

Bright Spot
Network 

2022

Annual Report

“

In my cancer journey, there's a "before I discovered Bright Spot" and "after I discovered Bright Spot." I'm so grateful for the resources and support I've received from Bright Spot Network."

Natalie, Bright Spot Parent



Dear Friends,

For both of us, this past year has been an opportunity to pause and take stock. We are so grateful to hear from so many in our Bright Spot community about the highs and the lows, the fears and the hopes of parenting through a cancer diagnosis. Through it all, our Bright Spot Network community has been there supporting one another.

At the heart of Bright Spot Network is the belief that no one should parent with cancer alone.

Thanks to you - our beautiful community of parents, guardians, grandparents, friends, supporters, siblings, kids, and more - more people than ever have found support through our services and programs. We've grown by leaps and bounds this past year, serving thousands of families in their hour of greatest need. At the same time, we're building organizational capacity so that we can continue to grow our impact into the future. We've hired new staff, expanded our existing programs, and launched new ones.

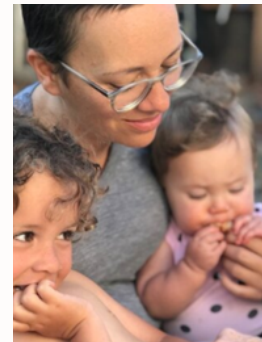
We are so proud of all that Bright Spot Network was able to accomplish this year. As we look towards the future, we are excited to build on this growth, working with each of you to deepen and strengthen the bonds of our community.

We are honored to share our annual report. It contains a snapshot of 2022 and the wonderful community that continues to inspire all of us at Bright Spot Network. It is because of you, that we have been able to touch so many families this past year. Thank you for all you do to support families who must navigate a parent or guardian's cancer diagnosis.

With gratitude,



Haley Pollack
ED and Co-Founder



Aimee Barnes
Chair and Co-Founder

2022: A Year of Growth & Expansion

Our goal for 2022 was to expand our organization and services. This past year we've grown to serve thousands of families at the time they need it most. In 2022, we:

- **Launched Bright Club and Bright Circle** for kids to bond, share, and learn while creating meaningful connections with other children who have a parent with cancer.
- **Distributed over 1,376 books and 730 art project boxes** through our Bright Reads and Bright Box programs.
- **Distributed \$112,000 in Bright Grants to 224 Bright Spot families** navigating a parent or guardian's cancer and in financial need.
- **Expanded our team**, bringing on Carissa Hodgson LCSW, OSW-C, as our Director of Programs and Community Outreach.
- **Grew our monthly virtual support groups offering over 60 hours** of virtual support group meetings.

1157

TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES SERVED

224

NUMBER OF FAMILIES THAT RECEIVED A BRIGHT GRANT

1376

BOOKS DISTRIBUTED IN THE BRIGHT READS PROGRAM

49%

% OF PARENTS WITH STAGE 4 CANCER IN OUR PROGRAMS



OUR PROGRAMS

In 2022, we launched **Bright Club** and **Bright Circle** for kids to bond, share, and learn while creating meaningful connections with other children who have a parent with cancer.

Bright Club is a monthly opportunity for kids ages 5–12 to interact with other kids who have a parent with cancer. Each month we have different themes and activities—we read books, create through art, engage in games, move through mindfulness activities, and welcome special guests!

Bright Circle is a special group for our youngest Bright Spot family members (ages 0–5 years old). We have songs, movement, and stories to help them better express their emotions... It's circle time but **BRIGHTER!**

Meet Carolyn

BRIGHT SPOT PARENT,
STAGE IV CANCER THRIVER, AND MOM OF 2

Carolyn is a social worker and has always enjoyed helping others. Caring for her two kids and navigating her own cancer diagnosis, she needed to seek help herself. Even with the support of family and friends, Carolyn didn't know how to talk to her kids or how to make sense of the active mom she was before cancer.

"I want my kids to remember me as a mom running around and not being sick. I'm scared to not be there for them and appreciate being able to talk to other parents who understand all of this. It can be a lot to carry and I'm glad to know I'm not alone. I appreciate everything Bright Spot Network has done for me and my family."

