

## CHILDREN'S CANCER CONNECTION THE ENTIRE FAMILY. THE ENTIRE JOURNEY.



Establishing partnerships with organizations and individuals working to find cures for childhood cancers and improve the quality of life for cancer patients and their families has been a core support area for the Deb and Jeff Hansen Foundation since its founding in 2006. It's hard to imagine a more perfect relationship for achieving that goal other than the one recently formed with Children's Cancer Connection of Des Moines.

"Children's Cancer Connection was established in 1988 to provide programs and services to children battling childhood cancer and their families," says Mark Slocum, Children's Cancer Connection executive director. We now support more than 500 families who are living, being treated or were diagnosed in the state of Iowa.

"We believe this is a journey that affects the whole family," Slocum says. "We strive to enhance the quality of life for families affected by childhood cancer by providing programs for education, recreation and support. The journey isn't easy, but Children's Cancer Connection walks alongside those families every step of the way."

Child cancer patients and families in need of such programs and services are referred to Children's Cancer Connection primarily by Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines (also a Deb and Jeff Hansen Foundation partner) and University of Iowa Children's Hospital in Iowa City. Childhood cancer patients are also referred to Children's Cancer Connection through friends and families already involved with the organization.

Children's Cancer Connection programs and services are offered at little or no cost, and no one is ever turned away because of financial consideration. Those services include (1) hospital-based programs; (2) camps and retreats; (3) support services and family outings; and (4) survivorship services.

"All Children's Cancer Connection programs and services are made possible by the generous support of hundreds of individuals as well as numerous service clubs, businesses, and foundations," Slocum says. "We receive no state or federal funding and are not part of the United Way."

"We are successful because of the support of more than 35,000 hours of volunteer service every year," Slocum continues. "Our volunteers provide general office help, are program volunteers, child care providers during support groups, and camp staff at every level."

### Deb and Jeff Hansen Foundation key focus area:

***Finding a cure for childhood cancers***—Through support of health organizations such as the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) and hospital facilities such as Blank Children's Hospital, the Foundation works to find a cure for childhood cancers, and improve the quality of life for cancer patients.

## Hospital-based programs

"The first step is often the scariest which is why Children's Cancer Connection helps families take it," says Slocum. "From diagnosis through a final treatment, our organization's hospital-based programs provide guidance and encouragement for the entire family."

- **Arts and Crafts Program**—Children's Cancer Connection volunteers visit the clinic at Blank Children's Hospital several times a week to facilitate arts and crafts with the kids! These children could be patients waiting to see a doctor to have a procedure or brothers and sisters waiting for their sibling.
- **End of Treatment Celebration**—When a child reaches the end of his or her treatment, it's a milestone to be celebrated! Children's Cancer Connection helps families celebrate this important moment with a party including cake and surprises.
- **Beads4 Bravery**—The Beads4Bravery program provides children with beads that are symbolic of specific occurrences or milestones they reach during treatment such as cat scans, hair loss and camp attendance. The beads are a tangible record of all the child has overcome, as well as a great tool for the child to use when sharing their cancer journey with others.
- **The Courage Store**—Childhood cancer is something that no child should ever have to go through, but they show us how brave they really are. The Courage Store allows children to earn Bravery Bucks for procedures, treatments, medicines, etc. that they find difficult or unpleasant. When a difficult or unpleasant task they choose is completed, each child cashes in their bucks for a reward they really want (i.e., a favorite toy, game, gift card)!
- **Family Resource Kit**—Children's Cancer Connection provides every newly diagnosed child at Blank Children's Hospital and The University of Iowa Children's Hospital a fun bag with a few items inside to keep them busy during those first long visits with the doctors. The bag also includes a binder for parents with information to help them track their cancer journey.



### Children's Cancer Connection

*serves all families affected by childhood cancer who are living, treated, or diagnosed in the state of Iowa, regardless of treatment outcome.*





## Camps and Retreats

Children's Cancer Connection camps and retreats are designed for the individual with cancer, the siblings of a child with cancer and a separate family camp for the whole family at Camp Heart Connection. "Camps are conducted at the YMCA camp in Boone and continue to be among the most popular of all Children's Cancer Connection services with a record number of attendees in 2015," says program manager Meridith Swoyer.

