FIRST DESCENTS PROVIDES LIFE-CHANGING OUTDOOR ADVENTURES FOR YOUNG ADULTS (AGES 18-39) IMPACTED BY CANCER AND OTHER SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS.
In my early 30s, I started to notice my peripheral vision was off, so I called my eye doctor who asked me to come in the following morning. It was then that I was diagnosed with ocular melanoma, a rare form of melanoma that affects 6 in a million people.

What followed was a week of radiation therapy resulting in the loss of vision in my left eye, but I learned that I was Stage 1A with less than 2% chance of my disease spreading and I only needed bi-annual liver scans, so I returned to my normal life.

My first ultrasound came back clean but after my second scan, I learned I had a dozen suspicious lesions on my liver and likely my cancer had metastasized. Soon after, it was confirmed that I had developed stage 4, metastatic, incurable ocular melanoma. At the time, there was only one FDA approved drug for my cancer with less than 15% survival rate. My best hope was clinical trials. We weren’t thinking of “survival” – we were looking for something to prolong my life.

The next several years would consist of 4 clinical trials with a myriad of side effects, two liver embolizations, and several major operations.

The physical toll settled and the emotional trauma rolled in. Few people truly understood what it was like to fight cancer, particularly one that is incurable with a high fatality rate. I was craving connection – just one person that would understand. This is when I learned about First Descents.

I joined the First Descents’ Denver community for a night of camping in August 2016. The next day, I climbed a 14,000’ mountain with this community. Every participant was so positive and alive. I was witnessing the Out Living It mantra firsthand and I felt I belonged to this group of strangers-turned-family. It was such a relief. It was on that mountain that I released cancer fighting Katie and all the burdens she was carrying and “Emoji” was born.

August 2017, I found myself dipping my toes in the Clark Fork River on a First Descents kayaking program. I was in no way prepared for the intense physical and emotional journey I would experience. As we kayaked each day and sat by the campfire each evening, there were admissions of our darkest hours and validation for the fears, anxieties, anger, and sadness that comes with cancer. There were tears but even more laughter.

June 2020, my story took a huge turn. After years of tumor stabilization and in the midst of the pandemic, scans revealed my tumors had nearly doubled in size. I enrolled in my fourth clinical trial which involved a 21-day stay in Pittsburgh that included 7 days of chemo and a 20-minute TIL infusion.

Scans showed that my tumors were shrinking, some were disappearing, but one was growing and it was determined by my doctors to operate to remove the remaining tumor.

On September 17, 2020, I underwent a major operation to remove half my liver. I woke up to hear the words I never thought I’d hear, “Your cancer is gone - you have no evidence of disease.”

Cancer takes away so much, but cancer has also given me so much: deepened relationships, new friends, and my FD family.

Cancer has taught me to say yes. I’ve done more in the past eight years than I might have in my lifetime thanks to First Descents. They pushed me to my limit, time and time again. First Descents helped me look to the future: worry less about death and more about what’s next; to scale that rock, to make that leap off that cliff, to ski that mountain, to kayak that rapid, to take in the mountain views, to share my story. To Out Live It.

Katie “Emoji” Doble, First Descents Oncology Participant
LETTER FROM THE CEO

As we rang in 2021, the world continued to reel from the impacts of the global pandemic. After launching programming for healthcare workers on the frontlines of the greatest public health crisis of our lifetimes in 2020, we refocused our energy on safely serving our oncology and multiple sclerosis (MS) communities.

In an effort to host the safest experiences possible, we made the decision to provide shorter, 3-day programs instead of our standard week-long adventures. As a result, we provided 66 programs serving 583 participants across the four communities we serve: Oncology, Multiple Sclerosis, Caregivers, and Healthcare Workers. It’s been inspiring to witness how adventure, connection, and shared experiences have created opportunities to heal during these uniquely challenging times.

