2022 ANNUAL REPORT
FIRST DESCENTS
FIRST DESCENTS PROVIDES LIFE-CHANGING OUTDOOR ADVENTURES FOR YOUNG ADULTS IMPACTED BY CANCER AND OTHER SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS.
In 2017, I was living the life I had always imagined: married, two babies and a dog, and a beautiful house in a quiet neighborhood. I was a career second grade teacher with a retirement plan and summers off. I had just returned to work after maternity leave and was in the midst of figuring out how to balance it all when I noticed I wasn’t able to feel my left foot.

The next few weeks brought a whole new level of clumsiness I’d never experienced. I was dropping dishes and running into table corners and door frames. I began to misread and mishear things. Driving through the town where I’d always lived, I would forget where I was going. All of this was accompanied by constant nausea, hot flashes, wooziness, and migraines that forced me to spend most evenings on the bathroom floor.

One Saturday I went to play soccer. I thought maybe some exercise would improve my circulation or reset whatever glitch was messing with my system. I tired quickly and I felt slow. My legs felt like lead and I didn’t have enough strength to even lock my ankles when kicking the ball.

What followed was a series of trips to the ER, neurology appointments, MRIs, extensive blood work, and a spinal tap to receive an official diagnosis: multiple sclerosis. The rest of the year was one loss after another. I couldn’t play soccer anymore - something I’d spent my whole life doing. I could barely walk around the block. I couldn’t read without falling asleep. New medications meant the end of breastfeeding way earlier than I had planned. I sought mental health services to help cope with the MS diagnosis and ended up with several mood and personality disorder diagnoses to go with it. I had a miscarriage. My dog died. My marriage was failing. I had no time or energy to socialize.

After my diagnosis, I began to accept my mortality – a deep understanding that my time on earth is limited. But I was so focused on letting go that I forgot to let things in. I was stuck, standing in place waiting for the next storm to blow through. Until I opened an email one day and learned about First Descents.

I read the announcement about this organization hosting a pilot program for young adults with MS and just knew I had to go for it. Even though I’d never been whitewater kayaking before, it sounded like something I would love to do in a place I would love to be. It was the first time in more than a year that I felt a spark of excitement, anticipation, and the call of adventure.

While taking it all in on my First Descents program in Tarkio, Montana, I observed something interesting - in this place, in this group, having MS became the least important thing about us when in everyday life it is the thing that screams different. I felt a profound sense of freedom wash over me. Being surrounded by others who knew exactly what I was going through let me feel seen, heard, and loved as a whole person.

In the years since my time in Tarkio, I have dedicated myself to out living my diagnosis. I invited adventure and excitement back into my life, despite the fear. I started singing and dancing in public. I have traveled and met countless new friends. I have left behind harmful relationships and formed new loving ones. I have found new activities to channel my passions into. I am always learning how to live a healthier and more authentic life.

I could never tell the story of my life without mentioning First Descents. It was truly what brought me back to life when I needed it most. My heart still burns brightly with passion for the healing power of adventure and the mission of First Descents. My First Descents adventure gave me my answer to Mary Oliver’s question - what will you do with this one wild and precious life? Answer - absolutely everything I can.

Elyse “Birdy” Palmer, First Descents MS Participant
LETTER FROM THE CEO

Reflecting on the past year, I am truly grateful for all that we have accomplished. Despite facing numerous challenges leading up to 2022, we found our focus, stayed resilient and returned to our core mission of providing week-long outdoor adventure programs for the young adult community that we serve.

I’m thrilled to share that this year we successfully executed 39 life-changing, week-long programs across 12 awe-inspiring locations coast-to-coast, serving a total of 459 participants. And what’s more, we were able to provide these transformative experiences amidst the untouched wonders of the wild while keeping the safety and well-being of our participants top priority.

Each participant experienced the Healing Power of Adventure as the Out Living It spirit filled the air. Lifelong bonds were formed, extending the impact far beyond the program itself.

The success of this year has reinvigorated our commitment to serving as many young adults impacted by cancer and MS, healthcare workers, and caregivers as possible. We are fully dedicated to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in all aspects of our work. Working closely with our JEDI committee and JEDI Advisory Council, we continue to make progress in ensuring that First Descents reflects the diversity of today’s community.

