

SUCCESS STORIES

Surviving The Cancer Journey: One Step at a Time Survivor Luncheon

SUMMARY

The East Georgia Cancer Coalition and the Georgia Cancer Center co-sponsored a Survivor Luncheon in Augusta, Georgia during Cancer Survivor month. The program was designed to nourish the mind, body, and spirit of cancer survivors and caregivers from East Georgia by offering panel discussion and various workshops. Our goals were to honor cancer survivors, to share skills to assist survivors in their cancer journey and to aid caregivers to enhance their lives, to share local resources and how to access them, and to provide the opportunity to engage in fellowship with others, either as survivors or as their caregivers. It is important for cancer survivors and caregivers to have the opportunity to participate in a support program that is able to meet their different needs within a short period of time.



CHALLENGE

The Georgia Cancer Survivorship Workgroup survey results identified survivors' education and support needs: they wanted to learn more about wellness behaviors and they were seeking access to community resources to support themselves and their families. According to the American Cancer Society, a large portion of survivors expressed their needs related to the lack of knowledge regarding what to expect as a cancer survivor and needs relating to sharing the cancer experience with and of other survivors. Various cancer support groups play an important role in meeting those need but it takes long-term participation for survivors to benefit fully.

The emotional and cognitive needs of caregivers of cancer survivors are often forgotten and are more likely to be ignored. A 2015 study showed that a substantial percentage of caregivers also have unmet needs for support, mainly with regard to fears concerning the patient's health and physical condition, lack of medical information, and a lack of emotional support for themselves.

WHAT DID YOU THINK OF SURVIVING THE CANCER JOURNEY: ONE STEP AT A TIME SURVIVOR LUNCHEON?

From survivors –

“Best cancer program ever. Thank you.”

“I really enjoyed and would like to attend again.”

“I enjoyed meeting/fellowshipping with other survivors and hearing their story.”

“It was very helpful and fun and I have more info on cancer and how to fight it.”

From caregivers –

SOLUTION

The Survivor Luncheon provided the opportunity for survivors and caregivers to attend a series of sessions on a Saturday morning. Based on their own interests and needs, participants were able to go to different workshops including “Yoga for Coping with Cancer,” “Poetry as a Tool for Healing,” “Using Music as Self Care,” “Fighting Cancer with a Fork,” and “Healthy Habits with LIVESTRONG.” Through lectures, demonstrations and hands-on experience, participants were equipped with knowledge and strategies to implement healthy diet plans, physical activities and stress relief methods that are designed for cancer survivors. By providing lunch, live music and drawings for prizes, we created a friendly and relaxing environment where participants could communicate with other survivors, caregivers and professionals at the event.

RESULTS

Among those registered, 22 different types of cancers were represented. The combined number of survivorship years for the registrants was over 500. One hundred twenty-nine participants attended the luncheon, including survivors and caregivers.

We received positive feedback on every aspect of the luncheon from our attendees. Feedback results have shown that they agreed that the survivor stories and lectures on coping and spirituality given by the panel were informative and helpful, the workshops provided skills that they could use, and the lunch and other services were appreciated. All of them expressed the willingness to recommend this event to another survivor. The goals of this program have been achieved in terms of assisting participants to enhance their lives with new skills and resources, as well as creating a platform for developing fellowship among survivors and caregivers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We plan to continue the Survivor Luncheon program with the help of our stakeholders and local sponsors. We will incorporate suggestions from previous participants on how to improve the overall experience. Sustainability for the luncheon will be achieved through the maintenance of collaborative relationships utilized in this program in order to implement future events.

We are actively seeking sponsorships and donations to support the costs associated with the Survivors’ Luncheon and other activities targeting cancer survivors in the future.