

# Building On Our Legacy

## Annual Gratitude Report

### INSIDE:

#### **Innovation Meets Technology**

Creating a cutting edge virtual environment for children in hospitals around the globe.

#### **Introducing The Hero App**

An innovative app and self-regulatory tool for adults to learn from and thank our children all over the world.

#### **Building a Standard of Care Model**

Kids Kicking Cancer converts nearly 25 years of evidence-based therapeutic martial arts into published research to impact global medical care for children.

Kids Kicking Cancer | Heroes Circle  
2022-23 EDITION





# CRAIN'S 2022 HEALTHCARE HEROES

## 2022 NOMINEE



Dear Members of the Heroes Circle® Family,

Many organizations produce an annual report. It can be a great tool to provide information about growth and impact. Looking back over the past year and a half as we are quickly approaching the quarter century mark of our organization, we are unable to provide just an annual message. Instead, thank you for opening our "Gratitude Report" which is a reflection of the deep appreciation we have for the multiple blessings that have allowed us almost twenty-five years of growing the therapeutic mantra of "Power Peace Purpose" around the world. For this, we are grateful to the medical establishments that gave us the opportunity to demonstrate and evaluate the positive impact that martial arts therapy can have on very sick children. We are thankful to the parents who have trusted us with the care of their most precious possessions at probably the most difficult times in their lives, and we are grateful to you, our donors and supporters who have sacrificed time and treasure to grow our mission. Personally, I am most grateful to G-d for allowing my wife Ruthie and I the opportunity to give added meaning to the very short life of our precious daughter Sara Basya as we continue to lower the pain of children around the world. Whether in the most challenged environments in Africa, where the mortality rate of our young patients approaches 90%, or in the western hospitals of Europe, America and the Middle East, every single child, Christian, Moslem, Jewish or other, becomes "our child." Nothing can be more fulfilling than witnessing firsthand the beautiful smiles we bring to the faces of these precious boys and girls. We are very grateful for these children and your trust to serve them.

And now, we are only beginning! As the Heroes Circle, we have transitioned to lowering the pain of multiple disease and trauma states for children. We have even seen how our kids can teach adults who in turn thank the children. When our boys and girls experience this sense of purpose, we have demonstrated how that lowers their pain. These children are at the center of a simple circle that is growing to surround the world.

There is much to report but even more to be grateful for. Thank you for reading and thank you for being an important part of our Heroes Circle family.

*Rabbi E.*

Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg  
Founder and Global Director, Kids Kicking Cancer | Heroes Circle  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics,  
Wayne State University School of Medicine

# Our MISSION and VISION



◆ **OUR MISSION** is to lower the pain and trauma of children by empowering them to heal physically, spiritually and emotionally.

◆ **OUR VISION** is to teach one million children how to “breathe in the light and blow out the darkness.”



## POWER PEACE PURPOSE

Our mantra was created to help students in our program access the therapeutic source of martial arts power. To our children, the term **Power**, or inner light, helps them imagine the energy of a fighter. The light represents the triumph over darkness – happiness, love, optimism, belonging. By breathing in this light, the children are given the meditative tools to blow out the darkness and create a place of **Peace**. Every child becomes a teacher by demonstrating what they can do in the face of adversity. Knowing they have a **Purpose** in teaching others, serves to decrease their pain and gives them an empowered sense of self.



Our little heroes are incredible teachers, and we hope you are inspired and motivated to learn from them. Please consider sending a #MessageOfLove and inspiration to pediatric patients across the globe. Your message will surely brighten the lives of everyone who sees it!



**SCAN TO SEND A MESSAGE OF  
LOVE TO OUR LITTLE HEROES**



Our students are teaching the world because of the kindness and generosity of our supporters. Thank you for sharing your light and love with our Heroes Circle community!

## MESSAGES OF LOVE TO OUR CHILDREN FROM AROUND THE GLOBE



"I am so happy you have found your power through breath! You're an inspiration!"

"You all should know your ability to teach us the techniques to deal with stress, anxiety and pain are changing our lives. As a parent, I'm teaching my kids thanks to you! Thank you soooo much!"

"The world needs your strength and kindness. Thank you for the peace, power, and purpose you all bring to our lives."

"Wishing for you all a complete and quick recovery. May you continue to find the strength inside of you to overcome your pain and discomfort while going through this. You are all amazing, even when you can't find the strength for a short while, you manage to pull it from somewhere deep inside. Prayers and respect for all of you."



"You inspire those around you to tackle their challenges in life demonstrating how strong of an impact your participation makes to the community at large. Keep up all of the hard work and remember to "breathe in the light & blow out the darkness!"

"We have all learned so much from each and every one of you. We're all so proud of all of you, you have taught us all to keep pushing and fighting through whatever life throws our way."

# Heroes Circle Pediatric Healing Program

We **TEACH** pediatric patients to use martial arts-based techniques to manage their response to pain and stress.

At the Heroes Circle, we connect children to a supportive community where they can use the techniques of the martial arts to focus on their inner strength and capabilities in confronting disease.

## INNOVATION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

In Kids Kicking Cancer's Heroes Circle, we understand that peer connectedness and "belonging" are critical components of healthy childhood socialization; directly impacting a child's level of resilience, self-esteem, recovery, and long-term health. The effects of pediatric isolation remain a major concern in hospitals worldwide and were only exacerbated as a result of the global pandemic.

Special thanks to Larry and Jackie Kraft for their transformational gift of \$1,000,000, which has given us the opportunity to provide an innovative tool to children in hospitals to help lower their pain, empower them through teaching, and connect them to a community of children who are also experiencing similar challenges.

In partnership with Detroit-based agency, Rebuild, production of the new web-based Kraft Family Digital Dojo kicked off late 2021, with an expected beta launch in fall 2023. With a combined use of state-of-the-art Blockchain Technology and Artificial Intelligence, this new virtual environment will allow children the ability to connect with Heroes Circle Martial Arts Therapeutic Mentors, as well as friends



Powered by the Kraft Family

and peers all over the world. Kids will also be able to participate in virtual martial arts therapy classes, access the new on-demand library of martial arts technique videos, participate in unique virtual age-appropriate events and engage with other patients through expressive journaling and gamification offerings.

