

Where healing begins

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Wellness News

Dear Friends,

Thoughts of summer often bring to mind images of warm sunshine, sandy beaches, and sailboats gliding across peaceful, glassy waters. For many of us, these thoughts provide a sense of calm and relaxation. And yet, as part of the work we do at Wellness House, we know that the waters are not always calm and relaxing. For those facing cancer, the waves are turbulent and often it feels as if the sailboat is drifting off course and at risk of sinking.

For many individuals and families, cancer can quickly throw life off course and into uncharted waters. Because the course of cancer is different for each person, Wellness House responds by offering 6 distinct program areas and special events that provide evidence-based tools for individuals, families, and caregivers to navigate the choppy waters that cancer can bring. For 7-year-old Lilliana, mentioned on page 4, a glitter bottle created in a Child and Family program represents her turbulent feelings and helps her feel calm when thinking about the loss of her father. “My heart smiled”, said her mother Jolanda, when she saw her daughter was learning to care for herself after creating the feelings bottle in the Wellness House Turtles Group.

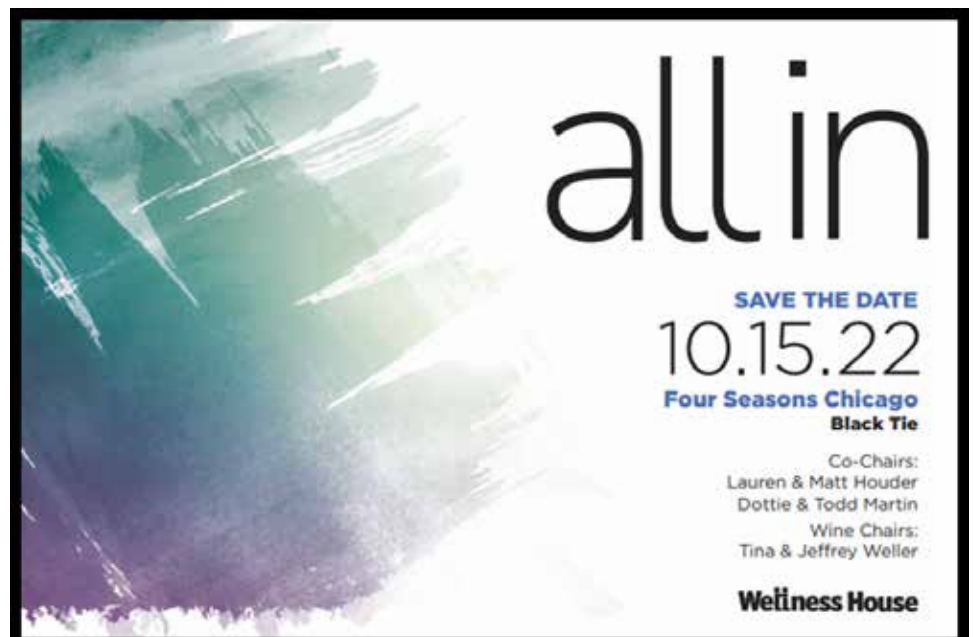
Since 1990, over 46,000 participants just like Lilliana have found tools that provide relief from the emotional and physical effects of cancer. As a supporter of our community, you have been the rudder, the mast, and the sail for thousands of families experiencing the unknowns of cancer. An American poet, Louisa May Alcott said, “I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning how to sail my ship.” We humbly thank you for joining us on this voyage and mission to help those affected by cancer navigate the toughest waters of a lifetime.



Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Executive Director



Lauren Staniar Haarlow
Board Chair



all in

SAVE THE DATE
10.15.22
Four Seasons Chicago
Black Tie

Co-Chairs:
Lauren & Matt Houder
Dottie & Todd Martin
Wine Chairs:
Tina & Jeffrey Weller

Wellness House

The Walk for Wellness House

A Homecoming for Many!