In addition to our week-long programs and on-going commitment to JEDI, we have expanded our resources to support our community and the Out Living It lifestyle. Our Out Cooking It content series features healthy recipes prepared by FD chefs, encouraging community members to explore new culinary adventures from home. Our Mindfulness series led by FD mindfulness coach Sprinkles, offers yoga, breathwork, and meditation practices further promoting health and well-being. And our Community Adventures provide a platform for peer-led experiences encouraging participants to live the life of adventure while connecting and supporting those around them in their local area.

None of this would have been possible without your support. Your belief in our mission has allowed us to overcome obstacles and make a positive impact on the young adult community we serve.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to empowering individuals through the Healing Power of Adventure. Together, we will create more opportunities for growth, connection, and resilience.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue,
CEO of First Descents
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**

- 86,000+ 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

**Obstacles**

**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 descents

Learn More
OUR HIGHLIGHTS

459
PARTICIPANTS SERVED

39
TOTAL PROGRAMS

2,587
PARTICIPANT INQUIRIES

$4.75M
FUNDS RAISED
**Expand Programs**

With more than 680,000¹ adolescent and young adult cancer survivors in the U.S., First Descents (FD) programs are offered nationwide and improve survivorship and quality of life for this unique demographic. Further, FD expanded programs to support young adults coping with other health conditions.

¹ACS Journals

**Build Community**

Young adults coping with health conditions often experience feelings of isolation and alienation. FD’s local adventure communities provide year-round outdoor experiences and ongoing supportive peer relationships.

**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.
In 2022, 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 numbers below highlight the ethnic background of 2,577 participant inquiries from 2022:

- **Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American**: 65%
- **Latino or Hispanic American**: 9%
- **East Asian or East Asian American**: 4.3%
- **Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American**: 3.6%
- **South Asian or South Asian American**: 3.3%
- **Multi-Ethnic**: 4.7%
- **Middle Eastern or Middle Eastern American**: 0.5%
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander**: 0.9%
- **Self Described**: 0.04%
- **Prefer Not to Disclose**: 7.9%
- **Native American or Alaskan Native**: 0.5%

In 2022, First Descents committed to expanding and improving our work in the JEDI space. In February 2022, we received a workplace evaluation led by Camber Outdoors to better understand how to improve justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in our specific workplace in the year ahead. From there, the JEDI Committee, LT and JEDI Advisory Council crafted a training and continuing education plan for the team in the year ahead including the following milestones:

FD expanded our travel scholarship grant with a goal of further reducing barriers to attending destination-based programs. In 2022, 100% of applicants who requested a Travel Scholarship were granted one. We worked to plan 2-4 JEDI Custom Programs as a strategy to provide a more safe and inclusive space for participants from marginalized communities. When compared to traditional week-long programs, custom programs are logistically harder to plan, have limited recruitment pools, and have added complications due to partnership contract agreements. Custom programs accounted for six of our 21 unfilled spots.

As a continuation from 2021, FD requires all staff and board members to take part in Camber Outdoors’ “Building Blocks of DEI” series. Additional JEDI trainings and resources are available to all staff, board, lead staff and contract staff. We established a formal JEDI onboarding process for all new employees, and a more in depth JEDI training for all Lead Staff. We incorporated Native Land Acknowledgement to website pages, programs, and Lead Staff training. Lastly, we focused on individual care and program accessibility to ensure participants felt a sense of belonging while on their program. Participants with disabilities received ADA bedrooms or the most accessible accommodations. Outfitters were briefed on how to better accommodate participants with mobility challenges. Participants who identified as trans or non-binary received private accommodations when requested.
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 2022, 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:

- Expanded accessible program locations by teaming up with world-class lodging partners and outfitters in Outer Banks, Estes Park, Crested Butte and Buena Vista which are suited to serve the MS population for years to come.
- Partnered with the Adapt Functional Movement Center and NeuroLab 360 to develop an 8-week trip/travel readiness program for participants that consist of: 4 weeks of Neuro PT and 4 weeks of Functional Movement Therapy.
- 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
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 2022, Team FD athletes competed in renowned races including the Ragnar Trail Relay, Leadville 100 MTB Race, Leadville 100 Trail Run, TransRockies Run, and the NYC Marathon. To date, the Out Living It Project has raised $6.9M across 2,070 projects with 38,274 supporters.