With an official launch on schedule for 2024, we are excited for the opportunity to move one step closer to dramatically expanding our reach and meeting our goal of empowering one million children.



**"No sick child should ever suffer the pain and anxiety of serious illness on his own. Within the circumference of the Heroes Circle, no child is ever alone", says Larry Kraft, a member of the Kids Kicking Cancer board. "That is why we are dedicated to supporting this amazing effort." "We have seen the power of these children teaching," Jackie Kraft added. "That impact can be significantly replicated with the tools that we are proud to help bring to life."**

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PEDIATRIC PROGRAMMING AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Thanks to the generosity of the Michigan Health Endowment Fund and our loving supporters, we continue to focus on growing our Adolescence and Young Adult (AYA): Teen Empowerment Program; created as a means to provide age-appropriate programs and activities in a fun, safe and supportive therapeutic environment for students 12-18+.

We believe this unique teen-focused therapeutic and empowerment programming will fill in the gap exacerbated by illness and disease. The monthly program focuses on socialization, community building, the honing of life-skills, academic and vocational support where appropriate, and counseling in some of the more practical aspects of young adulthood—i.e., writing a resume, filling out a job application, balancing a first checkbook, etc. We will remain a perpetual resource of help and care as our Heroes Circle students advance into adulthood and into life.

**AYA: TEEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM**  
POWERED BY MICHIGAN HEALTH ENDOWMENT FUND

**CONNECT, EMPOWER, FIND SUPPORT, AND HAVE FUN!**

**FREE! AGES 12-18+**

Our newest teen program is a fun and safe place for you to meet other Heroes Circle members, build connections in a supportive environment and learn new skills.

**PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES**

- Positive Peer Support
- Life Skills
- Volunteer Projects
- Expressive Arts Opportunities
- Team Building Experiences
- Virtual and In-Person Special Events
- College Prep
- Career Exploration
- Mentorship Opportunities
- Game Nights and Other Fun Activities

Have higher levels of performance in school

Empowerment Program was designed to provide a safe and supportive therapeutic environment for

...therapeutic and empowerment programming will fill in the gap provided by illness and disease. Our goal is to provide this group with ongoing access to peer interactions, psycho-social support, life skills, academic and vocational support where appropriate, and counseling in some of the more practical aspects of young adulthood—i.e., writing a resume, filling out a job application, balancing a first checkbook, etc. We will remain a perpetual resource of help and caring as our Heroes Circle students advance into adulthood and into life.



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“Awesome program. It allows Luca to be able to be around other people who might know a little bit about what he’s gone through, even though he doesn’t really remember it. I think it’s given him an opportunity, especially during the pandemic and being isolated at home, to have another outlet to do fun things. He seems to have quite enjoyed everything and comes and talks to me about it after the sessions are finished. So, I think you’re providing a great service for these kids and for these teenagers who might not have other outlets to get to.”

—Parent, Heroes Circle Student and AYA Participant



**SCAN TO MEET IZZY, ONE OF OUR TEEN PARTICIPANTS**



# POWER PEACE PURPOSE



## GLOBAL STAFF CONFERENCE

Thanks to an anonymous donor, Kids Kicking Cancer hosted our first post-pandemic Global Staff Conference in Detroit, MI in December 2022. The multi-day event brought together nearly 100 staff members from around the world to connect, train, innovate and inspire the future of our organization. The conference also featured world-renowned educational speakers who provided our team with a deeper understanding of the tremendous impact of pediatric trauma and the effects of medical treatment, as well as delivering vital tools and knowledge to address the challenges our staff face every day such as managing grief, loss, and compassion fatigue.

We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to come together and learn from our international colleagues, while streamlining training techniques and beginning to reshape the Heroes Circle curriculum followed globally by all Martial Arts Therapists.



## EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS

In January 2023, the Heroes Circle launched in-person programming at the Dwaine & Cynthia Willett Children's Hospital in Savannah, Georgia. This partnership provides pediatric patients with the opportunity to join Kids Kicking Cancer's Heroes Circle program and its growing community of members.

The Willett Children's Hospital at Memorial Health credits themselves as a pioneer for the entire state of Georgia, as they become the first to have this type of program, offered complimentary to a patient's treatment plan in partnership with their on-site health care team.

Rabbi Goldberg formalized the launch with a Grand Rounds presentation at Memorial Health in February.



**SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LAUNCH**



# OUR BEST YEAR YET

Last year we focused on strengthening and growing new and existing partnerships. As a result, 2022 proved to be our best year yet. Not only did we see a 51% increase in pediatric instances of service, but we added 27 new partner locations worldwide. Below are a few of our key organizational impact measurements.

# 186

The number of Martial Arts Therapists working with our Heroes Circle community worldwide



# 687

My Martial Arts Super Power Kits were distributed to children across the United States



# 105

The number of Heroes Circle sponsored events, including virtual dance parties, cooking sessions, movie nights, and more!

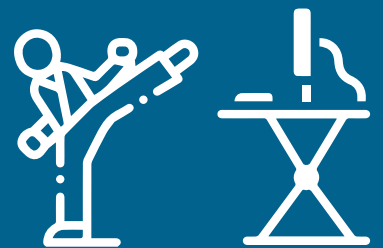


The total number of instances that children in our Heroes Circle Pediatric Healing Program participated in a class or session

# 21,306

# NEARLY 6,000

pediatric patients each participated in an average of 3 sessions last year



# Volunteers gave nearly 1,000

hours of service



# 32/10/5

The Heroes Circle served kids in thirty-two U.S. states; within ten countries; and spread across five continents



# 122

Hospitals and program locations offered Heroes Circle programming

# OUR U.S. PARTNERS

The Heroes Circle is a proud partner of over 64 health care providers and illness-based camps across the United States alone. We are always looking for new opportunities to expand the reach of our therapeutic applications, while working alongside partners who are focused on providing children with the highest quality medical care. A sampling of our partners is listed below.