The Walk for Wellness House on Sunday, May 1, 2022 represented a homecoming for many – *for our participants who are once again returning for in-person programs, for our community that hasn't celebrated all together in two years, and for our staff and Board who couldn't wait to welcome everyone back!* The congruence of so much love and support made this year's Walk a smashing success – **more than \$620,000 was raised**, surpassing our goal! We couldn't have gotten there without our Presenting Sponsor, The Inland Real Estate Group of Companies, and the more than 30 corporate sponsors and supporters that so generously partner with us each year. **#WelcomeHome!**

All proceeds from the Walk benefit programming that is provided year-round and at no cost to people affected by cancer. There were **more than 1800 people in attendance** at the Walk in Hinsdale, and we had **more than 200 walkers participate from locations of their own choosing**, confirming that the Wellness House community extends well beyond the western suburbs. Special thanks to Gina Pongetti Angeletti and Molly Haunty who co-chaired this year's Walk with passion and enthusiasm, and to THE CROWN ROYALS TEAM that broke their own record with more than 100 team members and \$126,000 raised! This team initially met within a support group at Wellness House and grows larger and more impactful each year. We salute the achievement each one of our 130 teams and 2000 Walk participants who provide a meaningful and critical impact on Wellness House, at the Walk and throughout the year.



Volunteer Needs

Volunteers are vital to Wellness House. They make it possible for Wellness House participants to enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey.

Front Desk Volunteer: Making participants feel welcome is part of our philosophy. We are looking for people to greet visitors and help create a warm environment by answering phones and checking people into our busy programs. **4 hour shift, once a week.**

Saturday Courtyard Volunteer: The Courtyard is our local consignment/retail store that sells a variety of fine furnishings. All proceeds benefits Wellness House. Whether it's helping customers or setting up eye-catching displays, we would benefit from retail or computer support. **4 hour shift, 1-2 shifts per month.**

Salon Volunteer: We are looking for licensed cosmetologists to provide hair cutting, wig cutting, and head shaving services in our salon. **We are also looking for a volunteer to coordinate these services.**

Database Support: We would love volunteer assistance on database projects. If you are skilled at Excel and you love data/numbers, we are looking for you!

Professional Photographer: We are looking for a photographer for select events & program photos.

Where healing begins

To most, 5-year-old Natasha's glitter-filled bottle looks like just another grade school craft project. In reality, it's a tool to make her saddest moments a little happier and her most anxious moments a little more calm.

Natasha created her glitter bottle at Turtles, a Wellness House program for children who are learning to live with the loss of a loved one. Each color of glitter represents a feeling - feelings that Natasha can now name, thanks to the help of the experts at Wellness House.

"I knew happy, sad and mad," Natasha said. But the death of her father in April 2021 revealed a host of emotions that the then 4-year-old didn't recognize.

Wellness House's Child and Family programs, including short-term counseling and Turtles, are designed to help make the trauma, grief and loss caused by cancer more manageable for children like Natasha, her sister Liliana, 7, as well as their mother, Jolanda.

Jolanda Djordjevic knew of Wellness House and its many support programs prior to her husband's death, but it wasn't until months after Milan died that she turned to Wellness House for help.

It was her husband's wish to keep his battle with cancer largely private.

"We didn't let anybody know about his cancer except for a handful of people," Jolanda said, and they almost never uttered the words "cancer" or "terminal," even though they knew cancer would ultimately take Milan's life.

"It was a lot for a young family," said Jolanda, whose daughters were 2 and 3 years old when Milan received his



diagnosis and began his four-year battle.

"My girls are so different in how they've been coping with it," Jolanda said. Her oldest daughter was an anxious child even before her father became ill. Upon his death, that stress manifested itself physically in Liliana, causing stomach aches and even more anxiety and worry. Meanwhile, Natasha remained her outwardly happy self, rarely shedding a tear and always doing what she could to make her mother and sister happy.

Through visits with a Child and Family Oncology Support Counselor at Wellness House, Liliana and Natasha each found a place to explore their feelings and gained coping skills to help themselves feel better.

Jolanda recently saw one of those skills in action as Liliana worried over the loss of a baby tooth. Anxious about the possibility of losing the tooth at school, Liliana agreed to let her mom coax the tooth along. But before she opened her mouth, Liliana stepped aside and practiced the breathing exercises she learned at Wellness House.

