

F I R S T   D E S C E N T S

# ANNUAL REPORT

20  
18



**FIRST DESCENTS  
PROVIDES  
LIFE-CHANGING  
OUTDOOR  
ADVENTURES  
FOR YOUNG  
ADULTS (AGES 18-39)  
IMPACTED  
BY CANCER.**





For eighteen years, First Descents has provided life-changing outdoor adventures to young adults impacted by cancer. After hundreds of programs and thousands of participants served, we've seen first-hand that adventure and community are profoundly healing. For the past two decades, I've witnessed the First Descents tribe face life threatening illnesses in the prime of their lives, and time and time again choose to Out Live It.

Now, we find ourselves entering a new era. With proven research and countless testimonials, First Descents has shown that social support and physical challenge are not additive, but essential. Adventure and community do not mean "cancer camp" and First Descents isn't a "cancer perk" but rather an integral part of the healing process. With that in mind, we launched Prescribe Adventure in order to reach young adults impacted by cancer sooner in their cancer journey.

In 2018, we enlisted hundreds of healthcare professionals and partners to help spread the healing power of adventure to their patients. We grew our local adventure communities and expanded our programs to reach more people. We proved more than ever before that adventure has the capacity to empower and transform.

With each new rapid conquered, rock wall climbed, and wave surfed, we learned that we can't stop here. We knew that the healing power of adventure was not unique to cancer, but could equally impact young adults coping with other serious health conditions. So, in 2018, with the support of our partners at Velocity Global, we piloted the first FD program for young adults impacted by multiple sclerosis. Next year, we will provide three more.

To say we've been paddling hard would be an understatement, but we know that the support of our partners and the spirit of our tribe will continue to propel us through the exciting rapids ahead. Here's to another year of wild, bold, beautiful adventures. Here's to Out Living It.

**Brad Ludden, Founder**

# FOUNDER'S LETTER



Regardless of your involvement, chances are you are here because you believe in the impact of First Descents (FD). With the renewed vision to become the global leader in adventure-based healing, we are passionately focused on three top priorities:

### **Expand Programs**

Looking ahead to 2019, FD has ambitious program growth goals for oncology programs, we will offer more programs for those living with multiple sclerosis, and we will continue to explore other affected populations who can benefit from our mission.

### **Build Communities**

Our research shows how positive outcomes are better sustained through continued adventure and peer support in local communities. A commitment to long-term community building sets FD apart, broadens reach and deepens the impact of our work. We are strengthening FD communities by making adventure more accessible, and enabling supportive peer relationships as an ongoing part of the healing process.

### **Prescribe Adventure**

Launched this past spring, FD's Prescribe Adventure campaign is transforming survivorship care by introducing First Descents to patients closer to the time of their diagnosis. Prescribe Adventure has allowed FD to partner with a growing number of healthcare professionals and hospitals, and together we are integrating First Descents as an important part of long-term care planning.

While our strategic priorities guide our actions, FD's ability to accelerate impact hinges on mobilizing support from those who feel as strongly as we do about the healing power of adventure.

As our strongest ambassadors, we're asking you to get behind our work in a big way. How can you and those you know contribute to our shared vision?

**Ryan O'Donoghue, Executive Director**





“In the spring of my final year of training to be a pediatric kidney doctor, my whole life took a turn. I was diagnosed with chronic leiomyosarcoma, a rare smooth muscle tumor. Two years later, I signed up for my First Descents program and soon I was in Bryson City, North Carolina with a group of people in the same situation as me, with their lives turned upside down by a life threatening, career changing, relationship challenging diagnosis.

My new First Descents family understood me on a different level. We could commiserate over breakfast and tell stories about surgeries and the horrendous effects of chemo. We could laugh together, inherently understanding each other’s pain, disappointment, and fear.