# OUR 2023 GLOBAL IMPACT

## CANADA

Antler River Elementary School  
Camp Merrywood  
Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent  
Erinoak Kids  
Hillside Kettle & Stony Point First Nations  
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation  
Hospital Hospice of Windsor & Essex County  
London Lightning Practice Facility  
Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre  
Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation  
Maplesoft Centre (CLIMB)  
Pathways Health Centre for Children  
Ronald McDonald House Charities BC & Yukon  
Spirit Summer Camps with the City of Ottawa  
Thames Valley Children's Centre  
Vanier Children's Services  
West Coast Kids Foundation

## UNITED STATES

Baystate Home Health and Hospice  
Beaumont Children's Hospital  
Boston Children's Hospital  
Boston Medical Center  
C.S. Mott Children's Hospital  
Camp Casco  
Camp Catch-A-Rainbow  
Camp Happy Days  
Camp Hobè  
Camp H-Town  
Camp KEMO  
Camp Kesem - Chicagoland  
Camp Kesem - Maine  
Camp Kids Are Kids  
Camp OAK Reach for the Sky  
Camp One Step - by Children's Oncology Services  
Camp Sunshine - Maine  
Camp Watcha-Wanna-Do  
Cancer Support Community - Greater Ann Arbor  
Children's Healing Center  
Children's Hospital of Michigan (DMC)  
Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC)

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP)  
Children's Hospital University of Illinois (UIC)  
Comer Children's Hospital - UChicago Medicine  
Cool Kids Campaign MD  
Dana Farber Cancer Institute  
Double H Ranch  
Dwayne & Cynthia Willett Children's Hospital of Savannah  
Esposito's Karate Fitness Center - Newton  
Gilda's Club Madison  
Gilda's Club Metro Detroit  
Hackensack University Medical Center  
Holtz Children's Hospital  
Hopecam  
Karmanos Cancer Institute at Lawrence and Idell Weisberg Cancer Treatment Center  
Karmanos Cancer Institute at McLaren Macomb, Ted B. Wahby Cancer Center  
Livestrong (Lance Armstrong Foundation)  
Maimonides Medical Center  
Maria Fareri Children's Hospital  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Montefiore Hospital and Medical Center

Nancy & Stephen Grand Family House  
North Star Reach  
Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital  
Okizu  
Rett's Roost  
Robert Wood Johnson Children's Specialized Hospital (RWJ)  
Ronald McDonald House Wisconsin  
Rush University Medical Center  
Special Love, Inc (Camp Fantastic)  
St. John Hospital and Health System  
St. Joseph Mercy Oakland Hospital  
St. Vincent Children's Hospital  
Sunrise Day Camp - Chicago  
Sunrise Day Camp - Greater Philadelphia  
Sunrise Day Camp - Long Island  
Sunrise Day Camp - Staten Island  
Sunrise Day Camp VX  
Team Impact  
The Children's Hospital at Montefiore  
The Larry & Jackie Kraft Healing Arts Studio  
Wellness House for Living with Cancer  
Wisconsin Athletic Club - Wauwatosa

## SENEGAL

Dalal Jamm Hospital

## UNITED KINGDOM

Classes offered virtually

## ITALY

AIEOP Case Gialle – Bologna  
AOUC Policlinico – Bari  
ASST Papa Giovanni XXIII – Bergamo  
Azienda Ospedaliera Santa Maria della Misericordia – Perugia  
Casa UGI – Torino  
Istituto dei Tumori – Milano  
Ospedale Civico Arnas – Palermo  
Ospedale Pediatrico Bambino Gesù – Roma  
Ospedale Regina Margherita – Torino  
Policlinico Gemelli – Roma  
Residence Daniele Chianelli – Perugia

## ISRAEL

Assuta Ashdod  
The Chaim Sheba Medical Center at Tel HaShomer  
Hadassah Medical Center – Ein Kerem  
Rambam School  
Save A Child's Heart  
Soroka Medical Center  
Sunrise Israel

## ZAMBIA

Arthur Davison Children's Hospital

## ZIMBABWE

Michael Gelfand Clinic  
Parirenyatwa Hospital

## SOUTH AFRICA

Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (Joburg Gen)  
Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg (Soweto)  
Dalal Jamm Hospital  
Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital  
Frere Hospital  
Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town  
Maitland Cottage – Children's Orthopaedic Hospital  
Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital (NMCH)  
Netcare Limited Alberton  
Netcare Unitas Hospital (Centurion)  
Polokwane Provincial Hospital  
Rahima Moosa Mother & Child Hospital  
Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, Cape Town  
Steve Biko Academic Hospital (Pretoria/Tshwane)  
Tygerberg Hospital, Cape Town  
Tygerberg School  
Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre

## AUSTRALIA

Koala Kids

2022 was no doubt a transformational year thanks to our passionate supporters, dedicated staff, and devoted healthcare partners worldwide.

Each of our partners listed offer a unique community centric approach, working closely with our Pediatric Healing Program team members to most effectively implement Heroes Circle programming into their standard therapeutic practices.

# MEET GRACE

## A Hero Who Journeyed from Fearful to Inspirational



You might not recognize 15-year-old Grace McKay if she were to stand next to a photograph of her 10-year-old self. While today Grace is an energetic and busy teen, involved in her high school's drama club and color guard, when she was 10, she was in the throes of treatment for cancer, often frightened, and bald from chemotherapy.

Grace was not yet 8 years old when she was diagnosed back in 2014 with T-Cell Lymphoma. She had just started a new school, something challenging in and of itself for a young girl. But instead of enjoying pre-teen life, Grace began an intensive chemotherapy treatment, full of overwhelming procedures like routine blood work, finger pokes, and hospitalizations. Her mom Aletha, reflecting on that time, remembers how her once social daughter "had become withdrawn, and did not really interact with other kids."

This all changed one November day when Sensei Michael Hunt came and visited Grace in the hospital. Michael invited Grace and her family to participate in the Heroes Circle, which included learning basic martial arts skills. Grace didn't initially understand why she was even being offered karate classes; she had done traditional karate prior to her diagnosis, but had to stop because of treatment. Sensei Michael explained how the Heroes Circle program was different. The unique therapeutic program was meditation-based, and they specialized in teaching children how to use Power Breathing as a method to manage anxiety and pain resulting from treatment. Also, the karate would be safe and non-contact in nature. Michael shared that he was a childhood cancer survivor himself, and one of the earliest students in the Heroes Circle program.

