kesem
A child’s friend through and beyond a parent’s cancer

DONOR IMPACT REPORT
2020
DEAR KESEM FRIENDS & FAMILY,

In our 20th anniversary year, we have proven that Kesem isn’t a place, it’s a feeling—one of community, hope, and resilience. When Kesem created virtual programming this year, that feeling transcended geography and technology, connecting over 8,600 children and 5,300 volunteers who laughed together and became empowered during the most challenging of times because of each other. This is the magic of Kesem. That said, the fact remains that there is more work to be done. There are over 5 million children with a parent impacted by cancer, and they need us now more than ever. You, our valued supporters, continue to make a difference each and every day and allow Kesem to provide life-changing support and comfort to children ages 6 to 18 in the time they need us most.

In my first few days at Kesem, I learned that Kesem is not only a feeling—it’s also a very significant action. It is common for our community to ask “Why do you Kesem?” And while the answers vary from person to person, the themes are always clear. We “Kesem” because we remain focused on bringing fun, peer-to-peer support to children impacted by a parent’s cancer. We “Kesem” for our amazing college student leader volunteers, who model empathy and compassion when it is needed most. We “Kesem” because we know that in the most challenging times, there are better days ahead. Personally, I “Kesem” because I believe in the power of community to provide healing and comfort. As someone who has been a volunteer in a homeless shelter for teens, a college student advisor, a camper and camp counselor, and the husband of a cancer survivor, I have seen how people can thrive—even in the face of devastating adversity—when surrounded by a supportive community of people who understand them.

Right now, Kesem matters more than ever. Our programs help the children we serve build social connections, develop positive coping skills and foster resilience. Time and time again, our camper families have mentioned that our virtual programming this summer had a positive impact on their families. One family told us that they hadn’t heard their daughter laugh in months until the first night she attended Kesem’s summer programming. Many families called Kesem the best thing that happened for their children this year, and went on to call our college student leaders superheroes! Kesem is more than camp—it is a critical need that allows children to understand that they are never alone. Kesem creates free, year-round transformative experiences that allows children to rediscover their childhood and be their best selves.

Thanks to your generous support, Kesem will be there for even more of the millions of children impacted by a parent’s cancer. We are grateful that you are by our side as we continue to empower them to find their voice, establish supportive relationships, and build resilience.

With much gratitude,

RICH SEGAL
Chief Executive Officer
OUR CHALLENGE

Today, there are more than 5 million children affected by a parent’s cancer. These children can feel isolated from peers, anxious, and hopeless. They can have a loss of social interest and negative academic performance. Many have to unexpectedly take on adult responsibilities at home. This year, these emotions were compounded by COVID-19, which resulted in remote learning, increased social isolation, and the additional stress of protecting the safety of family members who have cancer and are immunocompromised.

While there are many programs, services, and communities to support those coping with their own cancer diagnosis, these children are often left with a lack of resources, or spaces, or the peer-to-peer support tailored to help address their needs and experiences. Kesem is there to help.

While Kesem continues to scale to serve more children, we are reaching only a small fraction of the 5 million children who can benefit from Kesem’s life-changing programming. We are focused on continued growth to serve more children each year.

Camp Kesem gave my siblings back their abilities to be children again, and gave me hope. Without Camp Kesem, I don’t know what my family would have done.

— KESEM VOLUNTEER
OUR APPROACH

Kesem is the largest national organization dedicated to supporting children through and beyond a parent’s cancer. We provide comprehensive, year-round programming through a highly scalable model that is increasingly inclusive and accessible to the children who need us. Kesem’s programming is provided at no cost to families, offering fun and innovative ways to increase a child’s confidence in themselves in a way that isn’t available in traditional healthcare settings.

COLLEGE STUDENT LEADER MODEL

The power of our service model is rooted in our network of 5,300+ inspired college student volunteers.

Kesem recruits a diverse group of college student leader volunteers at 131 college campuses across the country to lead local Kesem chapters.

Kesem provides these college students with continuous leadership development training and support. They learn how to facilitate family and community outreach to bring new families into the Kesem community, fundraise to cover programming costs, and deliver Kesem’s impactful programs.

Kesem provides ongoing opportunities to stay connected to its mission and create impact. After graduation, these college students are considered to be Kesem alumni, and they are provided new opportunities to support children affected by a parent’s cancer. These engagements allow them to share their Kesem and professional expertise, volunteer in the field, and support organizational priorities.

