

In those early days, I had no idea whether the river would translate or where the journey would lead. But, at the first program on the Colorado River in 2001, I witnessed what I had experienced for so long, and hoped others would too—the river effortlessly guided 15 young adults with cancer over the course of a week and left them at the take out feeling empowered, connected, inspired, and renewed.

Now, 15 years later, we've found other teachers in the rocks, ice, waves, snow, and mountains. And thousands of young adults with cancer have experienced their lessons firsthand through a First Descents adventure.

Beyond just week-long programs, we've found ways to continue the adventure, and with it, the lessons that they offer all of us. We've built "tribs"—adventure communities of young adults with cancer around the country that meet regularly to venture out and discover. We've implemented a tiered program system with the goal of reaching as many young adults with cancer as possible and in the most effective ways. We've created a way for our community to give back through the Out Living It Project. And we're just getting started.

Today, we find ourselves sitting at a new put in, to a new first descent. As we look down stream, the possibilities are endless and equally exciting. In the coming years, we want to deliver this experience to every young adult with cancer in the U.S. who wants it in the hopes that the power of the outdoors can help countless people impacted by cancer to be Out Living It!



# WHY YOUNG ADULTS?

**Y**oung adults with cancer face a unique set of challenges including infertility, loss or lack of insurance, loss or lack of financial independence, re-entry into the workplace, and secondary malignancies. These challenges are frequently accompanied by feelings of alienation and isolation, depression, and decreased self-confidence.

First Descents uses outdoor adventure as a catalyst for addressing these issues by de-stigmatizing cancer, fostering a renewed sense of self, and creating a support community.

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Each year, nearly 70,000 young adults (age 15 - 39) are diagnosed with cancer in the U.S. alone.\*

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## WHAT HAPPENS AT FD

**D**uring the First Descents experience, young adult survivors and fighters are empowered through conquering legitimate outdoor challenges to push their limits and face their fears, and by doing so, they are able to regain the confidence and self-efficacy lost to cancer. First Descents places an emphasis on each individual's experience and provides the right support for every participant to achieve his or her goals for the week.

Each program is limited to 15 participants, ensuring individualized care, medical attention and an intimate experience with fellow survivors. First Descents programs are available to young adults with cancer regardless of their financial means. A variety of programs are available throughout the year in the U.S. and worldwide.





# PROGRAMMING

## FD1: THE ORIGINAL

The original First Descents experience. A multi-day adventure program centered around whitewater kayaking, rock climbing, ice climbing or surfing. Participants go beyond their limits, meet some of the most inspiring people and experience some of the most stunningly beautiful settings in the country.