Aletha was eager to get Grace and her oldest daughter, Danielle, involved. Cancer had disrupted the family's life,



and Aletha wanted to give her daughters both some sense of normalcy, as well as some involvement with other kids their age. Danielle enjoyed the program immediately, but Grace was overwhelmed at first. "She cried and sat in my lap," says Aletha. But that started to change as Grace became involved in other social aspects of the Heroes Circle, such as movie nights. She began meeting other kids, her age or a bit older, dealing with health difficulties similar to her. Suddenly, Aletha saw her daughter begin to emerge from her shell and look forward to meeting with new friends at class. "The biggest benefit of the Heroes Circle is the open and welcoming atmosphere," says Aletha.

The meditative breathing technique, known as Power Breathing, really began to play a positive role in Grace's treatments as well. Prior to learning Power Breathing, Grace would "melt down" going into treatments. "Power Breathing helped Grace calm herself prior to blood draws and other painful procedures," Aletha notes. Grace adds that even today, several years post treatment, she will use Power Breathing whenever she is stressed out. Even Grace's parents use it, joking how they initially encouraged Grace, but were often stressed out themselves as their daughter went through treatments.



Aletha says the Heroes Circle “has become an extension of family,” and believes parents became part of this family as well as children, sharing treatment stories as the kids participated in lessons. Since Grace’s treatment finished in February of 2017—capped off by a celebratory bell-ringing ceremony at Detroit’s Children’s Hospital—the McKay’s have continued their participation in the Heroes Circle. They have enjoyed participation in fun family events, ranging from Greenfield Village visits to Detroit Lions demonstrations.

For Grace, the Heroes Circle provides something she can rely on in a world where “a lot of stuff changes.”

Today, the McKay’s involvement with the Heroes Circle is more about giving back to a program that gave them so much. There’s a photograph of Grace from when she was ten, bald from chemotherapy, hanging up on the wall of one of the karate classrooms. When new students meet Grace, they don’t realize that she’s the same person as the girl in the photo. For those students, trying out the program for the first time, Grace is an inspiration, an example of something to look forward to, living proof that there can be light at the end of an often times dark journey. Says Aletha, “Grace is definitely a hero.”

# FOUR FOREVER FRIENDS

High school graduation is a meaningful milestone for most, but it's even more special for young women who've faced challenges and come out on top.



Although they can't quite picture what it's going to be like to be geographically apart, Danielle McKay, Haley Wallace, Paris Davis and Je'Nailya Belew are ready to face it.

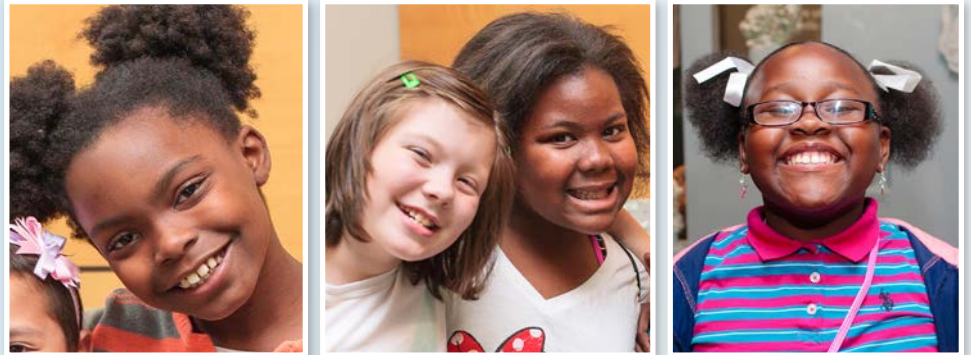
That's in large part due to the life skills they've learned in Kids Kicking Cancer's AYA: Teen Empowerment Program, where the four friends, who met when they were very young, learned cooking, banking, self-care, Internet safety and more to prepare them for adulthood.

"This program doesn't end after our students graduate. We will continue to support them as needed and they are welcome to come back and be the light to the team" says Niga McCamey, LLMSW, Program Specialist in charge of the AYA program.

The four friends consider each other family after all they've been through together.

Danielle, Haley, Paris and Je'Nailya met through Kids Kicking Cancer (KKC), all part of the program for various reasons: Danielle's sister Grace had T-cell lymphoma, Haley is herself a cancer survivor, Paris was a sibling participant as her brothers endured Sickle Cell Disease and Je'Nailya faced it herself.

Where once they were a support system for one another, creating the safe setting they needed to let loose and just be kids, now they are connected digitally, hoping to stay in touch when Danielle heads to Morgan State University to study theater arts and communication, Haley to Jackson College on a bowling scholarship, Paris to Wayne State University for nursing and midwifery and Je'Nailya to a cosmetology career.



Danielle, Haley, Je'Nailya, Paris

"It's the type of friendship where you knew you were going to be with these people for the rest of your life," says Je'Nailya.

"They're the only ones that understand," explains her mother, Wilma Clay. "The program has become one big whole family. It's really amazing."

When these girls started with KKC, they were young and navigating the confusing and scary paths of disease and wellness. The program gave them support, and power, as they learned to harness their breath and control the way they met challenging situations.

KKC grew alongside them. As they became teens, KKC became a global program referred to as the Heroes Circle,

helping children around the world. But there was always a place for them, as teens helping with Cowboys Kicking Cancer or guiding younger children entering the program. Danielle says the best part of the teen program was that she could just be herself and talk to peers when they gathered on a Monday night.

"I see my girls using the power breathing techniques on a regular basis, whether they're conscious of it or not," says Aletha McKay, Danielle's mother. "We've all learned how to deal with stressful situations better."

"The AYA: Teen Empowerment Program has inspired me to be a lot more creative than I was," says Haley. It's also provided volunteer hours that many high schools require.

Niga saw the bond between the four teens right from the start. After drive-through programs during COVID, the four would linger in the parking lot, masked and safely distanced, just catching up. It's like they never get enough of the bond and connection they share.