But maybe the most important thing about my First Descents program was it inspired me to dig deeper within myself. Suddenly all the adventures that life had in store for me, adventures I thought were no longer possible after cancer, were laid ahead of me again. FD broadened my horizons, and rather than focusing on my fears, I was empowered to see all of the things I could still do with my body. I was officially *Out Living It!*

As a doctor and as a patient, I’ve experienced the value of First Descents. I know that adventure and community are essential to the healing process. I would love to see the medical system go beyond treating my sickness, and start healing my soul. My hope is for a future where every young adult cancer patient gets a written prescription for First Descents, because nothing is more healing than *Out Living it!*”

**Jennifer “Galaxy Girl” Jackson**

## PROBLEM

Cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death in adolescents and young adults (AYAs) and continues to be one of the fastest growing and most underserved oncology demographics.

## OBSTACLES

- 70,000 adolescents & young adults are diagnosed annually
- Poor improvement in five-year survival rates
- Minimal peer support
- Rare and aggressive tumor biology
- Lack of participation in clinical trials
- Disrupts normative milestones of adulthood

## FD PROGRAM OUTCOMES

# 100%

OF PARTICIPANTS REPORTED INCREASED ABILITY TO COPE WITH CANCER AND ITS EFFECTS

# 81%

REPORTED INCREASED SELF-EFFICACY

# 61%

REPORTED INCREASED SOCIAL SUPPORT

# 17% TO 7%

PARTICIPANTS WHO REPORTED FEELING DEPRESSED BEFORE AND AFTER FIRST DESCENTS

[LEARN MORE](#)

# WHY IT WORKS?





AT A GLANCE

# OUR HIGHLIGHTS

1,281

UNIQUE EXPERIENCES  
PROVIDED

118

TOTAL PROGRAMS

\$3.9M

FUNDS RAISED

7,035

TOTAL PROGRAM DAYS

1,780

PARTICIPANT INQUIRIES



AT A GLANCE





## Expand Programs

With more than 640,000 young adult cancer survivors living in the U.S., First Descents (FD) will expand programs to improve survivorship and quality of life. Further, FD will explore and develop programs for young adults coping with other health conditions.



## Build Community

Young adults coping with health conditions often experience feelings of isolation and alienation. FD will strengthen local adventure communities and nurture supportive peer relationships that provide ongoing healing.



## Prescribe Adventure

Hospitals lack age-appropriate psychosocial survivorship programs for young adults. FD will build upon its network of healthcare professionals to reach more young adults earlier in the treatment process.



In 2018, First Descents made the exciting announcement that we would begin exploring program development for other serious health conditions that primarily impact young adults. In August of 2018, First Descents hosted 14 young adults living with multiple sclerosis (MS) for a week of whitewater kayaking, connection, and incredible adventure in Tarkio, Montana. This exciting milestone represents the first time FD has delivered programming for young adults impacted by other medical conditions beyond oncology and highlights the limitless potential of the healing power of adventure! Shoutout to Velocity Global, National MS Society and CanDo MS for making this program possible!



“We are incredibly proud of our participation in the highly successful First Descents MS pilot program. Our team supports and volunteers with First Descents on numerous occasions and in many ways, but it is particularly rewarding to help the organization bring these transformative experiences to young adults coping with MS. We are dedicated to further scaling these programs to reach more individuals living with MS in the years to come.”



Ben Wright, CEO, Velocity Global







Sharing healthy meals has become a tradition of the FD experience. During programs, participants are given the opportunity to enjoy a healthy diet focusing on fresh whole foods. We do not promote any singular “diet”. Our menus emphasize delicious and satisfying ways to get more plants to the center of the plate, including a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts and seeds. We also include quality organic animal protein as an option. Seated around the table or campfire, mealtimes are when our community celebrates the healing powers of nourishing food, the fuel for every great FD adventure.