First Descents also doubled down on its commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI). We operate at the confluence of two industries with historical and significant inequities: healthcare advocacy and outdoor recreation. By expanding and systematizing the roles of our internal JEDI committee and our JEDI Advisory Council, we now review all ongoing organizational initiatives and policies through an equity lens that helps to identify blindspots and challenge our implicit biases. We’ve re-evaluated practices and policies within the workplace, across our partnerships, and through the life cycle of our program design, recruitment, and delivery to put inclusivity at the center of our work.

Most importantly, diverse representation increased across our programming leading to our most diverse program season in FD’s history. In 2021, 41% of participants self-identified their ethnicity as something other than “Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American” representing an increase from 32% of participants in 2019. While we recognize we’re taking early steps on a much longer journey, we are dedicated to building and maintaining a culture of inclusion that empowers everyone within our community.

As we continue to navigate a new post-pandemic normal, we turn to our greatest teachers and strongest ambassadors as our north star: our community. These past few years have reminded us of the power and resilience of those we serve, and the constant undertow of the Out Living It spirit. Please join me in celebrating the courageous members of our community who inspire us each and every day.

Thank you for your support of our life-giving work. Onward, to many more adventures.

Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue
First Descents CEO
Cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death in adolescents and young adults (AYAs).

MS is the most common neuroinflammatory disease affecting young adults.

Cancer, MS, and all serious health conditions present unique challenges and obstacles to young adults.

**Problem**

- Cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death in adolescents and young adults (AYAs).
- MS is the most common neuroinflammatory disease affecting young adults.
- Cancer, MS, and all serious health conditions present unique challenges and obstacles to young adults.

**Obstacles**

- 80,000+ adolescents & young adults are diagnosed with cancer each year
- Minimal peer support
- Rare and aggressive tumor biology
- Lack of participation in clinical trials
- Disrupts normative milestones of adulthood
- Higher rate of depression and psychosocial distress in young adults impacted by MS and cancer

**FD Program Outcomes**

- 100% of participants reported increased ability to cope with cancer and its effects
- 81% reported increased self-efficacy
- 99% of participants want to stay involved
- 17% to 7% participants who reported feeling depressed before and after first descent

**Why It Works**

Learn More
OUR HIGHLIGHTS

583
PARTICIPANTS SERVED

66
TOTAL PROGRAMS

1,994
PARTICIPANT INQUIRIES

$4.63M
FUNDS RAISED
PRIORITIES

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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 often 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.

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.
In 2021, First Descents continued working to reach those traditionally underserved within the young adult oncology and MS communities as well as healthcare workers and caregivers. The chart below highlights the ethnic background of 1,994 participant inquiries from 2021.

In 2021, First Descents expanded and systematized the role of the JEDI Advisory Council to further support our commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI). Our JEDI AC now reviews all organizational initiatives to identify biases, shortcomings and areas for improvement. With their support, our language is stronger, our policies more equitable, and our commitment more action-oriented. At the same time, First Descents developed policies and trainings to advance our internal JEDI goals, including the following milestones:

In 2021, FD expanded our travel scholarship grant with a goal of further reducing barriers to attending destination-based programs. Travel scholarships are available to every participant who applies, with no proof of financial need required.

FD completely overhauled its hiring and onboarding processes to reduce biases and recruit candidates of color. Our new hiring system includes a new implicit bias training required for all staff, identical interview questions for all candidates, along with a scorecard system to evaluate each interview without bias, posting position openings on job boards dedicated to diverse hirings, and contracting an HR consultant and recruiter to reduce workplace cultural bias.