At Bright Spot Network Carolyn connected with other parents with an advanced diagnosis. She used Bright Reads books to start a conversation with her kids that she never thought she'd have. She enjoyed Bright Box activities to connect to her kids when everything felt just so heavy. Parenting with cancer can be difficult but finding community among people "who get it" can help make things a little easier.



I was diagnosed when my daughter was 7 months old. She knows cancer is something I have, that I have to go to the doctor and get lots of medicine. While participating in Bright Club, one of the intro questions was, 'who in your family has cancer?'. When the first kid said 'my mom', my daughter looked at me with such excitement. It wasn't in a 'finally someone understands me kind of way, but it was like they shared something mutually exciting kind of way. Her innocent enthusiasm made me think of cancer with a bit lighter of a heart. There is good in this dreadful disease. Genuine connection with others is part of that."

Julie, Bright Spot parent and mom of 1

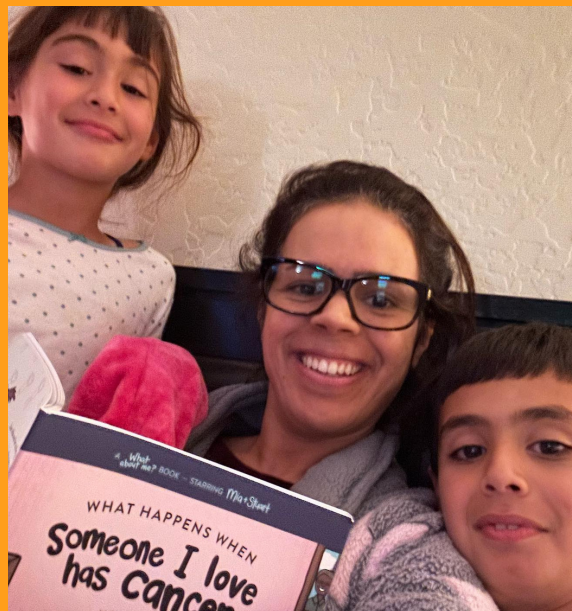
ROOTS

OUR PROGRAMS

In 2022 we distributed over 1,376 books and 730 art project boxes through our **Bright Reads** and **Bright Box** programs.

Bright Reads started in 2020, reaching 43 families in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has grown to serve 477 families in 2022! We provide free age-appropriate books on cancer, illness, feelings, grief, and loss. We know that kids have big questions about cancer. Bright Reads provide the dual gift of understanding and reconnection while helping kids process and begin to understand big life changes and the emotions that come alongside them.

Bright Spot Network and The Dolly Project partnered in 2021 to create **Bright Box**, a box of art projects curated by The Dolly Project specially designed for a parent or caregiver who is recovering from cancer treatment or surgery, created to keep kids busy while a parent is resting, or an easy activity that allows for quality time between a caregiver and child. This program has grown from serving 146 families in 2021 to 733 families in 2022, thanks to your support!



Meet Souad

STAGE III COLON CANCER SURVIVOR,
AND MOM OF 2

When Souad found out she had Stage III cancer, she told her friends and family not to tell her kids. As a recently divorced single mom, immigrant, and nursing student, she wanted to protect her kids and didn't feel like she had the words to tell her babies, "I have cancer."

Souad learned about Bright Spot Network and Bright Read's books from a social worker. When the books arrived, Souad read to herself first and discovered that the words in the books were the ones she was looking for.

"Bright Reads books gave me the courage to have the conversation I wished I didn't need to have and helped my kids understand my cancer and made it easier to say: mommy has cancer and mommy loves you."

Souad was relieved to have books that explain cancer in a way that kids understand. Books that make the mom the hero. Books that provide comfort and not fear. The conversations haven't been easy, but Souad is relieved to have the tools to talk to her kids about cancer and answer their questions if, or when, they have them.