## FDX: ADVENTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN

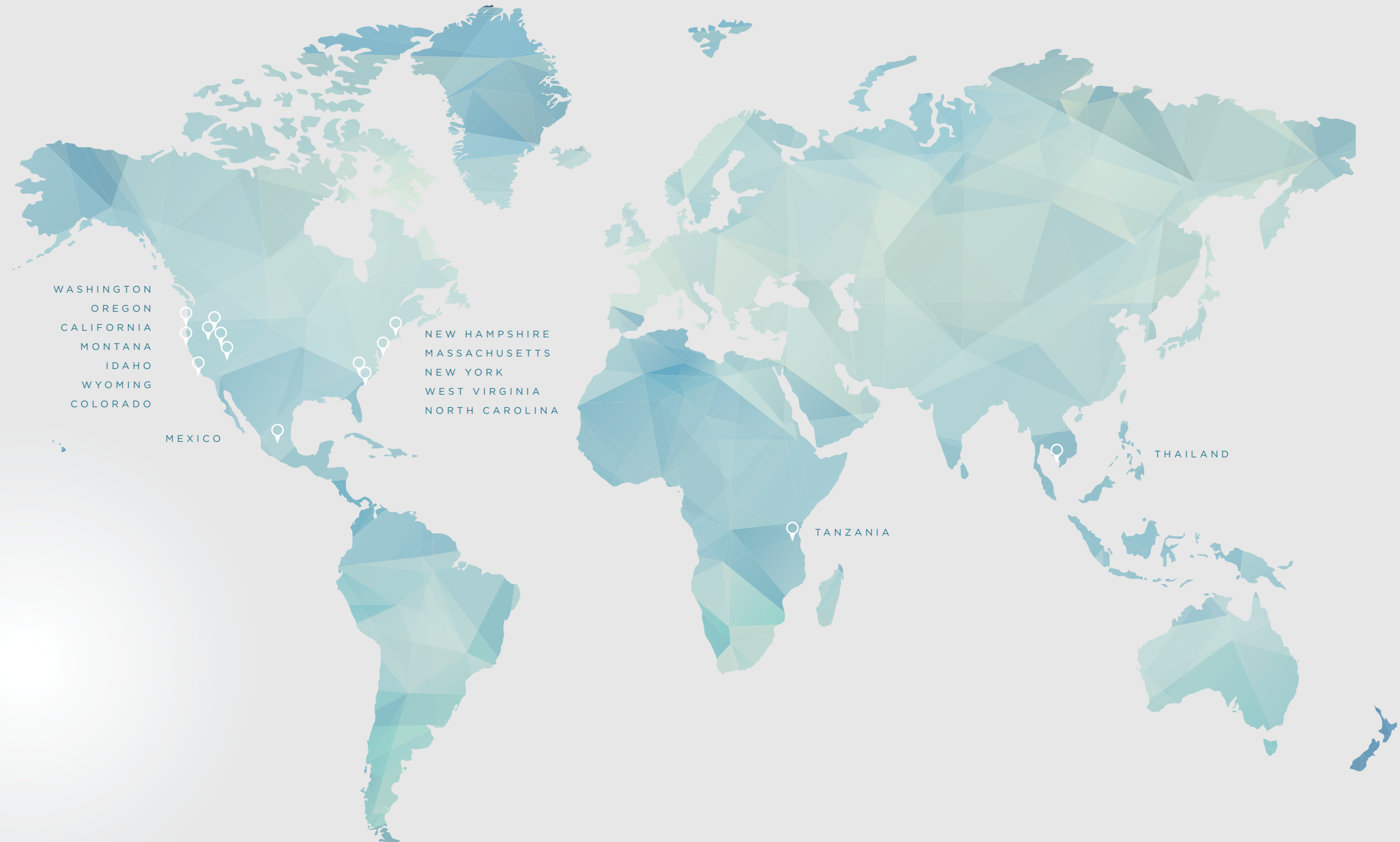
The ultimate adventure experience. FDX is your ticket to pursuing life-long adventure and continuing to live the spirit of FD. First Descents works with our partnering outfitters to reserve outdoor expeditions all over the world. New for 2015, alum who are ambitious enough to dream of an FDX and make it happen, can challenge their imagination to find, fund and dream an FDX, providing it meets certain criteria with First Descents.

## FDi: WEEKEND EXPERIENCES

In an effort to reach even more young adult survivors and fighters, First Descents launched FDi. The “i” stands for introduction. FDi is a weekend program, set near urban areas and hosted in collaboration with medical centers across the country. FDi is the perfect adventure for those who want to experience FD but are unable to attend an FD1 program due to health, treatment schedules, or family & work obligations.