"My heart smiled," Jolanda said, seeing that her daughter was learning to care for herself.

Now, one year after her husband's death, Jolanda, too, is turning to Wellness House for support. While her girls take part in Turtles, Jolanda gathers with other adults who have lost a spouse to cancer. She said she's grateful for Wellness House's thoughtful scheduling of the meetings. Because they occur

in tandem with Turtles, Jolanda is able to attend without needing a babysitter, or worse, causing further anxiety for her daughters by being away.

“This is probably the only way I could do this,” Jolanda said. “I don’t have to look for where I can go to talk to somebody. They have it all right here.”

Jolanda said her first visit to the Turtles Bereavement Group for Parents left her

exhausted but hopeful about her own grief journey.

“It helped me see I’ve come farther than I realized,” she said. And seeing others who are even farther along offered a glimpse of how much better things can someday be.

Jolanda said home already is becoming a happier place thanks to Wellness House.

“My girls talk about my husband every day, in a positive way,” she said. “They

speak very happily about him.”

Together, and with the help of Wellness House, Jolanda and her girls are adjusting to their new life.

“There’s such a vast array of different resources for cancer patients,” Jolanda said. But she wants people to know that Wellness House’s support doesn’t end when someone dies. Sometimes, that’s where it starts.

Spring Special Events



Wellness House presented Jodi-Ann Burey, *What I Learned from Talking to People of Color About Cancer*

When **Jodi-Ann Burey** entered the Zoom room, the conversation got real. For those living with cancer, everyday life can shift and for people of color, there can be additional layers of complexity. Wellness House presented Jodi-Ann Burey, *What I Learned from Talking to People of Color About Cancer*. Jodi-Ann is a sought-after speaker, writer, cancer survivor and creator and host of *Black Cancer*, a podcast about the nuances of the lives of people of color told through their cancer journeys. Ikea Johnson, Wellness House Community Relations Advocate led the conversation with Jodi-Ann. The program was held online and attended by 77 people affected by cancer. The online format enabled participants to join from any location and from the comfort of their own home.

“Jodi-Ann is a gifted communicator - she is able to put into understandable words so many of the issues (and solutions) that impact individuals on the cancer journey” - Participant



Kate Bowler – *No Cure for Being Human*

Life isn’t always bright and shiny, as **Kate Bowler** knows and shared during a special night with Wellness House participants on Thursday, April 14. Wellness House presented, Kate Bowler, *No Cure for Being Human* to an online audience of over 230 participants. Kate is a New York Times Bestselling Author, Duke Professor and Incurable Optimist and Cancer Survivor. Kate shared how she re-examined the way she was living with unflinching honesty and a unique connectedness to an audience experiencing the same thing. The conversation was warm, insightful, and deeply moving to participants. Brittany Brady, Wellness House Oncology Education Coordinator led a question-and-answer session at the end of the evening which provided an opportunity for an insightful and meaningful exchange with participants and Kate Bowler the author and fellow survivor.

“Kate was an excellent presenter. She was so real, so authentic, very likable and certainly had a cancer story to tell” - Participant



Unique Ways to Give

We love it when neighbors support one another! Wellness House has once again been selected as a beneficiary of the TW Group Charity Craft Beer Fundraiser at Ty Warner Park in Westmont on September 10, 2022. Come and join us at the event and sample dozens of local brews, all for a great cause! We are thrilled to partner with local organizations like the TW Group that create fun and unique ways to support the good happening with our community. **Cheers!**



Any organization interested in benefitting Wellness House with their own fundraising events can contact Liza Larsen at llarsen@wellnesshouse.org

Tax Strategies During a Market Downturn

Taxable Roth Conversion with Offsetting Tax-Deductible Charitable Contribution



David Blaydes and his team may be reached at info@rpiplan.com or 630.778.8100. www.rpiplan.com

2022 has been a year filled with economic uncertainty and market volatility. The volatility can provide an opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons – one of which is converting IRA assets to a Roth IRA. Roth Conversions are becoming more popular as many economists expect tax brackets to become less favorable in 2026 when the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is set to sunset.

