

HEALING THROUGH HAPPINESS

TRENT UNIVERSITY STUDY HIGHLIGHTS PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF CAMP

In 2022, Campfire Circle partnered with researchers from Trent University to study the psychosocial outcomes of overnight camp for kids with cancer who often miss out on childhood experiences due to their diagnosis. The research team included Sarah O'Connell, former camp volunteer and Master of Science student, led by Dr. Sarah West, Dean of Science and Associate Professor of Kinesiology & Biology at Trent University. The research study findings were published in 2024.

“We predicted that attending a two-week oncology camp would be associated with higher levels of hope, resilience, and mental well-being, and lower levels of stress in kids who have or have had cancer,” says Dr. Sarah West



The study gathered data through validated surveys and saliva cortisol tests during one camp session. Surveys were taken on the first day of camp, the last full day of camp, and three months after camp.

It had exciting findings in four key areas of psychosocial indicators:

RESILIENCE

Children with cancer face a myriad of psychological, social, and physical challenges. Resilience, or the ability to adapt to significant adversity, is critical to a child's long-term outcome. Levels of resilience in children were high at camp, as evaluated by The Child and Youth Resilience Measure. The Trent team found a clinically significant change in resilience between when kids were at camp versus when they were back in their regular environments. **"These high levels of resilience while at camp are a really positive finding,"** says Dr. West.



HOPE

Hope plays an important role in healing and resilience. The Trent team found that children had statistically significant higher levels of hope at camp than at home, according to the Children's Hope Scale. During camp, kids are highly motivated to pursue their goals and figure out ways to achieve them. **"A lot of the time, cancer and cancer treatment disrupts children's progressions towards goals, and camp is a time for them to reset,"** says Dr. West.



SOCIAL SUPPORT

"A lot of childhood cancer patients report feeling socially isolated or lonely during treatment and often report having a hard time maintaining friendships during this time," says Dr.

West. While at camp, children reported high levels of well-being and social support and these levels remained high even three months post camp. **"The fact that we are seeing relatively long-term high levels of social support at this time is really promising,"** says Dr. West.



STRESS

The research team measured cortisol levels (the stress hormone) in kids and found they had healthy, normal levels of stress while at camp, indicating that camp was not a stressful experience for campers.



"Overall, we concluded that the camp experience is associated with excellent psychosocial health in childhood cancer patients," says Dr. West. **"Camp is a positive and supportive environment for this patient population."**

This study will be used to further inform Campfire Circle's evidence-based programming to promote improved long-term outcomes for our campers. With your support, we are helping more kids and families over the long-term.