## AT A GLANCE

16,260

PARTICIPANT MEALS PROVIDED

29

PROGRAMS CHEFS

202

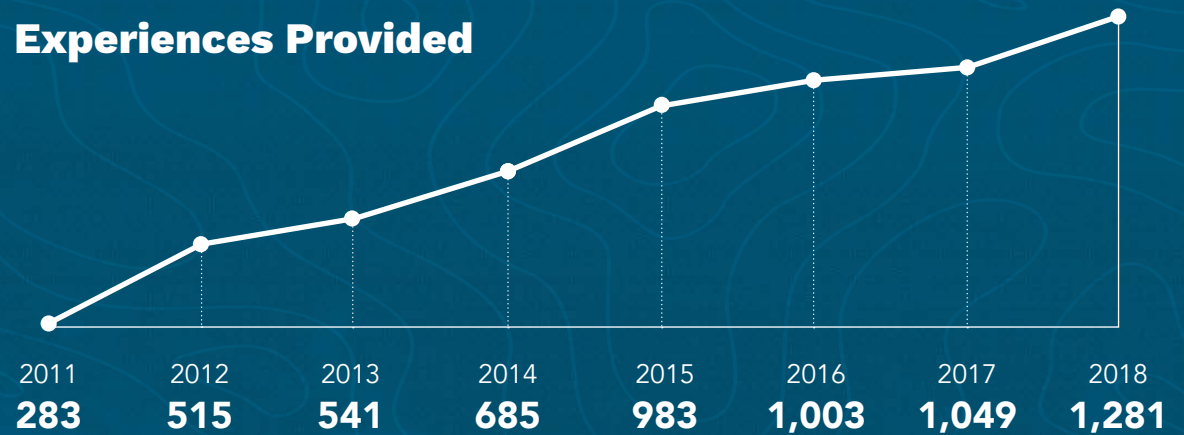
GROCERY TRIPS

RECIPES

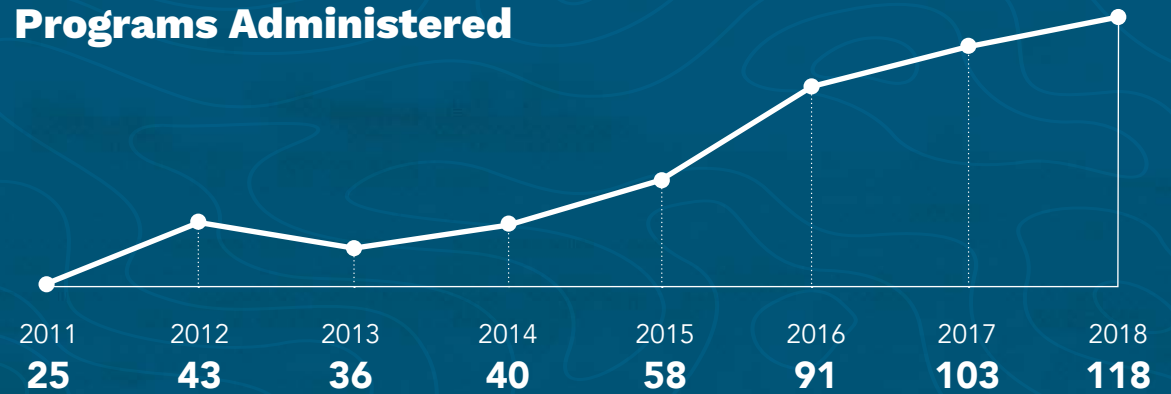


# OUR GROWING IMPACT

## Experiences Provided



## Programs Administered





MEET.  
CONNECT.  
ADVENTURE.

First Descents Tributaries offer local adventures and community support for young adults impacted by cancer.



## PARTICIPANTS BY LOCATION

2018	100
2017	100

\* **COMING 2019**  
Milwaukee  
Philadelphia



In 2018, we launched Prescribe Adventure to engage healthcare professionals and empower young adults to connect with their peers through community and adventure. Research shows that our programming improves survivorship, and we're reaching young adults earlier in their treatment processes through our growing network of healthcare professionals and medical centers.

# 1,780

PARTICIPANT INQUIRIES

# 50%

INCREASE FROM 2017

# 300+

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS  
ENGAGED THROUGH PRESCRIBE  
ADVENTURE

