Community is Stronger Than Cancer

Update on Virtual Programs at Gilda’s

As COVID-19 continues to spread in Wisconsin, the staff and board of Gilda’s Club Madison are closely monitoring guidance from the CDC and the Dane County Department of Public Health. In response, the board of directors has voted to maintain virtual programs through at least April 1, 2021.

As you know, Gilda’s Club is working hard to offer valuable programming for our members. We will continue to offer programs via Zoom and phone throughout this time. Programming currently includes:

- Weekly Support Groups
- Monthly Networking Groups
- Coffee Connections - social gathering
- Yoga and Tai Chi
- Relaxation and Guided Imagery
- Cooking, drawing, journaling, and other creative outlets
- Recently re-launched child and teen support
- As well as… One-to-one counseling, Patient Advocacy, and Open to Options treatment decision planning

Our goal is to return to regular programming as soon as it is safe to do so, however, it is likely we will continue to offer some virtual programs in perpetuity. The silver lining in our virtual programming is that members who are too ill or live too far to come to the clubhouse have been able to participate.

Thanks to your support, Gilda’s Club has been able to serve our members during this challenging time and ensure the stresses caused by a cancer diagnosis are not compounded by isolation and uncertainty. Gilda’s continues to help so that no one has to face cancer alone.

“The virtual classes have been very helpful. I feel a sense of community while safe in my own home. I have participated in many classes. Each class has brought so much happiness and positivity to my life. Even when I thought I was doing okay, I realize how much I need the interaction and with others who get it.”

- Angela, Gilda’s Club Member

Weekly support groups, yoga, and art therapy are a few of the many programs continuing to be offered virtually, thanks to your support!
As I walked through these doors for the first time on the way to a Gilda’s Club New Member Meeting, I was still reeling from the recent discovery: I have cancer.

I was scared, confused, and angry that I was suddenly confronting the worst news I could imagine. My best friend had convinced me, with considerable urging, that Gilda’s Club might be able to help. She pointed out, “It’s created for people dealing with cancer. Just give it a try and see how it feels.”

The red doors led to a well-appointed home with good art everywhere. But it was the library that welcomed me right away — hundreds of books, comfy chairs, good reading light, and a fireplace.

The books tell a lot about Gilda’s Club. There aren’t specific details about the latest cancer treatments — that’s the province of your medical team and the specifics of your particular cancer — but there’s a lot of information and assistance from people who know what it’s like to be living with these and other life-changing decisions. There is also a collection of age-appropriate books and other materials for people living with their cancer or providing care and support for cancer survivors and their families.

Becoming a member of the Madison Gilda’s Club was a natural choice for me to make. Deciding if I also wanted to join a cancer support group required some additional thought. At first, the very concept of a support group didn’t sound inviting at all.

I imagined cancer people sharing sad tales, commiserating, and trying to feel better.

I quickly learned Gilda’s support groups are, thankfully, quite different from this. These weekly meetings with a specific group of cancer survivors focus on wellness and our unique challenges. Confidentiality within each group and respect for other people’s opinions are the guidelines that set the tone and scope of these meetings.

The first meeting in the support group I joined began with members welcoming me, telling me how Gilda’s benefits them, and why they keep coming back each Tuesday evening. When my turn came, I shared my name and added, “I have cancer” out loud for the first time.

Not knowing how to talk about my cancer was a significant concern. Whom do I tell? What do I say? I didn’t want my friends to drift away or become distant, avoiding “cancer” and me at the same time. I also worried about the other extreme where cancer is all my friends see, greeting me with a troubled expression and: “How are you?” instead of just saying hello.

Well-intentioned comments are always okay. But with Gilda’s Club, we have a kinship of understanding. Everyone in my group experienced similar concerns with communication and other issues. No one has to explain cancer when sharing experiences. We get it. “

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Gilda’s Run/Walk

Thank you to everyone who ran, walked, or donated (or all of the above) as a part of Gilda’s Run/Walk this year! Because of our generous supporters, Gilda’s first-ever virtual Run/Walk event was a big success, with 570 registrants and raising over $90,000 to help Gilda’s support families facing cancer. Thank you to our Presenting Sponsors: Exact Sciences, Levy Giving Fund, Orosz Properties, and Ruth’s Chris Steak House.

