

HOPE QUARTERLY

Sharing the stories and celebrating the work of the Georgian Bay Cancer Support Centre

FALL 2025

MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It has been a whirlwind of activity at the Georgian Bay Cancer Support Centre (GBCSC) over the past few months. We are grateful to see our community and membership continue to grow.

Our 14th annual Cycle for Hope was a tremendous success, bringing together 350 registered riders and 60 dedicated volunteers who helped raise an incredible \$185,000. To our riders, volunteers, staff, and sponsors—thank you. Because of your support, we can deliver hope close to home.

Since opening the doors of our second location in Collingwood, we have more than 150 new members from Southern Georgian Bay who are now accessing our programs and services.

We have also expanded our program offerings, modeling them after our Penetanguishene location to provide more social-based activities for members locally.

In late September, we launched Camp Hope. It's our first overnight program designed to bring hope, connection, and fun to young families navigating a cancer journey. Read more about this new initiative on Page 2.

We are truly fortunate to be part of communities that time and again step up to support those in need as they face cancer. Thank you for helping us provide hope where it matters most.

Dylan Lalande



MEMBERSPEAK

If someone found out they had cancer, why would you recommend they come to the GBCSC for support?



"When we're dealing with cancer, we struggle with how to regain our day-to-day lives, how to recapture a sense of balance physically, mentally and socially. Our amazing Centre fulfills needs one often doesn't even realize exist or acknowledge. I encourage folk to walk in through the doors of our Centre, feel the healing energy of hope! Try various programs to see which resonate, which enrich their lives and help them adapt to their new way of being. I can guarantee the quality of our days are improved!"

Josie Kvacs



"If someone found out they had cancer, which I have known several, I have recommended they go to the Centre for support. They provide support in many ways, such as parking passes, gas cards, a wig if you need one, and for women, many beautiful hats to pick from. But more importantly, there is moral support. They have groups that you can join and feel that you are not alone in your journey of dealing with cancer."

Eileen Wallace



"I would recommend the GBCSC to anyone facing cancer because it truly is a place of comfort and belonging. When I joined, I was met with understanding, compassion, and encouragement that made an overwhelming diagnosis feel less isolating. The group provided me with not only emotional support, but also lifelong connections with people who genuinely 'get it.' GBCSC offers strength, hope, and community; things that make a world of difference during such a difficult journey."

Gen Deguire



CAMP HOPE HELPS YOUNG FAMILIES FACING CANCER THANKS TO GIFT FROM DECEASED MEMBER

The GBCSC proudly hosted our first-ever Camp Hope at YMCA Camp Kitchikewana in late September. This new program was launched to provide young families facing cancer with a place to heal, connect with others, and enjoy meaningful time together.

It was made possible thanks to a generous gift from the Estate of Elizabeth O'Connor. Elizabeth, a GBCSC member who battled cancer in her final days, allowed the GBCSC to have its first Camp Hope this fall, according to Dylan Lalande, Executive Director.

"Thanks to this incredible support, Camp Hope came to life and will now become an annual tradition, ensuring that no family has to face cancer alone."

Five families came together on a sunny and warm early fall weekend on Georgian Bay. They embraced all that a camp experience has to offer. Young and old enjoyed all kinds of activities including swimming, archery, and arts and crafts.

Alongside the fun, families also participated in peer support sessions led by GBCSC counsellors Jay Sutton and Shelly Sawden. They created a safe space to share experiences dealing with cancer.

One of the most powerful parts of the program was the time spent outdoors. Surrounded by the beauty of Georgian Bay, families had the chance to step away from hospitals, appointments, and daily stresses.

"Whether watching a sunset, sharing laughter around a campfire, or simply walking the trails, the natural setting offered moments of peace, renewal, and connection that are difficult to find elsewhere," says Dylan.

Colleen Taylor, who has battled cancer, was joined by her family at Camp Hope. She says the weekend was nothing short of rejuvenating for them.

"From the moment we arrived, there was a special energy—one that blended wonder for the kids, adventure for all of us, and a safe, welcoming space to connect with other families navigating life with cancer. We found time to recharge as a family, as parents, and as part of a caring community."

Colleen adds the camp counsellors were incredible and it truly captured the magic of camp.

"Fresh air, laughter, meaningful connections, and memories that will last a lifetime. We would recommend this experience to any family affected by cancer with children of any age. Our family is already counting down the days until next year!"