In 2021, FD required all staff and board members to take part in Camber Outdoors’ “Building Blocks of DEI” series, and made additional training available to all staff, board, lead staff and contract staff.
First Descents partners with medical centers and healthcare organizations nationwide to provide opportunities for young adult patients, caregivers and providers to attend our outdoor programs. Through the Prescribe Adventure campaign, FD engages healthcare partners and equips them with the resources they need to empower young adults to connect with their peers through community and adventure. Research shows that our programming improves psychosocial outcomes including body image, self compassion and self esteem, as well as reduced alienation, depression, and fatigue among FD participants.
In 2021, First Descents continued building integrated partnerships with leading hospitals and medical centers, specifically focusing on building partnerships with leading multiple sclerosis institutions in order to expand our offerings for the MS community. A few highlights include:

- Established accessible program locations by teaming up with world-class lodging partners and outfitters in Santa Cruz, Estes Park and Rogue River which are best suited to serve the MS population for years to come.
- Partnered with CanDo MS who were instrumental in supporting program recruitment. CanDo MS will continue to enroll MS constituents via newsletters, social media, and more.
- FD became an official service provider of the National MS Society. FD is now socialized with all young adult constituents who contact the NMSS support line and patient navigators are trained to share information about FD programs.
- FD attended and exhibited at both the 2021 Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) Annual Meeting and the 2021 CMSC Patient Program, “More About MS”

“First Descents isn’t taking people kayaking. FD is allowing them to connect with other people who have Multiple Sclerosis and it all happens organically. And they aren’t talking about MS and illness, they are talking about the adventure they want to do together when they return home. It is a powerful community. These types of programs are life changing.”

- Kathy Costello, Vice President of Programs, CanDo MS
When I earned my first finisher’s buckle at the Leadville 100 mountain bike race in 2007, I never imagined that I would still be doing the race 15 years later. As a First Descents Board Member and veteran FD Program volunteer, I have experienced firsthand the impact of adventure and peer connection on the lives of young adults with cancer and multiple sclerosis. The Out Living It Project has given me the platform to raise over $1.5 Million for FD over these 15 years. It is extremely gratifying for me and my donors to know that we have so directly impacted the lives of countless participants. Though the pandemic paused our efforts, it is great to be Out Living It again!

- Brent Goldstein, First Descents Board Member

The Out Living It Project (OLIP) is where adventure, creativity, and philanthropy collide. Out Living It Project participants can launch their own unique fundraiser or join an existing project or race to raise funds and awareness for First Descents.

In 2021, Team FD athletes competed in renowned races including the Leadville 100 MTB Race, Leadville 100 Run, TransRockies Run, and the NYC Marathon. To date, the Out Living It Project Give Back Adventures have raised $6.2M across 8,374 projects with 27,392 supporters.

$472,987 RAISED

2,379 SUPPORTERS

181 PROJECTS

LEARN MORE
Board of Directors

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**Chairperson** Debbie “Zipper” King Ford  
**Vice Chair** Dr. Brandon Hayes-Lattin  
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Julie Wright  
Kip “Wombat” Cross  
Michael Gross  
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Tanum “UniKitty” Davis Bohen  

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**Founder** Brad “Man Salmon” Ludden  
**CEO** Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue  
**Director of Programs** Mackenzie “Spudz” McGrath  
**Senior Programs Manager** Paul “Crash” Kelly  
**Program Manager** Angelina “Katniss” Mangiardi  
**Program Coordinator** Riley “Chum” Schumm  
**Program Coordinator** Kate “Lil Mo” Medici  
**Program Coordinator** Sophie “Bubbles” Ohaus  
**Director of Advancement** Ray “Cheddar Bunny” Shedd  
**Senior Marketing Manager** Becca “Turtle” Rohrer  
**Marketing Coordinator** Anna “006” Kenyon  
**Marketing & Events Coordinator** Anna “Whiplash” Wallace  
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**Development Coordinator** Andrew “Tops” Coulter  
**Director of Finance and Operations** Adam “Toby” Schuster  
**Finance & Operations Manager** Keith “Focus” Feikema  
**Global Experience Developer** Willie “Sweet D” Kern
In 2021, our generous community generated more than $4.63 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
TOTAL REVENUE
$4,628,574

GRANTS + CONTRIBUTIONS
$3,885,706

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
$140,161

OTHER
$247,458

SPECIAL EVENTS
$355,249

For full financials, please visit www.firstdescents.org/financials
69% of 2021 expenses were allocated to programs, providing 583 unique adventure experiences.