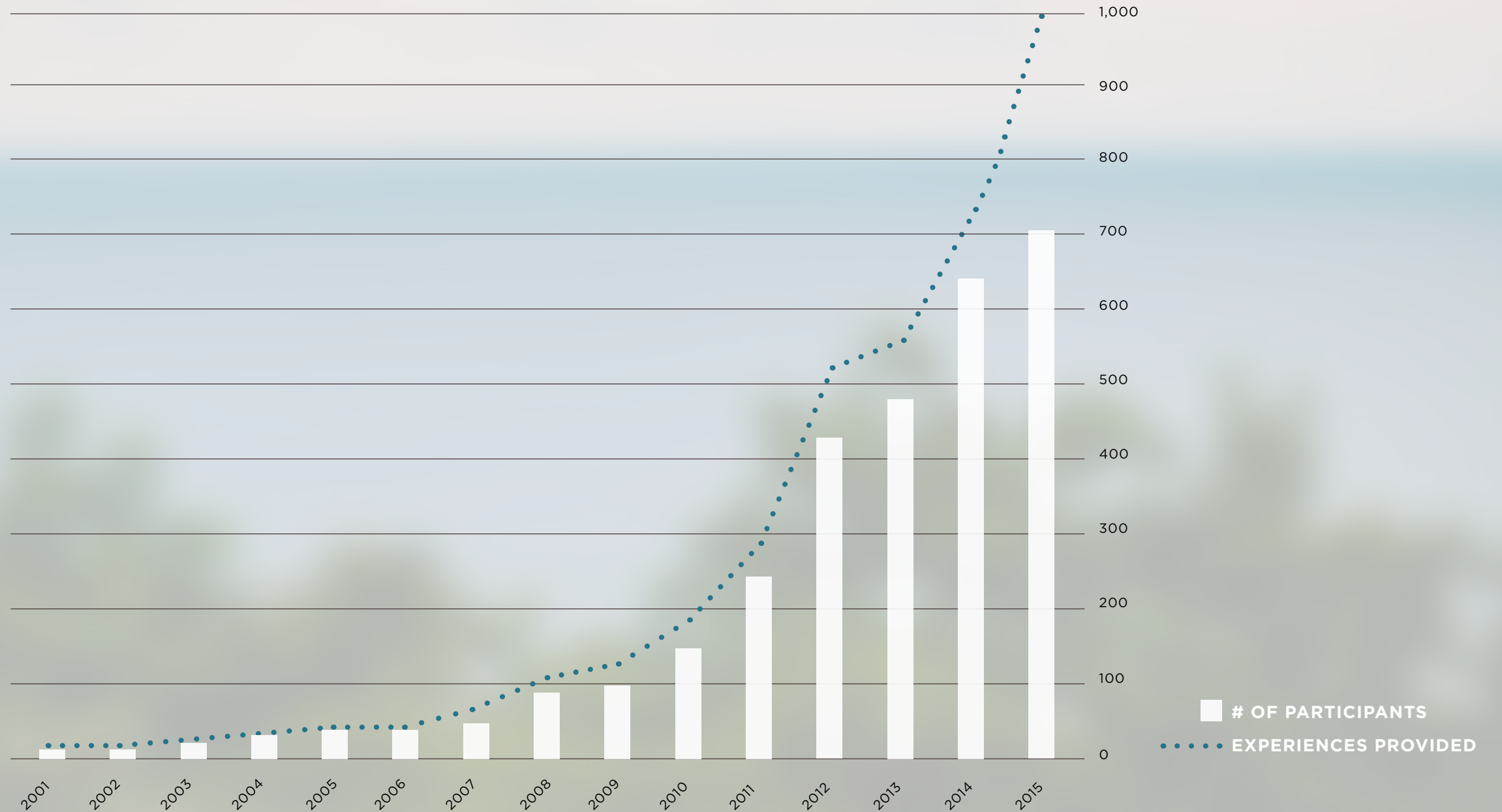
*First Descents also offers a limited number of programs to caregivers and participants ages 40 – 49.*

# LOCATIONS



# HISTORICAL IMPACT

THROUGHOUT ITS 14-YEAR HISTORY, FIRST DESCENTS HAS IMPACTED THOUSANDS OF LIVES.



\* Experiences Offered- accounts for every unique First Descents experience, whether it be a week-long program, or single / multi-day adventures offered through FDi and FDTributaries.

\*\* Participant Experiences- FD offers a unique set of program offerings. This metric accounts for each unique FD Participant experience, both prior to (e.g., FDi) and following (e.g., FDTribs) a signature week-long experience. It is determined by the total participation across all programs, taking into consideration some participants attend multiple FD experiences in a single calendar year.



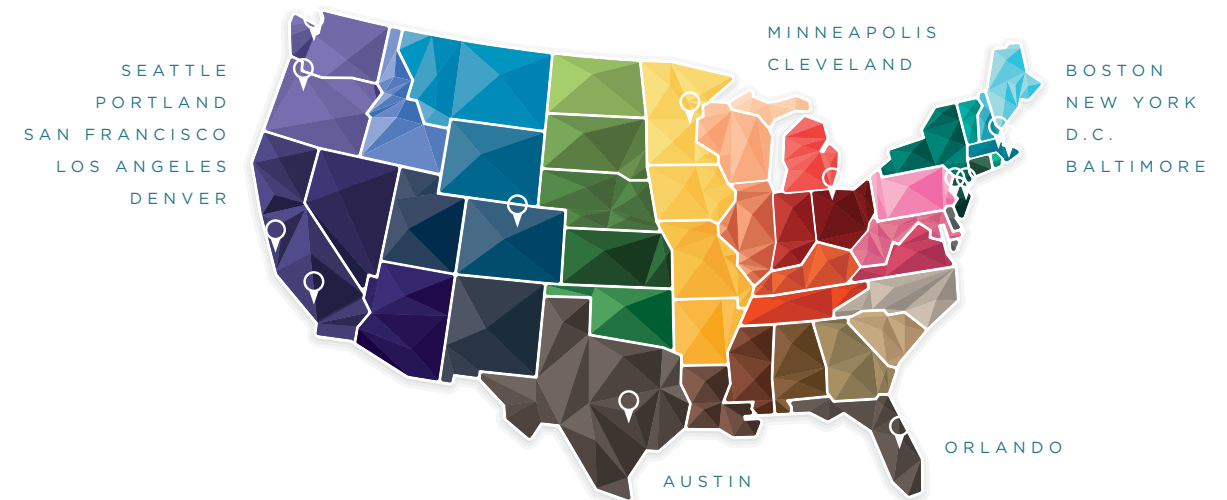


# FD TRIBUTARIES

In order to provide ongoing post-program support at the community level, First Descents launched a new initiative in 2013 to provide the opportunity for year-round adventure experiences through local chapters. Keeping with the theme of rivers, FD has dubbed these chapters Tributaries (Trib).

