

Westlake NEIGHBORS



the gathering place
Facing Cancer. Embracing Life.
The Journey to Well-Being.

Photos provided by The Gathering Place

The Gathering Place: *Where Compassion Meets Cancer*



Annie & Daughter Ruby (Age 6)

Hayden, Makenzie, Jordyn
Photo Credit Hilary Nemecek

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I'll never forget waking up after a colonoscopy when my doctor told me I had colon cancer. Fast forward 5 years and it was the same doctor with the same news. Luckily, with regular check-ups and God's blessings, I've been clean ever since. Fortunately, I had a great support network in place to get me through both journeys.

Until the early 2000s, however, there was no cancer support organization in Northeast Ohio dedicated to helping navigate the cancer journey from beginning to end. That all changed when The Gathering Place (TGP) opened their Beachwood and Westlake campuses. TGP is a non-profit organization supporting, educating and empowering individuals and families currently coping with the impact of cancer in their lives through programs and services provided free of charge.

"Prior to 2,000 there was a gap in providing supportive services in Northeast Ohio," said Adam Ross, Interim Chief Executive Officer. "Our founders - Eileen Saffran and Ellen Heyman -- researched other large U.S. communities and brought back the concept that we need a caring community that supports, educates and empowers free of charge."

For Eileen, her social work education, hospital experience -- along with losing both parents to cancer -- gave her the skills, first-hand experience and compassion to provide support for everybody's cancer journey.

"We're trying to normalize something that is so unusual. It turns your life upside down. Cancer touches everybody," added Ross. "The financial burden that comes with cancer can be crippling. Keeping the services free of charge is so important. We're making sure anybody touched with cancer knows they're not all alone."

Programs & Services

A cancer diagnosis affects every aspect of life. Listed below are some of the free TGP programs and services which provide emotional support, education and connection for individuals with cancer and their families as they navigate every stage of their journey:

- Individual and Group Support
- Family and Children Programs
- Movement and Nutrition
- Educational Programs
- Grief and Loss Support
- Creative Arts and Meditation



- Reiki and Reflexology
- Exercise and Nutrition
- Medical Library and Resource Center
- Wig Services
- Financial and Legal Consults

"Our programs remind people facing cancer that they never have to face the journey by themselves," says Karen Hatfield, Chief Program Officer at TGP. "We provide compassion, understanding, encouragement and hope at every step, when people need it most."

TGP programs serve children, teens, young adults, adults and seniors - anyone impacted by cancer. "Our programs are the heart and soul of TGP," said Beth Elsass, Outreach Manager. "They provide emotional support, education and meaningful connections throughout the cancer journey."

Support Groups

TGP has several professionally facilitated support groups for individuals with cancer, survivors, caregivers and loved ones. Each group provides a safe, caring place where people find encouragement, enabling them with greater confidence and resilience. Some of these groups include:

- Adults with cancer
- Caregivers
- Sister circle: for African women with cancer
- Life after cancer treatment group
- Older adults with cancer
- LGBTQ+ Virtual drop-in group

Ross explains: "Participants learn cancer may be part of their story, but it does not have to define them, and that healing often begins with the support of others who care."

Case Studies

Linda: Finding Strength After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis

Following her breast cancer diagnosis, Westlake resident Linda found comfort and encouragement at TGP. Their support and guidance, in a welcoming community, gave her the confidence to navigate her cancer journey. At TGP she discovered that healing comes not only from medicine but also through

education, movement, creativity and meaningful connections with others.

Annie & Daughter Ruby (Age 6): Supporting the Whole Family

When her daughter Ruby was diagnosed with cancer, Lakewood resident Annie found strength and hope at TGP. Individual support and mindfulness techniques helped Annie cope with fear and uncertainty, while children and family programs provided Ruby with joyful experiences, lasting friendships and the comfort of knowing she wasn't alone during an incredibly challenging time.

David Weiss: From Caregiving to Healing

As his wife faced cancer, David of Shaker Heights found strength through TGP's caregiver support and family programs. After her passing, ongoing grief support and connections with other families helped David and his children honor her memory, heal together and move forward.

Testimonials

Kristin Broadbent, president and CEO of Three Arches Foundation: "A cancer diagnosis creates needs that extend far beyond clinical care. Addressing them begins with recognizing each person's unique experience and providing the support that matters most. TGP puts its commitment into action through expanded access to cancer support services across Northeast Ohio."

Sandy Borrelli, co-owner of Bella Capelli Sanctuario: "While hospitals provide medical care, TGP helps people navigate the emotional and social challenges of the disease. Every service is offered free of charge to participants, their families and loved ones. The care provided here is truly unique -- unlike anything else available in our community."

Impact (2000's - Present)

- 47,000+ participants (individuals / families)
- \$42 million raised
- 6,000+ participants in activities
- 500+ children (grief support)
- 100% privately funded (thanks to sponsors)

- Global Impact: 50 U.S. states plus Puerto Rico, Washington D.C. and 5 other countries

We Are Here For You - ANYTIME

Few of life's experiences are more emotionally draining than awaiting a cancer procedure, diagnosis or update. Hospitals can be intimidating, moving cancer patients from room to room. At TGP, you can feel comfortable asking any questions. "If you are unsure about anything, just come into one of our locations. It's a safe space," said Elsass. "You are met with friendly people who will help you figure it out."

"Providing free quality support takes the financial burden off of families," added Elsass. "People come to a warm, inviting, supportive community not worrying about costs. There are no strings attached or time limit. You can take advantage of us as much or as little as you'd like. Our goal is to have them leave here a little lighter than before they came in."

Importance of Community

As a nonprofit organization, TGP relies on strong community support to provide free services for individuals and families impacted by cancer. Here are just three examples of the many generous community partners supporting TGP:

• Westlake Community Services Center: Lydia Gadd, Director, Community Services

"TGP has been close to my heart for many years. I saw firsthand the profound difference they made in the lives of individuals and families facing cancer throughout Northeast Ohio. I referred countless patients and family members to their program - including members of my own family -- because I knew they would find compassion, understanding and hope there."

• Westlake Porter Public Library: Andrew Mangels, Director

"TGP is an amazing community resource. I have known countless folks who have needed and taken advantage of their knowledge, resources, caring and compassion. It has continued to grow and make an exponential impact on our community and those that need their support and resources. We are extremely fortunate to have such an organization doing the work they do."

• Westlake Kiwanis: Nan Baker, President

"We are so pleased to support TGP. Their special grace gives confidence to individuals and families currently coping with the effect of cancer. We have donated funds so that their special programs and services are free of charge for those in need. Recently several of our members visited TGP and felt a sense of peace in their care. So grateful to have them in Westlake."

Conclusion

TGP's longevity and breadth of services already separate them from the pack, but it all gets down to people. "The core of what makes us so special is our team. We are so lucky to have them," said Ross. "The individuals here are skilled at what they do and passionate about our mission. They want to meet people as they walk through the door and help them on their journey."