First, let's discuss why a Roth IRA might be a useful retirement vehicle – growth in the account is tax free, withdrawals from the account are potentially tax-free, there are no required minimum distributions (RMDs), and if left to your beneficiaries there are no taxes on the distributions. If you believe you'll be in the same or higher tax bracket when you withdraw the funds or you don't plan to use the money and want to eliminate the tax liability for your beneficiaries, a Roth Conversion is worthy of consideration.

Next, why do volatile markets make this more appealing? To illustrate this, let's say you have a \$100,000 IRA that you funded with pre-tax dollars. If you keep it in the IRA, you will pay ordinary income taxes when you take distributions. In a market downturn, you may get a statement for your IRA and realize that it's now at \$80,000. This opens an opportunity to convert a portion (or all) of the IRA to a Roth IRA and make an offsetting charitable contribution during the same calendar year.

For those who wish to leverage the IRS tax code for their long-term benefit and are charitably inclined, considering a Roth Conversion with offsetting charitable deductions is a win-win strategy. With proper planning, challenges can become opportunities during market downturns. Our team would be happy to answer any questions you have regarding the strategy.

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Meet Our Experts — Beth Gomez

Pediatric Oncology Social Worker

As a pediatric oncology social worker at Central DuPage Hospital, Beth Gomez referred countless families touched by cancer to the services and support available at Wellness House. So when presented with the chance to provide that support as a member of the Wellness House team, Beth didn't hesitate.

Beth's Professional Highlights

- Pediatric social worker for 25 years
- 2019 Association of Pediatric Oncology Social Workers (APOSW) Social Worker of the Year
- Membership Chair, APOSW board of directors
- Earned her master's degree in social work from University of Illinois - Chicago

Beth joined Wellness House in November 2021 as the organization's first Program Manager dedicated solely to Child and Family Programs. "The main focus of my job is to create programming for patients and families that are being affected by cancer in some way," Beth said.

She is dedicated to making life a little easier not only for children with cancer, but for those affected by a child's cancer diagnosis. She also creates and oversees programming for children who have been impacted by a loved one's cancer journey.

"We have programming for all of those scenarios," she said.

While individual counseling, family counseling and support groups help children and their

families feel supported and less alone, other events are just for fun.

Beth said she hopes Super Hero Day, a new event at Wellness House, will bring children and their families together to celebrate how far they've come.

"It's really a celebration of strength and resiliency," Beth said.

Beth said she never set out to become a pediatric oncology social worker, but her desire to help others and her love of children are just a couple of reasons why it's a perfect fit.

"It's such a privilege to work with families at such a difficult time in their life," Beth said.

SUPERHERO DAY

"It's never as bad as it seems. You're much stronger than you think you are. Trust me." - *Superman*



Faster than the speed of light, 27 kids and parents filled the Wellness house Great Room to enjoy a night of Superhero fun.

Kids were decked out in their favorite superhero costume while creating sand art superhero logos, superhero masks and wristbands, enjoying plenty of snacks and two therapy dogs from Rainbow Assisted Animal Therapy! Families were grateful for the opportunity to come out and have some fun family time. ***Thanks to you, our donors, for being superheros to kids and families at Wellness House. Programs like this exist only through your generosity.***

"You only have your thoughts and dreams ahead of you. You are someone. You mean something." - *'Batman'*

Wellness House | Main Location
The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope
131 North County Line Road
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

Have you included Wellness House in your will or estate plan?



“The bottom fell out when I was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. The stress was almost unbearable. Handling it alone was unthinkable. Thankfully, that’s when I found Wellness House.”

– Sara, Wellness House Participant

When you include Wellness House in your will or estate plan, you help ensure we will always be here for people like Sara and their families.

To learn more, contact
Development@wellnesshouse.org

Monthly donations change lives all year long.

A monthly gift of \$10 or more can help people to fully live life with cancer and beyond.

Thank you to our generous grantors:

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