"You could feel the love they share for each other," says Niga. "They tell us that they are more prepared for the world thanks to this program. I'm excited to see them flourish and go to the next level. They all have their own separate talents, and it's amazing. I'm sure they're going to do great things."

And now, they're happy to pay it forward to kids just entering KKC and joining the Heroes Circle.

"If a kid is struggling and needs one-on-one, they'll ask us," Haley says. "We have a great time welcoming in new students. You can see how nervous they are at first and after everyone welcomes them in, they start to brighten up a little bit."

Haley remembers those early nerves all too well. On her first day with KKC, she pulled a hat over her face and huddled in a corner.

But it didn't take long before she met the girls who would become her lifelong companions, and the instructors had to lovingly separate them because they couldn't stop talking.

"We're all goofy," says Paris. "Always smiles and laughter when we're together. Everyone is so comfortable to be around, they're always there for you. They make me feel loved."

"We all made a promise to stay in touch," says Paris. "We say, 'You can't get rid of me that easily. We're stuck together from the very beginning.'"

"These girls have grown up together," says Cindy Cohen, Global Program Director, who feels like "the proud mama who's watched them all grow up."

"I'm proud of them," she says. "They're good people. I'm proud of how they've taken the adversity they faced and made the best of what life gives you, not only overcoming, but growing from it. They celebrate with one another and, sadly, they mourn with one another. It's a family."



# Heroes Circle School Program

We **EMPOWER** children with the tools to build resilience and overcome stress that can impact learning, behavior and long-term health.

What is totally unique is that the children are given a sense of purpose to thank the children of Kids Kicking Cancer all over the world for being inspiring teachers.

## EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO TAKE CONTROL OF STRESS AT HOME AND IN THE CLASSROOM

Using the power of martial arts to teach meditative breathing, mindfulness and movement, the Heroes Circle elementary school curriculum is a social and emotional based learning program adopted by Oak Park School District as part of a multi-year pilot aimed at teaching self-regulation and empowerment.

During the 2021-22 school year, we continued to manage our pilot program across three elementary schools and introduced the Heroes Circle to nearly 800 students – resulting in over 19,500 hours of curriculum engagement.

The Heroes Circle is a highly regarded, evidence-based program. During each lesson, students are given the opportunity to practice martial arts breathing, express their feelings, share ideas and thoughts, listen to others, and engage in dialogue about pertinent issues they are facing. Knowing that they have been heard and validated can help students move through the school day with a sense of calm, clarity of mind, and a refocused attention on learning. The entire program is also beneficial for teachers and other school staff, and helps foster a safe and harmonious school environment for all.



“Our goal was to empower young people with the tools they need to navigate life’s challenges, and seeing the impact it has had on students and educators has been truly gratifying. This series is a testament to the power of the children of Kids Kicking Cancer, to inspire positive change. We are thankful for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people.”

– Jamila Carrington Smith, Chief Innovation Officer

780

The number of students in Oak Park School District who were introduced to our Heroes Circle curriculum in 2021-22.

8,184

The total number of instances that children were connected to our Heroes Circle School Program curriculum during the school year.

# TEACHING AND EMPOWERING CHILDREN BEYOND TRAUMA AND STRESS

Every day, teens are bombarded with personal, familial, relational, academic, political, racial, and environmental stressors. This significantly impacts how they face the world. Left unmanaged, stress can lead to frustration, anger, depression, and physical illness. In the school environment, unchecked stress can become toxic and, in some cases, violent. We help students learn how to manage their stress effectively.

In 2022 we launched our Heroes Circle Middle School Program pilot, centered on a specialized, standards-aligned curriculum designed to enhance students' awareness of the feelings, thoughts,

the characters, visuals, dialogue, themes, and situations. This connection helps engage students in discussions and reflections about issues that are current and relevant to them. This powerful method helps children learn to regulate the limbic system while encouraging them to teach others and gain purpose in their lives and in the lives of very sick children around the world.

In Spring 2023, the video series "Teens Helping Teens in a Stressful World" and Kids Kicking Cancer staff Jamila Carrington Smith (Chief Innovation Officer) and Kelly Blankenship (Director, Heroes Circle Innovation), received an Emmy nomination in the "Children/Youth/Teens"



and behaviors associated with stress, as well as improve their understanding of how stress impacts their relationships, decisions, and the school environment.

The Heroes Circle Middle School Program is centered around an innovative video series, "Teens Helping Teens in a Stressful World", featuring a diverse group of friends who face a variety of stressful experiences and respond in different ways. Students in grades 6-8 quickly relate to

category by the Michigan-chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. The series, accompanied by a standards-aligned curriculum, is unlike anything available to school districts nationwide. We are on the forefront of teaching valuable lessons on coping with timely challenges like social media safety, in addition to teaching the importance of empathy and creating positive healthy connections.

 **SCAN TO WATCH A SAMPLE OF OUR MIDDLE SCHOOL VIDEO SERIES**



19,500

Hours spent by elementary students engaging with the Heroes Circle School Program lessons and videos.

14

Workshops, training and collaboration sessions were held in 2021-22 with Oak Park School District staff.

16,000+

Breath Brakes® taken by students during school hours.

# Heroes Circle Adult Healing Program

We **INSPIRE** healing and well-being in adults as they learn the powerful lessons inspired by the children of Kids Kicking Cancer.

Our tools and training help parents and caregivers of our Pediatric Healing Program participants, as well as adults in need of healing and purpose.

## A PODCAST FOR ADULTS LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN

In April 2022, Kids Kicking Cancer's Heroes Circle launched *I Am Not My Pain with Melissa Adams* – a weekly podcast where real warriors living with pain and illness discuss their challenges and victories, including treatments and coping strategies that they use to get through each day.