# 175+

MEDICAL CENTERS AND  
HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS  
REFERRING PATIENTS

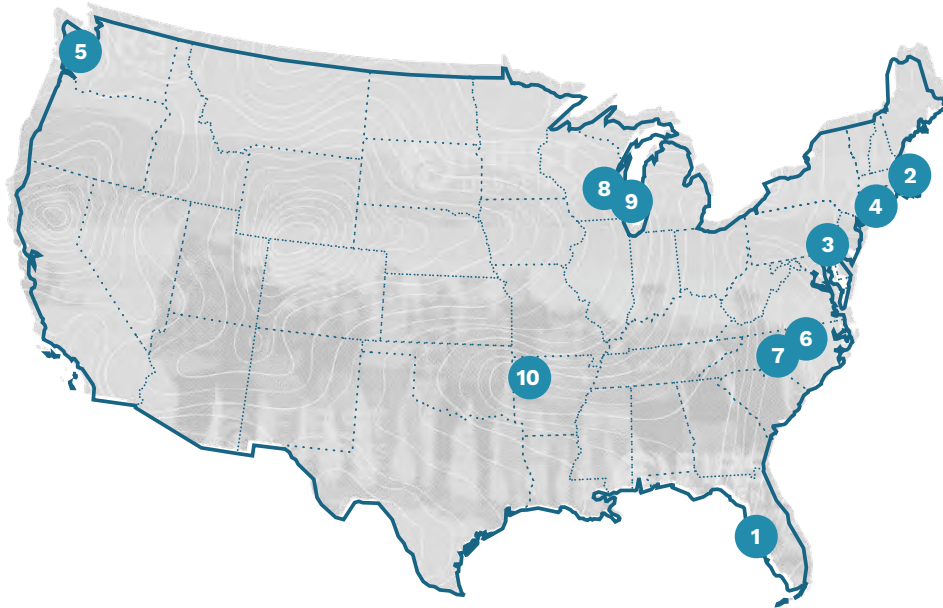
"I can only imagine the challenges that come with having cancer as a young adult – the loss of control, the hours spent in clinics and hospitals rather than with friends and family, the persistent cancer-related symptoms that limit normal abilities and activities. This adventure provided the opportunity for young adults with cancer to be in control, experience the rejuvenating power of nature, and test their inner and outer strength. The program also gave participants the unique support and encouragement that only comes from other cancer survivors."

– PhD, RN

# PRESCRIBE ADVENTURE



First Descents partners with medical centers to provide opportunities for young adults impacted by cancer to attend a First Descents program in close proximity to their treatment facility. In 2018, First Descents designed custom programs for 10 medical centers to help Prescribe Adventure to their AYA patients.



Tampa, FL



Boston, MA



Philadelphia, PA



Hartford, CT



Tacoma, WA



Chapel Hill, NC



Durham, NC



Wauwatosa, WI



Milwaukee, WI



Springdale, AR

“First Descents provides a unique, empowering opportunity for young adults with cancer to feel like themselves again, often for the first time since diagnosis. They are given a safe, welcoming space to not only be active and feel like a normal young adult again, but also to connect with their peers who simply “get it” and can relate on a different level than other friends or family. First Descents is truly a gift to young adults facing the physical and emotional challenges of cancer. As someone who works closely with young adults in an academic medical institution, the relief and comfort of knowing FD exists is felt not only by patients, but also those who care for them.”

- Dana Farber, Patient Navigator



# PRESCRIBE ADVENTURE





# OUT LIVING IT — PROJECT —

The Out Living It Project is FD's grassroots fundraising platform that combines adventure, creativity and philanthropy. Launch your own unique fundraiser or join an existing project to raise funds and awareness for First Descents. To date, The Out Living It Project has raised \$5.54M across 7,791 projects with 22,752 supporters.

IT PROJECT OUT LIVING IT PROJECT

# \$748,994.63

RAISED

# 5,454

SUPPORTERS

# 373

PROJECTS

LEARN MORE



# OUT LIVING IT PROJECT





## Where We Were

- ✦ First Descents, Established 2001
- ✦ Out Living It | Hosted First Program for 15 young adults with cancer
- ✦ Build Community | Launched Local Adventure Communities in 2013
- ✦ CNN Heroes | Brad Ludden Recognized as 2016 Top 10 CNN Hero

## Where We Are

- ✦ Expand Programs | Piloted First Program for Young Adults with MS
- ✦ Launched Prescribe Adventure | Enlisted 300+ Healthcare Professionals and 175+ Medical Centers to Extend the Healing Power of Adventure to their Patients
- ✦ Build Community | FDTrib Communities Established in 16 Cities
- ✦ Corporate Partnerships | New Partnership with REI Outdoor School to improve access to programming nationwide
- ✦ Participant Inquiries | 50% Increase to 1,780 New Participant Inquiries