- Colleen Taylor



SMUDGING CIRCLE – A PLACE TO HEAL, CONNECT, GAIN STRENGTH, AND HOPE

During the waning days of the pandemic, the GBCSC reached out to Bronson Black to host a smudging circle. What began as a simple gathering quickly became something profound.

As the eagle feather was passed for the first time, members shared what they had carried for so long – stories, laughter, and tears. According to Bronson (who over the summer became the GBCSC's Member Services & Program Coordinator), the circle (known as Smudging, Teaching and Healing from an Indigenous Perspective) naturally became a space of healing, release, and connection.

"The Smudging Circle offers members a traditional Indigenous healing practice that helps release the weight of lived experiences, fear, and uncertainty. Through sharing and smudging, participants can let go, find balance, and make space for hope and positivity."

Bronson admits he wasn't sure what to expect when he was first asked to facilitate the circle.



"It's the first program that my husband Tom and I attended. Within the Circle he found the courage and strength to share with others that he had terminal cancer," relates Michelle. "It is a valuable program that myself as well as others look forward to attending. We are given a welcoming, safe, non-judgemental space where what is shared in the circle is not shared outside of the circle"

Another regular attendee is "13-year cancer warrior" Giigwesedniinii Hunter.



"I had never worked with a group facing such hardship or impacted by cancer. Yet I had also never witnessed such hope and strength."

Michelle Robitaille regularly attends the Circle. It holds a very special place in her heart.

"I fight each and every day. I fight against the three different kinds of cancers attacking my body and my spirit. The smudging sessions at the Centre gives me incredible help beyond description. The sessions give me a peaceful respite and interlude for my mind, my heart, and my spirit. For a very short time, I feel safe and protected and not alone."

This circle continues to thrive three years since it started welcoming both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members. It remains a place where people can come together, share openly, and leave feeling lighter, supported, and connected. "The kindness and heart of the people in this circle never fail to move me," adds Bronson.

As Hunter emphasizes, the bi-weekly session helps him regenerate his inner spirit. "As each smudge session ends, I am ready, once again, to fight on."

Did You Know...

The GBCSC's largest annual fundraiser is the Georgian Bay Cycle For Hope. It has raised over \$800,000 since it started 14 years ago. **The 2025 event expanded to both sides of the Bay in Penetanguishene and Collingwood.** Over \$185,000 was raised during the one-day event – a new record.

Thank You!

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL *with Nicole*



How did you find out about the GBCSC?

I found out about the Centre through a really, good friend of mine. She had gone through her own cancer journey the year before. And when I told her I was diagnosed with cancer, she says 'Nicole, you have to come and join.'

What was it like when you first visited the Centre?

My friend brought me here the first time and it was... I can't even put it into words... it was just heartwarming. You felt like you were embraced by everybody. I just I felt like I was welcomed right away.

How has the Centre supported you?

It's amazing support. I couldn't have got through my first year dealing with my cancer diagnosis without it. I had a group of people who had my back and people who I could talk to about what I was going through. It just calmed me. My anxiety seemed to decrease when I came here knowing that I wasn't the first person to go through it.

What services or programs have made a difference to you?

Being involved with the Journey of Hope program for the last three and a half years has changed my perspective on my priorities and how I view life. You can talk openly, honestly, talk, cry, laugh, and even get angry. It makes a difference just knowing you're not alone... knowing that people care... it's huge.

What does it mean to you to access support for no fees?

I think it's amazing that all the program services we have here are free to members. It takes a burden off the family and it's not out of pocket for a lot of people coming here. There are no worries about the cost and you can focus on being positive and supporting yourself.

Does it make a difference having this support close to home?

Having the Cancer Support Centre local means a lot to me. I don't think I would have gone to a support centre if it was in Toronto or even an hour away. This is local. We have a connection here. It's great we have this Centre to help those in our area when they're needing it the most.

How has the Centre brought "Hope" to you?

Yes, it has given me hope. Knowing that I have a family here to help - through thick and thin and my ups and downs... it's a roller coaster. And it gives me hope to know that. I can help someone else, like someone else helped me.

**NICOLE
ROBITAILLE**



Community: *Tiny Township*

Member Since: *2022*



Georgian Bay
Cancer Support Centre

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