Ways to Support

Save the date—Giving Tuesday is December 1st! Our goal is to raise $2,500 to fund an entire year of Moving Forward, a support group that explores life after cancer. The first $1,000 in gifts will be doubled thanks to a generous match challenge donor!

A Kinship of Understanding

by Dick, Gilda’s Member & Ambassador

Anybody who paints the front doors fire engine red is expecting company.

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Everything behind the red doors echoes this fundamental difference: We get it. We can help. You do not have to face cancer alone.
Gilda’s Legacy Circle

When you leave a legacy gift to Gilda’s Club Madison, such as including us in your will, you make a lasting impact on those touched by cancer. Your gift will stay in our community and will directly support families touched by cancer in Southwest Wisconsin. When you designate Gilda’s Club Madison to receive a legacy gift of any amount, you will become a part of the Gilda’s Legacy Circle. To learn more, please contact Lindsey Dalton at lindsey@gildasclubmadison.org or (608)828-8862.

“I had been putting off my estate planning documents for a while, but finally decided a couple years ago that I needed to get those in place – in case anything happened to me, I didn’t want my family to have the added stress of determining what to do with my estate.

I had a handful of specific organizations that I wanted to include and Gilda’s Club was one of them. I’ve been a longtime volunteer with Gilda’s and truly believe in their mission that no one should face cancer alone and want that to continue even after I’m gone.”

– Lisa VanLieshout, Gilda’s Club volunteer

Red Door Society

If you are already one of our mighty Red Door Society members—thank you!

The Red Door Society is a community of loyal and generous supporters who have made a three-year philanthropic commitment to families touched by cancer. For as little as $21 a month you can join this group of people who, like you, want to ensure that no one faces cancer alone.

As you know, all of our programs are free to our members, but they are not without cost. Our Red Door Society involves making a three-year financial commitment to us. There are several different giving levels starting at $21 a month. Gifts can be paid monthly, quarterly, or annually…whatever is the most convenient for you.

Lisa VanLieshout, a longtime Gilda’s Club volunteer, shares, “I joined the Red Door Society a few years ago because I wanted to make a more substantial donation to Gilda’s Club and know where my dollars were going.”

Our Red Door Society members allow Gilda’s Club to be nimble and responsive to new needs as they arise…something that has been essential in this time of uncertainty. If you are interested in joining or learning more, please contact Lindsey Dalton at (608)828-8862 or lindsey@gildasclubmadison.org.

Upcoming Public Programs

We would love for you to join us at any or all of these upcoming public educational events. There is no cost to attend. Visit www.gildasclub-madison.org to register:

- Monday, November 16th, 3:30 pm- Advanced Care Planning. Advance care planning is one of the best gifts you can give to yourself and to your loved ones. Learn more about how you can make your own health care decisions through written and verbal communication with your medical team and family.

- Thursday, November 19th, 4:30 pm and Thursday, December 10th at 4:30 pm- When Sickness Meets Wellness: Live Your Best Life after Cancer. An educational element of Moving Forward, join us to discuss the importance of movement on your recovery, ongoing health, and emotional health. Cancer fitness expert Sami Mansfield from St. Louis will be joining us.
Art therapy has long been a part of the programming at Gilda’s Club Madison. Fortunately, these programs have been able to continue virtually.

Art therapy provides an additional way that people are able to process their cancer journey. It also provides an important outlet for people to learn a new skill or to simply take their mind off of the challenges they’re currently facing.

Kirsten explains, “Sometimes people need to focus on something entirely different...a respite. Something we can actually do and get done. It’s healing.”

The classes also have a social aspect, whether people are working on a group project or working alongside each other (even if “alongside” is virtual).

Classes have explored drawing, including a recent class on drawing eyeballs; a women’s art workshop series; guided painting; art journalling; and classes for kids.

One of our members recently shared what she was able to gain from the art journalling class: “Art journaling is a new approach to getting through the difficult times in life. I enjoyed the session; it gave me new ideas and ways of viewing the world.”

Another member, Angela, shared, “The drawing class has made me realize I am more creative than I ever thought. I have learned to be more observant. I looked through my sketchbook of what I have learned and thought ‘I’m an artist’.”

Do you want to support art therapy? Contact Lindsey at (608)828-8862 or lindsey@gildasclubmadison.org to learn how.

Artwork from two of our members who have taken art therapy classes.