OUR PROGRAMS

In 2022 we distributed a record amount of \$112,000 in grants to our Bright Spot Network Families through **Brigh Grants.**

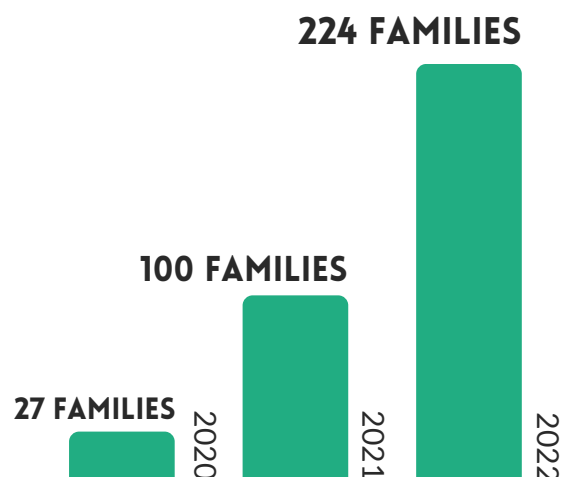
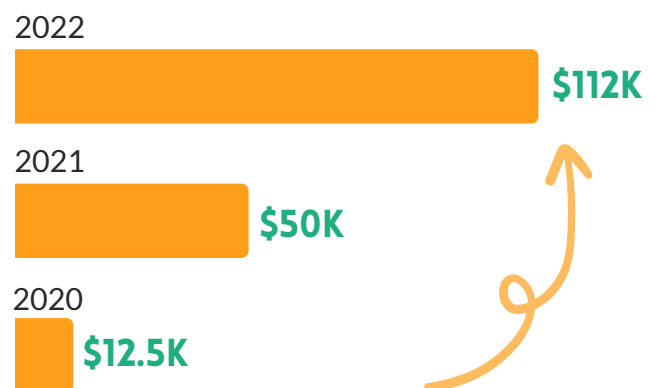
Bright Grants was first launched in March 2020, just after shelter-in-place was announced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, we were providing \$500 grants to families doubly impacted by COVID and cancer.

In 2020 we gave out 27 grants. In 2021, we distributed 100 grants, which solidified our plan to make this offering permanent.

In 2022 we proudly distributed grants to 224 families. It is widely known that the financial burden on parents facing cancer can be exorbitant and, many times, overwhelming. Whether it is the need to stop or reduce work, paying for extra childcare to accommodate doctors' appointments, or the medical bills themselves, cancer is expensive. While there are many cancer organizations that provide financial subsidies to families, our grant is unique because it is barrier-free.

\$112,000

Total amount distributed to 224 families in 2022





Thank you for the wonderful children's books and Bright Grant. Our five-year-old loves "Cancer Hates Kisses." She loves that the mom in the book is a cancer-fighting superhero like her mom and dad.

When fighting cancer while working and parenting a preschooler, it's hard to find the time or extra money to spend time as a family and/or parents' alone time. **The grant allowed for some extra caregiver time, and we also took time together as a family."**

Kristin, Bright Spot parent and mom of 1

Welcome Carissa!

Hello Bright Spot Network Community!

I am beyond excited to step into the Director of Programs and Community Outreach position with Bright Spot Network. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Oncology Social Worker with 14 years of experience working with families facing cancer. In addition to my work with BSN, I am a private psychotherapist and a Long Term Lecturer at the Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin Madison. I enjoy traveling around the country giving presentations on cancer, caregiving, grief/loss, and parenting.

I was drawn to this work because my father had lung cancer when I was 7, and my step-father had liver cancer when I was a young adult. These experiences gave me insights into what it's really like to have a parent with cancer. It is not an easy situation to navigate, and yet, I've found that most families travel through it with grace and strength. It is never something you would wish for your family. Ever. And yet, when kids are given the support they need, they thrive and learn valuable life skills.

My wife and I live in Verona, WI, with our 8-year-old son and 2 pups. When I have time to myself, I enjoy adding unique embroidery to pieces of clothing, reading post-apocalyptic novels, starting DIY home projects, and going for hikes in the prairie.

