

CENTER FOR BUILDING HOPE

A THRIVING COMMUNITY OF INDIVIDUALS AFFECTED BY CANCER

BY LALAENA GONZALEZ-FIGUEROA



Every person impacted by cancer has a unique story, but invariably, the collective tales follows a similar plot line. “It’s like being thrown into a foreign country where you don’t speak the language,” observes Program Director Andrea Feldmar, LMHC. “The first thing many people feel, aside from panic, is alone.” Processing volumes of information related to everything from blood count, drugs, interactions and reactions, says Andrea, is akin to trying to learn something new while hopping on one foot, blindfolded. “It’s pretty challenging and isolating,” she notes. “That’s what Center for Building Hope addresses. We reduce that overwhelming sense of isolation.”

Launched in 1994 as the Wellness Community, Center for Building Hope has evolved into an independently-run 501c3 organization that offers psycho-social support services to anyone – including patients, families and caregivers – dealing with a cancer diagnosis. All services are completely free of charge, and are thoughtfully designed to address an array of issues and needs. “We work as a team with oncologists,” explains Andrea. “Our staff is trained in the mind/body connection, and we focus on empowering our clients with the knowledge and resources they need to make the best decisions they can.”

To the surprise of many first-time visitors, Center for Building Hope (CBH) isn’t shrouded in a clinical setting. The sprawling 5-acre Lakewood Ranch campus

is a healing and aesthetically-pleasing environment featuring a Gold LEED-certified green building and outdoor spaces designed with the unique needs of cancer patients and their caregivers. “We partnered with Ringling College of Design, who provided innovative ideas for our community,” says Andrea. It’s in the details; outdoor areas such as a colorful butterfly garden and serene pond feature ample shade to protect delicate skin impacted by chemotherapy and radiation treatments. A labyrinth acts as a centering tool for those seeking to calm their minds and achieve inner peace. “Time and again, we hear people say, “This isn’t what I expected,” says Andrea. “We’re proud of that.”

CBH’s calendar of activities ensures that patients, family members and caregivers have ample opportunities to connect with others. “We make it easy to come and spend the good part of a day here,” Andrea notes. All groups are led by licensed clinicians, and emphasize evidence-based research models. “We don’t promote any specific treatments or services,” she adds. “We simply provide the education and opportunities for people to share their experiences.” Support and networking groups are specific and include communities of men; Spanish speakers; young women diagnosed in their 20s, 30s and 40s; and caregivers. Additional groups focus on grief, nutrition and exercise. Monthly networking meetings are cancer-specific, allowing members to delve into specifics relating to treatments, symptoms

and experiences. In addition to activities at its primary campus, CBH also offers outreach programs throughout the region.

With no federal or state funding, the Center for Building Hope runs on grant monies, donations and fundraising dollars. “The generosity of individual donors makes all the difference,” says Andrea. “Committing to ten dollars a month has a tremendous impact on countless lives,” she remarks. CBH has become known for its array of community events, which draw significant crowds and yield critical financial gains. “We have a great calendar of fundraisers, including our annual award-winning gala, Night of Hope.” She continues, “We love the opportunity to partner creatively with local organizations, and have put together events including tennis and golf tournaments, car shows and fashion outings, which appeal to a diverse group of individuals. They have a great time while contributing to a wonderful cause!”

Center for Building Hope will continue its mission to help enhance the quality of life for those impacted by cancer for free.

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