“[Kesem] means a safe place to share my story.”
— KESEM CAMPER
Thanks to your generosity this past year, Kesem was there every step of the way to support children in the time they needed Kesem magic the most. Without skipping a beat and because of you, Kesem provided critical year-round programming and services to over 8,600 children and their families in 2020.

In only six weeks, we converted our beloved flagship program, Camp Kesem, into a robust and meaningful virtual camp experience called Kesem at Home. Even though our college student volunteers had unexpectedly packed up their belongings and headed home for the rest of their academic school year, they showed up for our community. These burgeoning leaders provided magical experiences to our campers and sent over 8,600 care packages—one for each child attending Kesem at Home—across the country. These packages were met with enthusiasm by each child who would then use these materials to participate in a dynamic and multi-day, virtual camp program.

In addition, more than 11,000 families also received a complementary activity book with a broad range of games and projects they could do together outside of Kesem at Home creating even more opportunity to share the magic of Kesem.

For many children, Kesem is a life-changing experience, providing a safe and welcoming environment to have fun and rediscover their childhood. What’s more, Kesem is a beacon of hope to camper families who find comfort knowing that their family is supported in the most challenging of times. Finally, our partners (e.g., cancer partner organizations, corporations and healthcare providers) benefit from having Kesem as their go-to resource when a patient or even an employee needs Kesem’s life-changing and free support services.

Kesem relies on donations for 100% of our income. These contributions are essential to providing services at no cost to camper families. Thank you for helping Kesem create impact and memorable experiences during this critical time. On the surface, we laughed, we sang campfire songs, and we showed off our skills in talent shows. But what we really achieved was even bigger than these moments and even more remarkable—we brought children and our college student volunteers together to find strength and resilience. One of the many positive lessons we have learned this year is that the Kesem community strengthens with time. Thank you for helping to fortify our mission as we navigate the trails ahead with firm resolve and commitment to scale our services for the 5 million children who need us.
WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Kesem remains steadfast in our commitment to serving children impacted by a parent’s cancer.

OUR COMMITMENTS

We will harness the power of our staff, student leaders, volunteers and alumni to create experiences that are meaningful and inspiring.

We will use systems and data-driven decisions to think long-term, as well as drive growth and results.

We will create a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable community where everyone feels valued and respected.

We will deliver year-round programming so that more children impacted by a parent’s cancer have the ability to connect with peers.

Thank you for being a part of the Kesem community. You are helping us provide social-emotional and life skills that young people facing adversity in their current and future paths so deeply need.

YOUR GIFT’S IMPACT

In 2020, our supporters contributed more than 9 million dollars to Kesem. These contributions made it possible for us to pivot from our flagship program, Camp Kesem, to our successful virtual program, Kesem at Home, while retaining all our year-round services, at no cost to families.

PROGRAM

This year, 62 percent of our expenses was used for programming, including to advance our work in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This percentage is lower than in a typical year, largely driven by the reduced expenses of hosting Kesem at Home in lieu of our traditional in-person camp program. Kesem used funds to efficiently conceptualize and host 143 sessions of Kesem at Home this summer. We trained and supported more than 5,300 student leaders and reached more than 8,600 campers and their families—including over 1,000 families who had not participated in Kesem programming before.

ADMINISTRATION

Approximately 18 percent of our expenses was applied to administrative costs. Again, this percentage was higher than in years past because of the lower-than-normal program expenses resulting from our COVID-driven shift to online programming. After largely completing planning for in-person camp, Kesem then created Kesem at Home, and the systems and tools needed to support this new program. We provided ongoing staff professional development training, including a continued focus on cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies.

OUTREACH & DEVELOPMENT

20 percent of our revenue covered outreach and development expenses. As with every year, we used a portion of donations to engage families. Kesem at Home created a new and exciting opportunity for us to reach new families where an in-person sleepaway camp has historically been a barrier. Moreover, we added six chapters and strengthened fundraising capacity and strategy at the national and chapter level.

*These figures are estimated.
These leading organizations and strategic partners have invested to expand Kesem’s services and support more children impacted by a parent’s cancer.
I haven't heard my daughter laugh in months until the first night at Kesem...
What Kesem means to me is: unconditional love, that can be felt no matter how far apart.

— KESEM AT HOME CAMPER
Kesem’s mission of supporting children through and beyond a parent’s cancer, and our vision of ensuring that every child impacted by a parent’s cancer is never alone, can only be realized through an ongoing, steadfast commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in every part of our organization.