I look forward to connecting with each of you to learn more about how to make BSN the best support community for young families with cancer. I invite emails and phone calls to get to know you and listen to your specific thoughts.



Carissa Hodgson
LCSW, OSW-C

Meet our Leadership Team

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Haley Pollack
Co-Founder and
Executive Director

Aimee Barnes
Co-Founder and
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Claire Pennline

Gila Ruskin

Diana Mock

Chelsey Gomez

Monica Vasquez

“
Not only does Bright
Spot Network fill a
critical resource gap
for families facing a
parent's cancer
diagnosis but our
programs offer care
and connection for the
whole family when
they need it most.”

Orli Cotel,

Board Member



We are stronger together!

We invite you to join us in supporting young parents who are cancer survivors with a safe space for healing, recovery, and reconnection.

- **Donate** on our website or start a Facebook fundraiser.
- **Volunteer** your time to benefit the families we serve! If you are a wellness practitioner, yoga teacher or social worker, consider donating your time and expertise to our program. If you have ideas about how to bring your unique talents to our community, contact us!
- **Partner with us!** We work with local and national medical, corporate, and non-profit organizations to further our mission and help parents with cancer. Contact us to learn more.
- **Share** our programs, resources, and social media with family and friends to increase our reach and impact.



brightspotnetwork.org/donate

Thank you for your *generous support.*

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Pamela Yip Trust

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David Taylor Charitable Trust
Kate Larsen
To Celebrate Life
Trevor and Jennifer Houser

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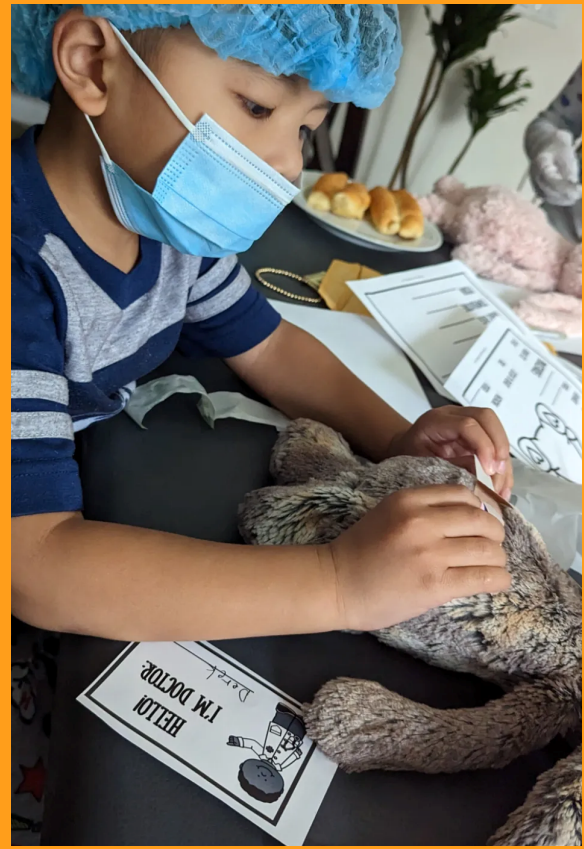
My grandmother was diagnosed with cancer when my mom was just a baby. While my grandmother underwent surgery and chemo, my mom and her brother were sent to live with my great-grandmother. That sense of abandonment and loss of connection between mother and daughter has affected her for her whole life. And the fear that cancer would once again rip our family apart has transcended generations. And that's why I support Bright Spot Network.

Kate Larsen, Bright Spot Network supporter



"The Bright Spot Network has created a needed space for parents with cancer to receive compassionate and meaningful support. Having cancer while raising small children comes with very unique challenges that often are not addressed. Bright Spot not only names these challenges, but also provides concrete support that addresses day-to-day struggles. Many of my patients have shared that Bright Spot is the first place they turned where they really felt understood and did not need to explain themselves. I am so grateful for Bright Spot and will continue to share information about this amazing program with patients and colleagues."

Frances Ford, LCSW and BSN Supporter



Thank you to all our donors and volunteers!

Follow our journey and help us
spread the word about our work.



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