## Where We Are Going (2019)

- ✦ Expand Programs | Provide over 1,500 experiences for young adults impacted by cancer
- ✦ MS Programs | 3 adventure programs for young adults with MS
- ✦ Build Community | FDTrib Communities in 18 cities and 9 pilot cities
- ✦ Prescribe Adventure | A network of 600+ Healthcare Professionals and 300+ Medical Centers & Hospitals
- ✦ Participant Inquiries | 2,500 new participant inquiries



## Board of Directors

Founder Brad “Man Salmon” Ludden  
Chairman Brent “Sunday” Goldstein  
Vice-Chair and Secretary Debbie King “Zipper” Ford  
Treasurer Michael “Volcano” Kantor  
Medical Director Larry “Larry Boy” Smith  
Josh “Bear” Behr  
Alix “Snooki” Berglund  
Brad “Uncle Brad” Reiss  
Dr. Brandon Hayes-Lattin  
Jeremy Shevlin  
Joel “Fuji” Appel  
Kip “Wombat” Cross  
Tanum Davis “UniKitty” Bohen  
Honorary Director – Rochelle “Hefty” Shoretz

## Staff

Founder Brad “Man Salmon” Ludden  
Executive Director Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue  
Chief of Staff Melissa “Master Splinter” Markle  
Global Experience Developer Willie “Sweet D” Kern  
Healthcare Partnerships & Recruitment Manager John “Fever Dog” Scheid  
Director of Programs Mackenzie “Spudz” McGrath  
Senior Programs Manager Paul “Crash” Kelly  
Senior Manager Andy “Panda” Frame  
Program Manager Brooke “Noodles” Barry  
Program Coordinator Riley “Chum” Schumm  
Program Coordinator Jason “Buck” Eshleman  
Director of Advancement Ray “Fridge” Shedd  
Senior Marketing Manager Becca “Turtle” Rohrer  
Marketing Coordinator Anna “006” Kenyon  
Development Coordinator Andrew “Tops” Coulter  
Development Officer Emma “Piano Pat” Burick  
Director of Finance and Operations Adam “Toby” Schuster  
Finance and Operations Manager Ella “Lady Smith” Kerr