“I love adventure big or small, and I also love making a difference in the lives of others. It’s with these two things in mind I began planning my purpose-driven bike ride across the country. Through the Out Living It Project, I was able to take on this grand adventure and raise as much money as I could to fund the adventures of others who are going through challenges I can’t even imagine. The more I learn about First Descents, the more I know they are providing a service I can truly get behind.”

- John Wittry, Out Living It Project Fundraiser
Board of Directors
Founder Brad “Man Salmon” Ludden
Chairperson Debbie “Zipper” King Ford
Vice Chair Dr. Brandon Hayes-Lattin
Secretary Alix “Snooki” Berglund
Treasurer Michael “Volcano” Kantor
Medical Director Larry “Larry Boy” Smith
Ben Davis
Brent “Sunday” Goldstein
Jean Smart
Joel “Fuji” Appel
Julie Wright
Kammi Reiss
Kip “Wombat” Cross
Michael Gross
Susan “Hawk” Rafferty
Tanum “UniKitty” Davis Bohen
Advisory Josh “Bear” Behr
Honorary Director Brad “Uncle B” Reiss
Director, In Memoriam Rochelle “Hefty” Shoretz

Staff
CEO Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue
COO Adam “Toby” Schuster
VP of Programs Mackenzie “Spudz” McGrath
Program Director Nancy Crane
Program Manager Angelina “Katniss” Mangiardi
Program Manager Andrew “Tops” Coulter
Program Manager Kate “Lil Mo” Medici
Program Coordinator Sophie “Bubbles” Ohaus
Partnerships & Recruitment Director Michael “Blades” Neustedter
VP of Advancement Ray “Cheddar Bunny” Shedd
Marketing & Communications Director Chris “Apres” Dolan
Senior Marketing Manager Becca “Turtle” Rohrer
Marketing & Events Coordinator Anna “Whiplash” Wallace
Development Director Amy “Agave” Hart
Development Officer Emma “Piano Pat” Burick
Finance & Operations Manager Keith “Focus” Feikema
Finance & Operation Coordinator Annie “Jelly” Stettinius
In 2022, our generous community generated more than $4.75 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
$4,754,226

GRANTS + CONTRIBUTIONS
$3,208,171

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
$284,404

SPECIAL EVENTS
$983,691

OTHER
$277,959

For full financials, please visit www.firstdescents.org/financials
74.9% of 2022 expenses were allocated to programs, providing 459 unique adventure experiences.

For full financials, please visit [www.firstdescents.org/financials](http://www.firstdescents.org/financials)
Always Keep Pedaling Foundation
  Amy Lin
  Anonymous
  Brent & Lisa Goldstein
  Cathleen Robinson
  Chad McWhinney
  David & Iris Gordon
  Debbie King Ford & Rob Ford
  Eva Ho
  Grady Durham
  James & Crystal Dean
  Jennifer Feikin
  Jeremy & Sandra Shevlin
  Joel & Tiffany Appel
  Josh & Jennifer Behr
  Katherin & Doug Milham
  Katie & Tom Morgan
  Kip Cross & Jessica Martin
  Kirk MacKenzie
  Michael & Mia Kantor
  Michael & Violet Gross
  Mindy Boyum
  Nancy Oaks
  Prather’s Market
  Rich & Diane Easton
  Rise Above It
  Wacky Warriors

Anna “Snoop” Noland
  Ben & Julie Wright
  Brad Ludden
  Brent & Lisa Goldstein
  Corbin Clement
  Danielle’s Dreams
  Greg McFadden
  Gutkin Family
  James & Crystal Dean
  Jamie “Alpha” Stec
  Jason & Laura Minard
  Jennifer “Galaxy Girl” Jackson
  John Ourisman
  Kelly Hoffman
  Lois & James Benfield
  Paul Fraynd & Katie “Emoji” Doble
  Paul Johnson
  Susan Doran
  Theresa Wilson
  Timothy Sheets
  Travis Stover
  Will “Stand Up” Flanary
  Zach Calkins