In 2015, FDtribs provided experiences for 513 young adults impacted by cancer. Located in ten major cities across the country, FDtrib events follow a quarterly structure and align with FD's Core Values: Community, Adventure, Challenge, and Humility. FDtribs events serve as an introduction to week-long programs for new participants, sustain the spirit of Out Living It beyond FD1 programs, and connect the YA community on a local level.

- » Ski weekend in Vail, CO
- » Stand-up paddling (Class I-III rapids) and camping on the Upper Colorado River
- » Sea kayaking Channel Islands National Park
- » Surf weekend in Daytona Beach, FL
- » 100-mile Bike The Keys
- » Camping and white water rafting on the Shenandoah River
- » Culinary workshops, indoor and outdoor rock climbing, bike tours and flying trapeze classes in multiple cities







# 2015 SUCCESS OVERVIEW

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PROGRAMS IN 13 STATES AND 4 COUNTRIES

ICELAND | DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | FRANCE | PUERTO RICO

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FD1 FIRST TIME PARTICIPANTS

427

A 53% YEAR/YEAR INCREASE

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WEEK-LONG PROGRAMS

42

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FDi

Oregon Health and Science University

Seattle Children's Hospital

Mary Bridge Childrens Health Center



# OUT LIVING IT PROJECT



Previously Team FD, the newly renamed Out Living It Project is where the First Descents community fosters a spirit of adventure, creativity, and philanthropy. OLI Projects are unique ways to fundraise for First Descents and range from marathons to back yard barbecues to meditation challenges. Anyone can join a project or create a project of his or her own design.



THE OUT LIVING IT PROJECT NUMBERS TO DATE:

\$4.2M  
RAISED

7,107  
PROJECTS

13,186  
SUPPORTERS



# WHY IT WORKS

## 2011 RESEARCH

First Descents partnered with clinical psychologist Dr. Robin Rosenberg and Dr. Stephen Kosslyn, founding Dean of the Minerva Schools at the Keck Graduate Institute, to understand the impact of the FD experience on a host of psychological issues common to young adults with cancer. The study showed the FD programs reduce depression, alienation, and fatigue while improving body image, self-compassion and self-esteem.

BODY IMAGE  
SELF COMPASSION  
SELF-ESTEEM



DEPRESSION  
ALIENATION  
FATIGUE

## 2015 RESEARCH

In 2015, we partnered with the University of Michigan to continue to track the effectiveness of our programs. This most recent study showed a significant impact on levels of depression.

REPORTED DEPRESSION  
BEFORE WEEK AT FD



REPORTED DEPRESSION  
AFTER WEEK AT FD





# TO LEARN MORE, PLEASE CONTACT:

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[WWW.FIRSTDESCENTS.ORG](http://WWW.FIRSTDESCENTS.ORG)







## **WE ARE A TRIBE.**

A COLLECTIVE. A TEAM. AND A FAMILY  
BROUGHT TOGETHER FOR THE MOST  
DESPICABLE REASON, THE UGLIEST IMPACT: CANCER.

## **BUT**

WE STAND AND PADDLE AND SURF AND CLIMB AND THRIVE  
TOGETHER NOW NOT BECAUSE OF CANCER,  
**BUT BECAUSE OF FIRST DESCENTS.**

CANCER CAN COME A-KNOCKIN' ALL IT WANTS. IT CAN YELL  
AND SCREAM AND THROW FITS AND TAKE LIMBS AND MEMO-  
RIES. SHAKE ITS CATHETERS AND  
CHEMO IN OUR FACES.

**BUT IN THIS FAMILY, IT'LL GET NOWHERE.**

BECAUSE THE ROAR OF THE RIVER, THE SILENCE OF THE  
SUMMIT, THE CLASH OF THE SURF AND  
**THE WAR CRIES OF THIS TRIBE WILL ALWAYS WIN.**

WE ARE FIRST DESCENTS.  
WE ARE **#OUTLIVINGIT.**

AND THIS IS OUR MANIFESTO.