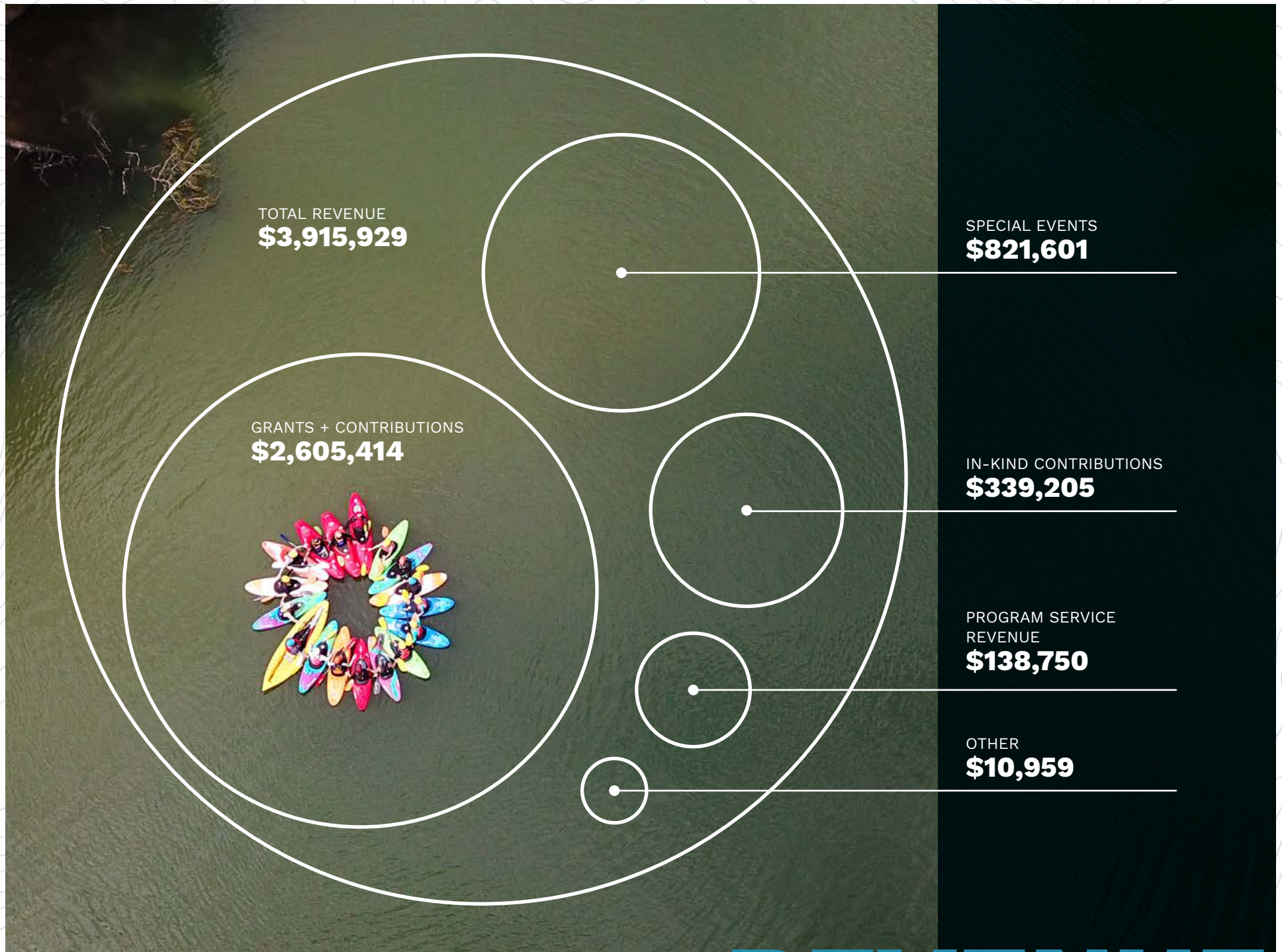


**In 2018, our generous community generated more than \$3.9 million representing a banner fundraising year.**

**In recognition of our financial transparency, Guidestar awarded FD with its coveted platinum ranking.**







For full financials, please visit [www.firstdescents.org/financials](http://www.firstdescents.org/financials)







**\$100,000 +**

Genentech  
Wend Collective

**\$50,000 — \$99,999**

BBVA Compass  
Haymakers For Hope, Inc.  
Michael Gross Family Foundation  
NVIDIA Foundation  
WilmerHale

**\$25,000 — \$49,999**

Chad McWhinney  
Dale Katechis  
DaVita University  
Elbaz Family Foundation  
Gilead Kite Pharma  
Grady & Lori Durham  
Joel & Tiffany Appel  
Jon & Mindy Gray Family Foundation  
Kirk MacKenzie Charitable Gift Fund  
Lyndon Rive  
Pete Rive & Natasha Dvorak  
Scott Lynes  
Tanum Davis & Sean Bohan  
The Anschutz Foundation  
The Offield Family Foundation  
The Tappan Foundation  
Wacky Warriors

**\$10,000 — \$24,999**

Aetna, Inc.

Amanda Precourt and Andrew Jensdotter  
Brent & Lisa Goldstein  
Chuck Ludden  
Colin Fryer  
Company of Motion LLC (Fluidstance)  
Dear Jack Foundation  
Erika and Matt Fitzgerald  
George Karl Foundation  
Hans & Alix Berglund  
James Wallace  
Kimbal & Christiana Musk  
Kyle & Lisa Wynja  
Mellam Family Foundation  
Nancy Lazkani  
Omnicell  
Prather's Market  
Ritz Carlton Bachelor Gulch  
RK Foundation  
Scott & Michelle Brooks  
The Behr Team  
The Precourt Foundation  
TIC Denver  
Triford Foundation  
Vail Valley Surgery Center, LLC  
Velocity Global

