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First Descents: Free Outdoor Adventure Therapy for Young Adults Fighting, Living With, and Surviving Cancer [1]

Editor's Note: This is part of a series of Patient Advocate Guest Columns and Podcasts, launched as a forum for patient advocates to address a topic, issue, or trend within the cancer community through Cancer.Net, the patient information website of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

First Descents: Free Outdoor Adventure Therapy for Young Adults Fighting, Living with, and Surviving Cancer

A Patient Advocate Guest Column by Whitney Lange, Director of Programs, First Descents (www.firstdescents.org/[2]).

In 2001, 15 young adults took to the rivers of Colorado in whitewater kayaks. For seven days, they learned the basics of the sport, eventually conquering Class III rapids before the week's end. They were there to prove a point: that cancer - no matter how aggressive, advanced, or invasive - would never be stronger than they were.

Since that week in 2001, First Descents has utilized whitewater kayaking and other outdoor adventure sports to promote emotional, social, and physical healing for nearly 1,000 young adults with cancer. In 2011, First Descents will host 28 one-week programs in six states: California, Colorado, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, and Utah.

During a First Descents adventure, young adult survivors are empowered by conquering challenging outdoor activities that lead them to face their fears. By doing so, they are able to regain the confidence and identity they may have lost to cancer. Each program is limited to 15 campers, ensuring individualized care, attention to any medical concerns, and an intimate experience with fellow survivors.

First Descents programs are available to young adults with cancer regardless of their financial

means. All meals, accommodations, and program activities are provided free of charge (including travel scholarships, when needed).

In the words of First Descents campers:

?First Descents reminded me of who I am, and gave me confidence and courage which has already helped several times since I've returned. I know I'll never be able to repay you for everything that all of you do, so all I can say is thank you, a million times over. You gave me back my life.?

- *Lisa aka ?Wings? - 2010 camper*

?This organization attracts the most positive, friendly, goofy, courageous and inspiring people you could imagine. Coming to camp is such a special place, separated from daily life, to reconnect with my old self and the world around me. Without all of the connections I have made and the positive experiences I have had, finding the inner strength and attitude to return to life at full charge would have been so much more difficult. Spending a solid week with others who have a deep sense of gratitude for every breath and can live the mantra ?carpe diem? with ownership is truly a privilege, and one day soon I hope to follow your lead and pay it forward.?

- *Tim aka ?T-Pot?- 2010 camper*

?The best part of the week was pushing my limits to address my fears. When I conquered those fears I proved to myself that my fears can't hold me back anymore and actually what frightens you may become a huge part of laughter and light in your life.?

- *2010 camper*

How to get involved with First Descents:

- **Participate!** If you are between the ages of 18 and 39 and have heard the words *you have cancer*, apply online at www.firstdescents.org [3]
- **Spread the word!** Young adult cancer survivors are an underserved population. Please share this information with any young adult survivors who might benefit from First Descents.
- **Volunteer!** First Descents welcomes medical providers to volunteer at camp, lending expertise and medical support.

To participate, donate, volunteer, or learn more about First Descents, please visit www.firstdescents.org [3].

If you are a patient advocate interested in authoring a future Patient Advocate Guest Column or Podcast, please contactpatientadvocates@asco.org[4]or 571-483-1358.

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Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/research-and-advocacy/patient-advocates/patient-advocate-guest-columns-and-podcasts/first-descents-free-outdoor-adventure-therapy-young-adults-fighting-living-and-surviving-cancer
[2] http://www.firstdescents.org/
[3] http://www.firstdescents.org
[4] mailto:patientadvocates@asco.org