Chad McWhinney
  Joel & Tiffany Appel
  Kirk Mackenzie
  Sandy & Joe Samberg
  Rise Above It

Alix & Hans Berglund
  Brent & Lisa Goldstein
  Jennifer Mills
  Kevin & Whitney Zimmerman
  Mark & Marshall Stockseth
  Nancy & Rob Samit
  Rita Lamoureux
  Sandy & Joe Samberg
  Shine Foundation
  Wacky Warriors
$100,000+
Genentech
Gilead Sciences, Inc.
Michael Gross Family Foundation
Sandy & Joe Samberg
Steve Hovde
Tap Cancer Out
Velocity Global
Wend II, Inc.

$50,000 — $99,999
Amy Brown & Bryce McMaken
Anahata Foundation
Chad McWhinney
Christina & Stuart Smith
Chuck Ludden
I’m Not Done Yet Foundation
Kimbal & Christiana Musk
Oak Foundation
Pete Rive & Natasha Dvorak
Scott Klein
The Mayer Foundation
The Offield Family Foundation
VF Foundation

$10,000 — $24,999
Adam Stanchina
AlleyCorp Healthcare Fund
American Junior Golf Foundation
Anonymous
Brian Hoyt
Bullet Proof Strategies
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
deLaski Family Foundation
Epperson Family Foundation
Foundation Medicine, Inc.
Gary & Lois Claar
JAC Family Foundation
John & Liz Ridyard
Jonah Casin
Kathleen MacKenzie
Kathryn & Nick Raffensperger
Kelly & Brad Rainko
Mary Beth Jester
Haymakers for Hope
Joel & Tiffany Appel
Kirk MacKenzie
Matt & Ashley O’Reilly
Nathan & Carrie Trookman
River Roots
Scott Lynes & Brian Coulthard
The Anschutz Foundation
The Gateway Fund II of the Denver Foundation
The Tappan Easton Foundation
Vicki Gross & Jonathan Levine

$5,000 — $9,999
Adam Wertz
Amy Lin
Andrea Blank
Arnold & Marilyn Greenberg Memorial Gift Fund
Bank of America
Bill Johnson
Brandon Hayes-Lattin
Bristol Myers Squibb
Cathleen Robinson
Christa Multhauf
David & Christine Myers
David & Iris Gordon

David Weaver
Debbie King Ford & Rob Ford
Doug & Katherine Milham
Emmett Foundation
Earl Reiss
Foley Incorporated
Goldman Sachs Gives
Hans & Alix Berglund
Jeff Simmons
John & Gay Coe
John Geller
Kevin & Elizabeth Keating
Kevin Clement
Kip Cross & Jessica Eldredge
Lyndon & Madeleine Rive
Nancy E. Barton Foundation
Patricia Spencer
Patrick Johnson
Rutledge Cancer Foundation
Ryan & Tara O’Donoghue
Scott Kaplan
Shannon Peterson
Shine Foundation
Sophie Sparrow & Chris Eldredge
Steven Bogacz & Kai Eldredge
Takeda Oncology
The J.E. Fehsenfeld Family Foundation
Tom & Angela Civik
Wacky Warriors
William Newton Jr. & Anne French
Charitable Lead Annuity Trust
$2,500 — $4,999
Alan & Sarah Hathcock
Anya Kane
Artur Tomala
Betsy Schweitzer
Brett Greenfield
Carolyn & Laurence Belfer
Christina Jue
David & Nanette Bender
Derek Wintle
Duncan Gibbs
Dwayne Kramer
E.H. & M.E. Bowerman Advised Fund
Eric Fretz
Faith Goldstein
Harmon Foundation
Howard Postal
Intrinsic LLC
Jack & Greer Gardner
James & Lois Benfield
Jean Smart
Jeffrey Hoffman
Jennifer Mills
Jesse Sanders
John Welz
John Wittry
JW Bennett
Katherine Estes Rogers Foundation
Kevin & Whitney Zimmerman
Kevin Conners
Kimie & Brad Kreidle
L. Dee Family Foundation
Lisa MacDougall
Mark & Nancy Duarte
Mary Maguire
Mary Thomas
Michael Coslov
Patricia Kritek
Patrick Currie
Rachel Jones
Rick & Cathy West
Rocky Mountain Bliss
Schwartz Family
Scott & Ford Woods
Sean Glynn
Stephanie Rosenthal
Stewart Gross
Suzy, Nancy & Carol Minkoff Charitable Fund
TREW Gear
Victoria Johnson
William & Molly Gilmore
William Hoefl