**\$5,000 — \$9,999**

Amanda Lofland & Ryan Scheeler  
Amy Lin  
Association of Corporate Counsel Colorado Chapter  
Ben & Shirley Eisler

Beverage Distributors Company, LLC  
Chad Cooley  
Clif Bar Family Foundation  
COGO Labs, INC  
Community Foundation Boulder County  
Connecticut Children's Hospital  
Crawford Family Foundation  
Dana Farber Cancer Institutue  
David Gordon  
Debbie King Ford & Rob Ford  
Duke University Health System  
Emmett Foundation  
Enel Green Power North America  
Epperson Family Foundation  
Fifth Generation Inc.  
FishPond USA  
Gary Muskett  
Guaranty Bank and Trust Company  
Harmon Foundation, Inc.  
Harold Zirkin  
Hogan Lovells  
Howard Postal  
James and Carolyn Brett Charitable Foundation  
Jeffrey Hoffman  
Jeremy & Sandra Shevlin  
John Kirk & Cathleen Robinson  
Kendra Scott Jewelry  
Lawrence and Kimberly Weinberg Fund  
Mark Devlin  
Mary Bridge Children's Hospital  
Medidata Solutions

Mindy Boyum  
Neil & Marcy Cohen  
Sage Hospitality Resources  
Sam & Peggy Grossman Family Foundation  
Samantha Gautier Foundation  
Samit Family Foundation  
Servpro of Greater Boulder LLC  
Southern Glazers  
Stanchina Family Foundation  
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia  
The Howard Family Fund  
The Kane Family  
Thomas Oldre  
Tim and Diane Parks  
Tina Cochran  
Tom & Angela Civik  
Town of Avon  
Travis Stork  
William Newton & Anne French  
Woodruff Family Foundation



## \$2,500 — \$4,999

Ace Adventure Rafting  
 Alejandro de Castro  
 Allen Lund Company  
 Alyssa Snyder  
 Anne Greer  
 Beyond Boundaries  
 Big Red F Restaurant Group  
 Bill Milton  
 Boa Technology  
 Boettcher Foundation  
 Children's Hospital of Wisconsin  
 Crestone Capital Advisors  
 David Ruf  
 Diana Price Fish Fund of the Denver Foundation  
 Dirk Sorenson  
 Doug and Melissa Bonnette  
 E.H. and M.E. Bowerman Advised Fund  
 EarthRoamer  
 Eva Ho  
 Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin  
 Google, Inc.  
 Heather Koll  
 Helene & Andrew Glick  
 Howard Chai  
 James & Crystal Dean  
 Jeffrey Anderson  
 Jennifer Franz  
 Joan and Gene Mensching  
 John Kirk

Jordan Staab  
 Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation  
 Kristin L. Gardner Foundation  
 Meaghan Horton  
 Michael & Heidi Brodsky  
 Michael Staffieri  
 Mile High Station  
 Moffitt Cancer Center  
 Nancy and Harry Toll  
 Nancy E. Barton Foundation  
 Patrick Rimron  
 QuietKat  
 Renee Noland  
 Rob and Nancy Samit  
 Rob Mahan Foundation  
 Robert Graham Designs LLC  
 Robert Heidkamp  
 Rod & Linda Gray  
 Sarah Metz Krissoff And Austin Krissoff  
 Scott McGuire  
 SMITH  
 State of Colorado  
 The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation  
 The Westin Riverfront Resort  
 Tim Train Landres  
 Tin Cup Whiskey  
 University of North Carolina Chapel Hill  
 Vail Resorts  
 Wendy Rambo

## \$1,000 — \$2,499

Aaron Carlson  
 Albert Small  
 AmazonSmile  
 Amy Dickstein  
 Andrew & Molly Snyder  
 Andrew Magalong  
 Ann Horak  
 Anne Pert  
 Arlene and Paul Norman Charitable Fund  
 ASLAN Fund  
 Bailey Family Foundation  
 Barry & Marilyn Goodman  
 Bear & Carrie Pratt  
 Benjamin Hartman  
 Betsy Grossman  
 Bill & Sarah Ross  
 Bonfire Brewing  
 Brad & Kammi Reiss  
 Brad and Sharon Fuller  
 Brad Ludden  
 Brady & Kristen Dolsen  
 Bruce & Ellen Winston  
 Bryan Fitzgerald  
 Cancer Treatment Centers of America  
 Carrie Accardi  
 Caryn Roach  
 Chad Braun  
 Charles Gravely  
 Charles Schwab  
 Christine Ardez