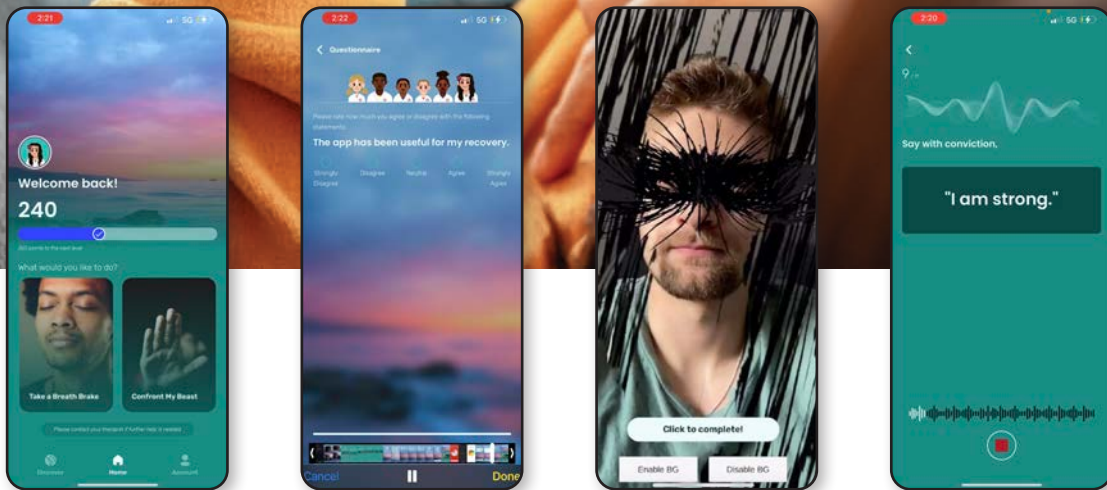
Melissa Adams knows pain. For over twenty years, she has been managing daily, persistent pain while navigating through a difficult healthcare system, never-ending judgments, and her new normal. Pain naturally consumed her life. Until a unique and fortuitous opportunity led her to Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg. Working with Rabbi G and integrating the Heroes Circle martial arts-based meditations allowed Melissa to retrain her brain and lower her pain, but more importantly, she stopped fighting the pain. She accepted it as part of her life and with acceptance came the knowledge – that pain does not need to define her. Her purpose is now clear – to help others with pain or illness by bringing their stories and challenges into the open, and to connect the extraordinary kids of the Heroes Circle and their powerful meditation techniques to the pain community.

The new podcast provides a platform and resource for the millions of other people suffering from chronic pain. "I really want to give these people a voice, to tell their story, and establish what the issues are that they face." Melissa says these issues go beyond the pain itself, to the ways chronic pain elicits judgment from others, and can affect relationships and parenting. Knowing how isolating chronic pain can feel, she wants others to feel less alone, and take away stigma and shame, eventually bringing them back to learn from the children of the Heroes Circle.



▶ **SCAN TO CHECK OUT OUR FULL PODCAST LIBRARY**





## INTRODUCING THE HERO APP

Thanks to a new impact grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, we spent the greater part of 2022 and early 2023 designing and developing the new Heroes Circle Hero App, a self-regulatory tool for adults suffering from Substance Abuse Disorder (SUDs) and other forms of addiction.

This innovative app, set to launch by the end of 2023, will serve as an interactive space where the children in our Heroes Circle Pediatric Healing Program can inspire and motivate adult users. Presented in avatar form, our children will teach the patients how to “change their brains” using the same breathing techniques they regularly use to help fight pediatric cancer and other painful diseases. In turn the adult patients are invited to “thank the children”, giving our pediatric students a purpose to their healing journey.

# What is Standard of Care?

An accepted medical practice driven by scientific evidence, the patients (and their families) and the medical professionals who apply the technique. Our goal is to create the pathway for our proven techniques to be available for children in pain everywhere.

## BUILDING A STANDARD OF CARE MODEL

The expansion of our therapeutic model is based on partnerships with extraordinary clinicians and health care institutions who are integrating our evidence-based psychosocial support modalities into their standard therapeutic practices, independent of pharmaceutical agents.

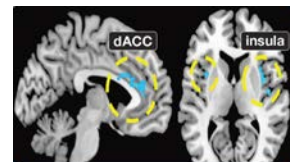
The Heroes Circle has been employing and evidencing non-contact Martial Arts Therapy as a cost saving, fun, safe and simple intervention for almost twenty-five years. Children associate the martial arts as a symbol of empowerment. This allows us to use our breathing and meditative techniques to support them in controlling the pain and fear associated with illness and treatment.

In 2022, we published the first edition of our Heroes Circle Research Compendium – a journal comprised of over ten research publications and medical features that prove the benefits of our program and pediatric interventions through scientific method and application.

### RESEARCH



Pediatric Health, Medicine and Therapeutics Journal (Dove Press)



### Martial arts intervention decreases pain scores in children with malignancy.

This article was published in the following Dove Press journal:  
Pediatric Health, Medicine and Therapeutics  
#July 2016  
Number of times this article has been viewed

Martin H Bluth<sup>1,2</sup>  
Ronald Thomas<sup>1,4</sup>  
Cindy Cohen<sup>3</sup>  
Amanda C Bluth<sup>1</sup>  
Elimelech Goldberg<sup>2,4</sup>

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**Background:** Martial arts intervention in disease has been mostly limited to adult inflammatory, musculoskeletal, or motor diseases, where a mechanical intervention effects positive change. However, the application and benefits to pain management in childhood malignancy are not well described. Here, we assess the effects of defused martial arts interventions in children with cancer with respect to their pain perception and management.

**Methods:** Sixty-four children with childhood malignancies were enrolled in a martial arts program, which encompassed both modulation and movement modalities. Pain scores (0-10) were recorded pre- and post- 1-hour session intervention. Pain scores were created by total visits and tabulated by whether participant pain reduced at least 1 unit, stayed the same, or increased in intensity immediately after (post) participation session. Differences in pain scores were further compared by age and sex.