For full financials, please visit [www.firstdescents.org/financials](http://www.firstdescents.org/financials)
$100,000 +
Genentech
Michael Gross Family Foundation
Omaze
Sandy & Joe Samberg
Small Business Administration (SBA)
#StartSmall LLC
Tap Cancer Out
Wend II, Inc.

$10,000 — $24,999
Anonymous
American Junior Golf Foundation
Ben & Julie Wright
Bob & Amy Martin
Brent & Lisa Goldstein
Brian Hoyt
Casey O’Malley
Chris Hermon
Chuck Ludden
Debbie King Ford & Rob Ford
Edward & Marsha Mattison
Epperson Family Foundation
First Responders Children’s Foundation
Haymakers For Hope, Inc.
Joel & Tiffany Appel
Joy in Childhood Foundation (Dunkin Brands)
Ken deLaski
Kevin & Elizabeth Keating
Mark & Marshall Stockseth
Matt Turner & Julia Mauro
Matt Zimmerman
Medidata Solutions
Mellam Family Foundation
Nancy Oaks
River Roots
Rod & Linda Gray
Sam & Alexandria Warren

$5,000 — $9,999
Alyssa Snyder
Amy Lin
Barbara McCafferty Family Foundation
Dr. Alexander Robb & Dr. Jenna Tjossem-Robb
BNY Mellon Charitable Gift Fund
Brad Kreidle
Brady & Kristen Dolsen
Brandon Hayes-Lattin
Cathleen Robinson
Clif Family Foundation
David & Iris Gordon
Doug & Katherine Milham
Emmett Foundation
Gary & Christine Muskett
Hans & Alix Berglund
Jennifer Mills
Jeremy & Sandra Shevlin
John Geller
Josh & Jennifer Behr
Kim Metcalf
Kip Cross & Jessica Martin
Lisa Kohl
Marcia Donziger
Matt Fargo
Max & Elaine Appel
Michael Hammond
Rylee Johnston & Ryan Wells
The Kirby-Jones Foundation
Travis Stork
Troy Cox & Adeo Alday
Vail Valley Surgery Center, LLC
$2,500 — $4,999
Alison Hadden
Amy & Chris Hart
Brian Levin
BWBacon Group
Charlotte & Chuck Fowler
Chauncey Tanton
Chris Hansen
Danny Effron
Donald Weaver
Doug & Dana Flora
E.H. & M.E. Bowerman Advised Fund
Eric Fretz
Eric Schweitzer
Frank Fumich
Grace Brann
Harmon Foundation, Inc.
Helene & Andrew Glick
Howard Postal
Jack Garner
James & Crystal Dean
James & Lois Benfield
James Hiseler
Jeffrey Hoffman
Jesse Sanders
Jessica Billingsley
Jill Dahan
John & Liz Ridyard
John Colonna
John Lacy
Jonathan Been
Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation
Katherine Estes Rogers Foundation
Kevin & Whitney Zimmerman
Kristin L. Gardner Foundation
Kristine & Tom Dowd
Lori Lyons
Mark Harmon
Mark Scully
Martin Carrigan
Meghan Newcomer
Michael & Mia Kantor
Myron Holscher
Nancy E. Barton Foundation
Newman’s Own Foundation
Overbrook Family Advised Fund of Serena Altschul
Paul Berliner
Paul Johnson
Prather’s Market
Renee Noland
Richard Michaux
Ross Stern
Ryan Foley
Samira Woodings
Stephanie Webber
Stephen Turner
Taylor Bevis
Taylor Boylan
The Steadman Clinic Lynda Sampson
Thomas Blumenthal
William & Molly Gilmore
William Workman
Terry McNamara
The Omidyar Group
TransRockies Race Series
Trevor Stern
von Jones
Waldron Charitable Fund