- **Camp Heart Connection Oncology Camp**—"The Camp Heart Connection Oncology Camp is the only one of its kind in Iowa," says Swoyer. "It's where the childhood cancer patient spends an entire week doing fun things – being a child, not a patient. Patients continue their treatments at the camp, but rush to get back outside as soon as the treatment is over." Campers are able to spend time with others who are going through the same emotions as they are. Returning campers who are off treatment provide hope to our new campers, and nobody has to worry about not fitting in due to scars or hair loss.
- **Camp Heart Connection Sibling Camp**—"Camp Heart Connection Sibling Camp is one of just a few offered in the entire U.S.," Swoyer says. "It's a special week where siblings of cancer patients are the center of attention. It's all about them." Sibling Camp is a place to share feelings about being shuffled amongst relatives as parents find ways to be present for the child with cancer. Sibling Camp is also a safe place for bereaved siblings to meet other kids coping with the same thing.
- **Mid-Year Mini Camp**—The Children's Cancer Connection's Mid-Year Mini Camp provides campers the opportunity to catch up with friends from summer camp, as well as give children new to the program the chance to enjoy a camping experience without having to wait until next summer. It's a chance for kids to "get away from it all" while enjoying the benefit of being around others who understand what they're going through.
- **Family Camp**—Children's Cancer Connection provides family camps every year. These weekend events are opportunities for families touched by childhood cancer to meet and socialize with others in a similar situation. There are often educational components, and always time for parents to share ideas, questions, and coping strategies with other parents.
- **Weekend-To-Remember Camp**—Children's Cancer Connection remembers those children and their families who fought childhood cancer and never gave up in the fight. The weekend is spent remembering those children who have passed away and honoring their memory.



*According to the American Cancer Society, 43 children in the U.S. are diagnosed daily with cancer and the average age of diagnosis is 6.*

### *Children's Cancer Connection —*

*We enhance the lives of children and their families affected by childhood cancer by providing quality programs for education, recreation and support.*



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## PLATINUM



## PREMIER



## GOLD



## SILVER



## BRONZE



## Support Services & Family Outings

Children's Cancer Connection Support Services and Family Outings programs allow families to interact with one another in both structured and unstructured settings. Trips to sporting events, amusement parks and seasonal activities encourage families to engage on a recreational level. Support groups for recently diagnosed families, grief groups and teen groups are other support avenues.

- **Family Connection**—A group for parents, started by parents. Meeting once a month, this group allows for parents, regardless of treatment outcome, stage of treatment, or number of years their child has been off treatment, to share their experiences of a similar journey's with childhood cancer. The entire family is welcome to come as daycare and dinner will be provided.
- **Sibling Connection**— Siblings are often pushed aside as focus is on their sibling battling childhood cancer, however, cancer affects the entire family. This group allows for siblings, ages 5-18, to come together, hang out, and share similar experiences and feelings of their journey. Nothing is ever forced to be talked about, rather it is a time once a month for siblings to receive all the attention.
- **Teen Connection**—Teenage years are hard enough as it is, add cancer in the mix and it is a whole new language. Teens, who are on or off treatment, meet once a month to hang out, attend outings, and be together with other teens who can truly say, "I know what you mean".
- **Family Events and Outings**—Children's Cancer Connection is about the entire family, the entire journey. Hosting events and outings for families at little to no cost allows for a time where families can be 'normal' and do things together as a family. From zoo outings, theme parties, Adventureland and everything in between, they want families to be together and have fun.
- **Lending Library**—Children's Cancer Connection offers a library full of information. With resources on almost every topic related to childhood cancer, every family is welcome to check out the information for any duration of time.
- **Adopt-a-Family**—Children's Cancer Connection, along with local businesses, groups and individuals, tries to make the holidays a little bit brighter for families who need some extra joy.

## The Survivorship Connection

Children's Cancer Connection provides an all-weekend camp, spring conference and several annual outings and educational programs as part of The Survivorship Connection. The organization believes that young adults (ages 18-39) who are cancer survivors have unique needs. They consider someone to be a survivor from the second they hear "you have cancer."

The Survivorship Connection provides opportunities for survivors to meet new friends, engage in fun recreational activities, and take an active role in their survivorship by learning about topics that relate to their own unique needs as a survivor. Any young, adult survivor who lives, goes to school, or received treatment in Iowa is eligible to participate.