**Results:** Prepain and postpain scale data were measured for 64 participants, 43 males (67.2%) and 21 females (32.8%), ranging from 3 years to 19 years. Preintervention and postintervention data were obtained for 223 individual session visits. Mean number of patient participation visits was 1.8±1.6 (range one to nine visits). Of 116 individual measured sessions where the participants began with a pain score of at least 1, pain intensity reduced 21 unit in 85.3% (99/116) of visits, remained the same in 7.8% (9/116), and increased in 6.9% (8/116). For the majority (66.3%, 77/86) of sessions, participants began with a prepain intensity score of at least 5-10 with reduction in pain intensity following the session. The overall mean pain score progression was reduced by -40% (pre: 5.95±2.64 and post: 3.03±2.45 [95% CI: 2.34-3.50], P<0.001). Mean pain intensity scores had greater reductions with increased age of participants (3-6 years [-1], 7-10 years [-2], 11-14 years [-3], and 15-19 years [-4]).

**Conclusion:** Martial arts intervention can provide a useful modality to decrease pain in childhood cancer, with greater effect achieved with higher baseline pain scores and patient age. Martial arts intervention may improve patient compliance with respect to medical and surgical management, thus reducing disease morbidity and health care costs.

**Keywords:** martial arts, karate, cancer, pain, intervention, therapy

#### Video abstract



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#### Introduction

Cancer continues to dominate the health care landscape.<sup>1</sup> Although administration of pharmacological agents constitutes the major intervention in this disease space, other "non-drug" therapies constitute a significant component of the psychosocial-economic opportunity with respect to treatment. Much of the interventions with regard to cancer treatment, vis-a-vis both pharmacological and nonpharmacological modalities, focus on controlling the pain associated with this disease. Indeed, cancer pain accounts for



## SCAN TO MEET OUR RESEARCH PARTNERS AND CHECK OUT OUR RESEARCH COMPENDIUM



# Heroes Circle Research Compendium

FIRST EDITION

### RESEARCH

considerable costs and may also contribute to noncompliance either as a result of treatment regimens or patients' quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

Pediatric cancer contains another layer of complexity in that the patient often refers to the unit of the father, mother, and child, and as such, may affect compliance to therapy, the perception of pain, and quality of life. Other variables including the patient's other relatives and belief structure, provide additional considerations.<sup>15</sup> Various modalities have been used to address pediatric cancer pain. Although pharmacological options have been used to decrease pediatric pain, barriers to successful implementation include parents' reluctance to their child receiving pain medication, inadequate information/education pertaining to physician medication orders, subjective pain perception and severity scores, and fear of addiction or tolerance to pain medication among others.<sup>16</sup> Insurers are eager to adopt interventions for controlling cancer pain (pediatric and adult), since this would facilitate considerable cost saving to the health care industry as a means to increase patient compliance to therapy and disease management as well as to decrease other morbidities.<sup>14,17</sup>

The application of martial arts in health maintenance has been well documented. Both physical (Karate, Tai Kwon Do, etc) and meditative (Tai Chi and ChiQi) (Gung, etc) modalities within the scope of martial arts have been shown to increase flexibility, range of motion, mental focus, and decrease anxiety and stress.<sup>18</sup> Martial arts facilitate control over oneself and include different aspects of metered breathing, guided imagery, and physical as well as mental conditioning to overcome challenges. The positive effects of martial arts in disease states have also been described. Recent studies have shown that rheumatoid arthritis patients who practiced Tai Chi 50 minutes/week for 12 weeks had decreased pain and fatigue when compared with routine care.<sup>19,20</sup>

Similarly, patients suffering with osteoarthritis or fibromyalgia, where there are less effective disease-modifying agents than for rheumatoid arthritis, can also benefit from Tai Chi.<sup>20-22</sup> In those studies, implementation of distinct Tai Chi regimens, either short form or long form (which pertains to the number of postures per form), has been correlated with positive findings pertaining to improved muscle strength, endurance, reduced stress, psychological well-being, flexibility, and muscle control. Even in pilot studies where there were no observed differences between Tai Chi and control groups over a 4-8-week regimen,<sup>23</sup> participants generally "preferred Tai Chi to their previous physiotherapeutic intervention, finding it more useful and more enjoyable". Furthermore, the implementation of Tai Chi to other diseases including

Parkinson's<sup>24</sup> and heart diseases<sup>25</sup> has also been reported. Regarding malignancy, a recent meta-analysis demonstrated positive effects of Tai Chi and Qigong in adult cancer patients in improving their quality of life and decreasing markers of inflammation (C-reactive protein and cortisol).<sup>26</sup>

Although there are reports of the application of martial arts in other disease states with demonstrations of beneficial effects, here we describe the effects of martial arts as an interventional therapeutic modality to reduce pediatric cancer pain. This program is further adaptable to hospital and clinic settings as well as noncancer pediatric disease space, thus providing widespread accessibility toward the control and mitigation of pediatric pain.

#### Methods

Sixty-four children with childhood malignancies were enrolled in the martial arts therapy program, which encompassed both the meditative aspects of martial arts and the actual movements and techniques used in that discipline over the course of 12 months. The intervention was administered by specially trained martial arts instructors according to the standard operating procedures of the organization Kids Kicking Cancer ([www.kidskickingcancer.org](http://www.kidskickingcancer.org)) and patient consent was obtained prior to intervention. Each program consists of a 1-hour session, where patients are exposed to a mix of martial arts-based therapeutic interventions, either individually or in group setting. The session begins with identifying each child participant's (pre-session) pain rating as well as location of pain and cause where applicable (ie, "my pain was 7/10 after having chemotherapy, line/catheter/port placement, and/or injections", etc). Pain scores are recorded using an 11-point (0-10) verbal and/or continuous visual analog scale. The visual analog scale is a psychometric response scale commonly used in questionnaires to measure pain as an instrument for subjective characteristics or attitudes that cannot be directly or objectively measured. The participant begins with a "body scan" in which children lie down and begin to meditate, focusing upon the sensation of their breath. After a few moments (times differ based on the age and attention level of the group), the students are asked to imagine themselves perceiving their bodies beginning from the top of their head and proceed downward through their body

relating the different muscle group on the voice direction of the "sensei" (martial arts instructor). The "body scan" also helps each participant focus on and become cognizant of each body part with respect to pain/fear/frustration and function and gently allows any unpleasant sensations to flow out of their body. The session continues with karate style martial arts movements modified for each patient according to his or

# Heroes Circle Family Connections

January –  
December 2022

For our Heroes Circle families suffering from the isolation exacerbated by illness, we offer interest based virtual programming monthly. Events include virtual dance parties, cooking lessons, movie nights, arts and crafts, and holiday gatherings.