$1,000 — $2,499
Aaron Batte
Adam Wertz
Albert Davidson Jr.
Andrew Lazerow
Andrew Pitakos
Andrew Schuman
Andrew Tu
Anthony Pigllicampo
Austin Kuhrmeyer
Bailey Family Foundation
Barry & Marilyn Goodman
Bart Foster
Ben & Shirley Eisler
Bill & Sarah Ross
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Bret Burton
Brian Ciciora
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Cari & Kimberly Howland
Carol Hordis
Catering by Design
Charles Johnson
Charles Lozner
Chris Nehls
Christine Goethals
Christopher Mutzel
Christopher Pilat
Christopher Walters
Christopher Watson
Christy Orris
Clifford Ruff
Corey Jensen
Dalfen Industrial
Daniel Kaufman
David & Robin Gonzales
David Christian
David Freibbaum
David Ratner
David Ruf
David Weaver
Deanna Byck
Denver Health
Derek Wintle
Drew Fink & Daniela Uribe
DrumsForCures Inc
Edward & Kathleen Quinn
Elizabeth & Justin Bruns
Enrique Tamayo
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Eric Glass
Erin Moore
Ethan Castro
Faith Goldstein
Frank & Joyce Puglia
Gable Silvian
Gavin Lantzy
George Rizk
Giving Assistant, Inc.
Heritage Heights Academy
Hilary Schiff
James & Kimberly Hakala
James & Carolyn Brett Charitable Foundation
James Clydesdale
Jay Hirsh
Jayne Flinn
Jean Smart
Jenny & Greg Baldwin
Jesse Brownell
Jo Ann Neusner
Joan & Gene Walsh
Joel Heath
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John Hammond
John Ikalowych
John Livesey
John Ourisman
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Kristy Anderson
Kyle Jansen
Larry Smith
Lawrence & Kimberly Weinberg
Leigh Augustine
LendUS
Lisa Ihm
Lori Wellins
M Harger
M. Robert Burman & Carol W. Burman Family Foundation Fund
Marc & Lindsey Gutman
Marckwardt Family Charitable Fund
Margot Badenhausen
Mark Imbertson
Mark Kogod
Matt Holmes
Melissa Lawrence & Shawn Madden
Merle Postal
Merritt Hopper
Michael & Karen Standish
Michael Cessario
Michael Corridan
Michael Gellman
Michael Saltman
Michael Sullivan
Michele Resnick
National Christian Foundation
Neil & Marcy Cohen
Nick & Caitlin Smarrelli
Nick Burgess
Nicole Tondre
Olga Macedo
Patricia Spencer
Paul Bergman
Paul Brown
Paul Rago
Peter McBride
Phyllis Johnson
Randall Loker
Richard Rothgeb
Rick & Cathy West
Rob Mossman
Rob Shaver
Robin Cheung
Ryan Drant
Ryan Long
Ryan Turbyfill
Samit Family Foundation
Sarah Uram
Sasha Pierson
Scott & Amy Brody
Scott Beardsley
Scott Kaplan
Scott Nimmer
Sean Glynn
Seth Waddell
Silas Eldredge & Lara Nickel
Stephen Huskins
Stephen Nilsen
Steve Friedman
Steven & Gail Shak
Steven Barardo
Suzy, Nancy & Carol Minkoff
SylvanSport LLC
The Baupost Group, L.L.C.
The Sspanx by Sarah Blakely Foundation Fund
Thomas McCafferty
Tim Wakeland
Timothy McCabe
Vincent Connolly
Walter Hagstrom
Wesley Walton
HERE’S TO ANOTHER YEAR OF
OUT LIVING IT ADVENTURES

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