$1,000 — $2,499
Aaron Batte & Jill Sturman
Abigail Pogrebin
Adam Peshek
Amy & Jon Meltzer
Andrew Hottell
Andrew Schuman
Ashton Barker
Baird Foundation Inc
Barry & Marilyn Goodman
Beverly Martin
Blake Nyman
Bill Gregorak
Blake Nyman
Brad & Marla Jeffress
Brad Hollister
Bruce & Ellen Winston
Brynn Crowe
Buffy Burge
Byron Walker
Carrie Accardi
Carrie Goldberg
Casey Easton
Charles Lozner
Charles, June & Sean Contant
Chris Warner
Christopher Henandez
Christopher Irish
Craig & Lynn Lubbock
Craig Urucioli
DAC Inc Lubbock
Darren Hinton
David Cole
David Ruf
Dawn Cartier
Dawn Lyon
Debbie Tick
Deborah Leder
Diageo
Diane Meyer Simon
Don & Terri Oliver

Douglas Jackson
Drew Fink & Daniela Uribe
Ed Mellers
Edward & Kathleen Quinn
Eileen & Lowell Aptman
Elaine Stucy
Elizabeth Surma
Emma Rouse
Enterprise Holdings Foundation
Eric Menell
Eric Mindich
Francesca DiMaio
Gable Silvian
George banker & Candice Carson
Gray Holdings LLC
Greg Greenwood
Harriet Burnett
Harriet Libstag
Icelantic Skis
James & Carolyn Brett
James Hadden
Jamie Becker
Jason Minard
Jean DiNatale
Jeff Moody & Cheryl Marcus
Jen Brill
Jill Seigerman
Joan & Gene Walsh
Joel & Valerie Virta Pearlman
John Ourisman
John Wortman
Jon & Julie Cohen
Jon Zalisk
Jonathan Georger
Jonathan Graham
Jonathan Skipper
Jordan & Erin Robbins
Joshua Jeffries
Julian Scott
Justin Davis
Katherine Borsecnik
Keep Climbing Foundation
Keith & Shannon Love
Kerry Siggins
Kevan Haas
Kevin Prefontaine
Kimberly & Jeff Veber
King Family
Lawrence & Kimberly Weinberg
Liz & Peter Menges
Lori Moore
Loriel Townsend
Lotz Family Foundation
Luke Cobb
Marc & Carel Slatkoff
Marc & Lindsey Gutman
Margaret Howard
Margot Badenhausen
Mark & Jo Brinkerhoff
Mark Goldstein
Mark Helper
Mark Kogod
Mark Rees
Martha Vanderhoof
Max Eckstein
Meghan Newcomer
Melissa Barker
Melissa Marinko
Merle Postal
Mesdag Family Foundation
Michael Kantor
Mick Ribault
Mike & Erin Anello
Mizuho Bank
Neil & Marcy Cohen
Nick & Caitlin Smarrelli
Patrick McGinley
Paul Brown
Peter Burack
Peter McBride
Ralph & Debra Merritt
Randall Loker
Richard J. Buoncore
Rick Schoen
Rob & Nancy Samit
Robert & Carol Burman Family Foundation
Sam & Chris Powell
Sam & Gwyneth Stites
Sarah Rogers
Sarah Uram
Scott & Amy Brody
Scott Drablos
Sean Nimmer
Stefan Lalos
Stefani & Scott Kimche
Stephanie Donner
Stephen Nilsen
Steven & Gail Shak
Susan Rabinowitz
Susana Ribault
The Spanx by Sarah Blakely Foundation Fund
Thoryn Stephens
Timothy McCabe
Tracey Kruse
Verisk Analytics
Victor & Janice Rosenberg
Victoria Morrissey
Wendy & Douglas Eisenberg
HERE’S TO ANOTHER YEAR OF OUT LIVING IT ADVENTURES