Last year we hosted over 105 family gatherings, both in-person and virtual, thanks to our in-kind partnerships with The Henry Ford, the Detroit Pistons, the Detroit Tigers, Cranbrook Institute of Science, and more!



*Belting Ceremony*



*Detroit Lions Training Camp*



*Detroit Tigers Childhood Cancer Awareness Game*



*Halloween Trunk or Treat Event*



*Parent Program Spa Night - Impact100 Oakland County*



*Rainbow Connection Picnic*



Horsepower for Hope Event



Livestrong Cooking Series



Parent Program Virtual Painting Event



Virtual Global Dance Party



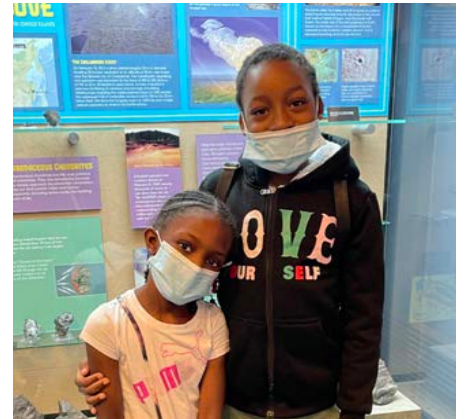
Salute to America - The Henry Ford



Summer Art Club



Valentine's Day Drive-Thru Event



Cranbrook Institute of Science Outing



Visit to Henry Ford Greenfield Village



Blue Angels Meet and Greet

# Heroes Circle 5th Annual Golf Outing and Dinner

July 25, 2022  
Knollwood Country Club

Golfers gathered for our 5th annual outing at Knollwood Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. The event raised more than \$247,000 to support the growth of our global Pediatric Healing Program.

Thank you to our event chairman, Josh Kaplan, outing sponsors, participants, and the many generous supporters who made the event possible.

SCAN TO WATCH A RECAP  
OF LAST YEAR'S EVENT





# Heroes Circle 4th Annual Virtual Pediatric Psychosocial and Palliative Care Conference

November 2-3, 2022

In November 2022, we hosted our 4th annual Pediatric Psychosocial and Palliative Care Conference, presented by Priority Health.

Our theme, "The Building Blocks of Resiliency", focused on standards of care and how to create a culture of healing empowerment through community building and patient and family support.

Our virtual conference brought together world-class healthcare professionals to explore challenging topics in pediatric psychosocial and palliative care, as well as over 440 health care professionals from 17 countries. Guests left informed and inspired, receiving continuing education credits for social work, nursing, child life and medicine.

## 2022 CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



**Amit Sood, MD, MS, FACP**  
CEO, Global Center for Resiliency and Wellbeing  
Professor of Medicine (Retd.),  
Mayo Clinic.



**Ifeyinwa (IFY) Osunkwo, MD, MPH**  
Lifespan Hematologist, SVP and  
Chief Patient Officer of  
Forma Therapeutics



**Elan Schneider, DPT, CYT**  
Co-Founder and CEO of TrainPain;  
Co-Founder of Non-Profit Pain  
Education Organization  
RetrainPain.org.



**Evan Ruggiero**  
Drama Desk nominated actor,  
professional dancer, and cancer  
survivor who overcame the challenge  
of leg amputation while continuing  
to perform across the United States.



**Adam Rapoport, MD,  
FRCPC, MHSC**  
Medical Director, Pediatric Advanced  
Care Team (PACT), The Hospital for  
Sick Children; Medical Director,  
Emily's House Children's Hospice



**Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg**  
Founder and Global Director,  
Kids Kicking Cancer | Heroes Circle,  
Clinical Assistant Professor of  
Pediatrics, Wayne State University  
School of Medicine



**SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR 2023 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE  
NOVEMBER 8-9, 2023, AND TO VIEW LAST YEAR'S EVENT RECAP.**





HERO  
POWER  
PEACE

CHILDRAFT

# 2022-23 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our work is only possible with the support and dedication of our Heroes Circle board of directors, as well as our government, corporate, foundation, community, and nonprofit partners. Their knowledge, expertise, and commitment power our mission. **Together, we will work to empower one million children to reduce their pain and stress.**



Robert Bronstein  
Chairman

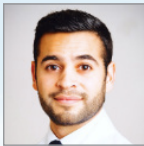


Neil Schloss  
Treasurer



Shirley Stancato  
Secretary

## MEMBERS



Daniel Bral



Chris Keogh



Norman Pappas



Gail Danto



Larry Kraft



Lawrence Wolfe



Keyantee' Davis



Bonnie Larson



Barbara Hertzler



Tonya Matthews



Olivia Jackson



Bridget McCormack

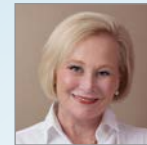
## NEW MEMBERS IN 2023



Archie Drake



Barak Leibovitz



Randy Rubin

# FINANCIALS

For nearly 25 years, your support has made all the difference. Because of your passion and care for our Heroes Circle community, more children around the globe have access to our transformational therapeutic martial arts tools.

We will no doubt continue to evolve and to innovate as we approach our silver jubilee. And we know that we will be able to count on your love and support to do so!

**THANK YOU** from the bottom of our hearts.

## REVENUE

2022

Annual Campaign	\$1,514,311
Grants	\$1,111,497
Other Revenue	\$379,910
In-Kind	\$162,330

**Total Revenue** **\$3,168,048**

## EXPENSES

2022

Program & Administration	\$3,026,364
Fundraising	\$501,884

**Total Expenses** **\$3,528,248**



Platinum  
Transparency  
2023  
**Candid.**





## WITH GRATITUDE

Last year was a record-setting year for the Heroes Circle, thanks to the significant generosity and kindness of our global community of supporters. We are deeply grateful to everyone who helps make our mission possible. Together, we will work to empower the children of the world to reduce their pain and stress.



Kids Kicking Cancer | Heroes Circle  
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Southfield, MI 48034

[HeroesCircle.org](https://HeroesCircle.org)