

Operation Ohana

2020 Annual Report



A Letter from our Co-Founders

This year has been full of the unexpected.

It was a year-ago that we launched Operation Ohana. We wanted to build something that we hadn't found elsewhere, the organization that we wished had existed when we first got our cancer diagnoses as parents of young children.

Despite the challenges we've faced - and thanks to incredible support from our family, friends, and community - we did it. And we are thrilled to report back on what a difference we have made.

This year didn't go as we planned, of course. Yet, we carried our hopes and dreams forward and kept working on meeting the needs that we could. Together, with our own families, and the families we have come to know along the way, we have built a deep and rich community through Operation Ohana.

Here's a few things that we are most proud of:

- Last year we raised money thinking we'd be able to hire staff to run our programs, but once COVID hit, we knew the right thing to do was give it away to those who really need it. We have given over \$12,000 in small grants to every person that asked for help.
- We have sent over 400 age-appropriate books on illness, health, and bereavement to families navigating a cancer diagnosis.
- We launched monthly virtual support groups for patients and survivors, forging connections that extend outside of the group.

For a long time after our respective diagnoses, we both felt like life would never be as good as it was before cancer. What we've found, instead, is that none of this is so straightforward.

Sometimes the future is simply too scary to think about and sometimes we both find ourselves full of rage at what cancer took from us. In the two-years since our respective diagnoses, we've also both learned to slow down and appreciate our kids' hugs just a little bit more. We're sad that cancer had to do it, but we're also truly grateful for the old friends turned cancer-buddies and the cancer-buddies turned new friends.

In this year of the mundane, profound, surprising, and frustrating, the community of Operation Ohana has been a bright spot --- even more so since the pandemic came into all of our lives. We know it's not necessarily the community any of us wanted to need to find, but we are endlessly glad to have it.

Thank you for helping launch Operation Ohana last year and we hope we can count on your support as we venture forward in the next year.

Haley & Aimee

Our Year in Review

We launched Operation Ohana one year ago with the simple idea that there was a need to better serve families with young children where a parent is facing a cancer diagnosis. We knew about this need from our own personal experiences - facing cancer under the age of 40, with children below school age. We'd felt so lucky to find one another while going through cancer treatment - but there was a clear lack of resources, of community, for people like us. So we decided to build it. That's how Operation Ohana started.

The initial response after our launch in November 2019 - both from people in need of support and those willing to help with donations and as volunteers - was overwhelming in the best possible way. Our launch video was viewed 4k+ times. Within our first month we'd had nearly two dozen requests for support from people all over the country facing all different types of cancer and personal circumstances. Before the end of 2019 we raised almost \$50,000.

Then COVID-19 hit.

Originally, we'd envisioned Operation Ohana building community primarily in person - through support groups and meet-ups at the park, children's therapy resources, and family-focused retreats in Hawaii. As the pandemic took hold, it became clear we weren't going to be bringing together cancer patients and survivors in person anywhere soon. But that need for community hadn't gone anywhere - if anything, it was greater than ever.

So, we made some big pivots. Right away, we decided to start a small grants program called [Ohana Cares](#), which provides financial support to families facing cancer during the pandemic. The program has been incredibly popular and so far we've granted over ten-thousand dollars in support of more than twenty families in need of help with everything from medical bills to rent to groceries.

To support kids remotely, we launched a program called [Ohana Reads](#), which provides free, age-appropriate books that deal with cancer and big emotions to young children. We also send parents a useful guide on how to talk to kids about cancer with age-appropriate examples. So far, we've sent over a hundred books to almost thirty families.

And we launched [virtual support groups](#) for survivors and partners. The benefit of going virtual was that it actually made it easier for us to serve the full breadth of our community, which includes people all across the country. We also recently launched virtual yoga, hosted an online writing retreat for parents to write therapeutically about their experiences with cancer and kids, and are offering virtual one-on-one yoga and movement for those in need of pain management support.

Like you, we also grieved the senseless killings of George Floyd, Ahmed Aubrey, Breonna Taylor and countless others. As with police violence, health disparity and inequity are issues of systemic racism. [Black cancer patients face the highest death rate of any racial group](#). Cancer doesn't discriminate and

yet it is disproportionately affecting the Black community, Black families, and Black lives. We donated one thousand dollars to the Charlotte Maxwell Clinic, which provides integrative care to low-income women free of charge - approximately seventy-five percent of their clients are African-American, Latina, and Asian. We also committed to addressing racial disparities through our own work, including by targeting outreach for our services to facilities that serve BIPOC individuals, and to enhancing diversity within our own organization's leadership.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our Board of Directors, Advisory Board, our incredible volunteer team, and our generous donors. We are 100% volunteer run, and funded by donations from friends and family across the country and around the world. As we look ahead to 2021, we are energized to build on what we've achieved this year - despite the many headwinds. We are excited to continue and expand the programs we've launched during the pandemic, including hosting more writing retreats, expanding our support group offerings, and continuing to provide Ohana Cares grants for all who qualify.

We're also looking forward to building out our resources online while we continue to operate within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes publishing a comprehensive list of resources for families facing cancer, and formally launching the Parental Cancer Therapists Network - a nation-wide database of therapists that will be available to Operation Ohana families.

And, when the time comes, we're looking forward to getting back to in person events, convenings and services - including family retreats.

One of the incredible things about having children is the opportunity to watch them grow into their own people, beyond what you as their parent ever could have imagined. Khalil Gibran said, "Your children are not your children; they are the sons and the daughters of a life's longing for itself. They come through you but they are not from you and though they are with you they belong not to you." So it has been with Operation Ohana. One year ago we never could have imagined that Operation Ohana would have achieved all it has. We're so proud of what the organization has become, what's been achieved, the community it has created, and above all, deeply humbled by and grateful to the families that have reached out and trusted us to support them during their time of great need. We've come a long way in year one. But this is just the beginning.

Mission

Operation Ohana provides young cancer survivors who are parents of small children with a safe space for individual and familial healing, recovery, and reconnection.

Why it Works

Problem

Cancer survivors with young children face unique challenges.

Rates of cancer amongst adults ages 20-49 are increasing.

Currently, statistics are not regularly kept on how many people diagnosed with cancer are young parents or guardians. However, a 2010 [study](#) estimated that approximately 562,000 U.S. minor children are living with a parent in the early phases of cancer treatment and recovery. And the [National Cancer Institute's 2019 Annual Report to the Nation](#) found that while overall cancer incidence rates for all ages have decreased, rates of cancer amongst adults 20-49 are increasing - an age range that corresponds with the years when many are becoming parents.

Few cancer resources are targeted to young parents.

Because the median age for most cancers is 60+, there are few resources available to support young survivors, especially those with young children. Of the resources that do exist for young survivors, many are focused on the very young - e.g. those in their teens and early 20s, or may be targeted to young survivors of specific cancers (e.g. breast cancer).

Young parents who are cancer survivors have unique needs.

The exhaustion and trauma of cancer impacts not only the diagnosed parent or guardian, but also their children, and the entire family unit. On a practical level, survivors may have significant support needs, e.g. meals, housekeeping, childcare, etc., but severely limited time to research how to get help. Physically, their cancer may impact specific parts of parenthood, e.g. being able to breastfeed, or simply having the energy to keep up with small kids. And, emotionally, young parents may feel significant anxiety or depression about seeing their children grow up, and anger and frustration at being “robbed” of precious time during their children’s earliest days – fleeting moments even under normal circumstances.

Operation Ohana was founded to address these challenges.

First Year at a Glance



Helping families through cancer

<https://operationohana.org/>