Cindy VanDermeer  
 Craig Justice  
 Craig Sylvester  
 Cunitz Family Charitable Fund  
 Curt Silbert  
 Dagger Kayak  
 Dan & Caroline Patten  
 Daniel Magdalena  
 Daniel and Michelle Murphy  
 Daniel Chapman  
 Daniel Kaufman  
 Darrell Young  
 David Altobello  
 David Corkery  
 David Smith  
 Dean 'O'S Casino  
 Doris Plume  
 Dorothy Williams  
 DRTDA/ Bighorn Toyota  
 Edward Quinn  
 Emily Merola  
 Eric Fretz  
 Faith Goldstein  
 Fifty-Nine 22 MLK  
 Franklin Paulson  
 Frederick Arzt  
 Gavin Baker  
 Gayle Strong  
 George Billings  
 Gilson Snow  
 Greg Carlin  
 Gregory Cowan



Guys wWho Give

Hilary Kwan

Holly Osborn

Icelandic Skis

Imprint Events Colorado, LLC

Intel Corporation

Island Oceanfront Properties

Jack Singleton

James & Lois Benfield

James Patrick Griffith Foundation

Jamie Loggains

Jan Serota

Janet Harvey

Janet Krull

Jason Minard

Jen West & Andy Buettner

Jennifer Mills

Jesse Bernal

Jessica Meng

Jim & Carolyn Badenhausen

JJ Johns

Johanna Dolan

John Miner

John Ridyard

Jolie Deutschman

Jon Goldstein

Jon Steinman

Joseph Neumeyer

Justin Conigliaro

Karen R. Chakmakian Charitable Fund

Karin Smith

Katherine Milham

Kathryn & Nick Raffensperger

Kelly & Jamie Malin

Ken Evers

Kenneth Collins

Kevin Zimmerman

Kings River Land & Cattle Co.

Klavs Miller

Kristen Nelson

Laura Burnett-Kurie

Linda Iverson

Lorri Goldberg

Lynn Parker

M. Robert Burman and Carol W.  
Burman Family Foundation Fund

Marcia Donziger

Mark Kogod

Mary Ellen and Paul Monzella

Matthew Kannenberg

McNicholas Family

Meghan Newcomer

Melissa Chen

Melissa Lawrence & Shawn Madden

Melissa Peters

Michael & Suzanne Frame

Michael Kross

Michael McHugh

Michael Postal

Michael Potts

Misiu Hoffman

Neil Markus Foundation

Neil Newton

Oliver Stanton Foundation

Optimum Events

Optiver US LLC

Paul Borgman

Paul Johnson

Phyllis Johnson

Powder Days Foundation

Rachel Mueller

Raymond Liberatore

Resilience Patient Project Inc

Rick Schoen

Ritz-Carlton Chicago

RJ & ML Badenhausen Charitable Fund

Robert Keats

Ryan Drant

Ryan Long

Shinesty

Shyla McKee

Sidney Weeter

Spencer Holst

Spencer Kimball

Stacy Fousek

Stephanie Lindquist

Stephanie Wall

Stephen Huskins

Stephen Papermaster

Stephen Rader

Steven Curwin

Stio

Surfing For Life Foundation

Tami Yinger

Tara Picklo

Telluride Ski Resorts

Terri and Jeffrey Kominers

The Hamilton Group Trust

The Shubert Organization, Inc.

Timothy Gathman

Tito's Handmade Vodka

Todd Heustess

Union College Women's Rugby Team

Valerie London

Verl Allen

Victor and Janice Rosenberg

Virginia Koslow-DiMola

William Phillips

William Yinger





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[www.firstdescents.org](http://www.firstdescents.org)  
@firstdescents  
#OutLivingIt