



Mission of Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance

The mission of Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance is to provide emotional, educational, and practical support to families of children with cancer.

Brief History of Candlelighters

Candlelighters CCFA began in 1989 with two parent support groups from the Houston Medical Center: one at Texas Children's Cancer Center and one at MD Anderson Cancer Center. The Texas Children's Hospital group sought formal incorporation, and in 1992 Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance was legally formed. In the fall of 1992, they invited the MD Anderson Parent Group to join them and the two organizations merged into one.

The Parent Consultant Program was developed to directly meet the needs of families at the treatment centers and to inform them of potential resources and help through Candlelighters. Our programs and services extend beyond the hospital walls with our Family Camp, Adopt-A-Family, Fall Festival, quarterly newsletter, and other special events.

The Parent Consultant ("PC") position is unique because the PC is also a parent of a child who has or had cancer and understands firsthand what a childhood cancer diagnosis means to the child, the parent and the entire family unit. This unique program has grown to include four parent consultants serving childhood cancer families at MD Anderson Cancer Center Pediatrics and Texas Children's Cancer Center.

Over the years, we have learned how critically valuable it is for our Parent Consultants to be able to personally hand parents of children with cancer practical assistance such as a meal pass, parking pass, phone card, or gas card. The incredible relief and emotional support in this small act of practical help is priceless to the childhood cancer family in need during their most difficult and darkest hour. It is our greatest honor and privilege to bring this type of comfort to childhood cancer families when stress is so high, and they feel so helpless.

No family has to face childhood cancer alone.

A childhood cancer diagnosis is devastating to families. Treatment requires months and usually years of therapy with many children who relapse facing five or more years of treatment. Even with insurance coverage, unexpected non-medical expenses add additional stress and hardship to the family budget. This is why Candlelighters focuses on practical, emotional, and educational needs of children with cancer and their families. Childhood cancer families receiving treatment in the Houston-area pediatric cancer centers are eligible for our programs and services.

Candlelighters Programs and Services

Candlelighters Childhood Cancer Family Alliance provides emotional, educational and practical support to families of children with cancer. Candlelighters partners with families and shares their journey as they battle the disease and the tremendous financial burden they inherit immediately upon diagnosis. We offer all our programs and services free of charge to our families.

Candlelighters Services

Candlelighters' Parent Consultant Program was developed to directly meet the needs of families at the treatment centers and to inform them of potential resources and help through Candlelighters. Each Candlelighters Parent Consultant is a staff member who had or has a child with cancer and knows what it is like to be the custodial parent of a child with cancer. The Parent Consultant provides emotional support, educational support and practical support to families being treated at the Texas Medical Center. This unique program consists of five parent consultants serving childhood cancer families at Children's Memorial Hermann, MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital, and Texas Children's Cancer Center. ***In 2020, our five Parent Consultants provided more than 5,300 hours of support to 4,255 childhood cancer families.***

Candlelighters Newsletter is distributed several times a year to all families, as well as community supporters. Our newsletter features educational information for families such as articles on school issues, emotional support, research updates and other resources for childhood cancer families. The newsletter connects all our families with a calendar of events and happenings, articles from long-term survivors and patients on treatment, memorials, and photos and articles of interest to our families, our sponsors and our donors. ***In 2020, Candlelighters published one hard copy newsletter that was distributed to more than 7,000 households and businesses as well as a digital newsletter that was distributed to more than 7,200 households and businesses.***

Gas Gift Cards for use at major gas stations are available. Coupled with parking fees, the costs of actually traveling to the hospital, especially on multiple days and weeks, can become a struggle for many of our families. In many instances, one parent accompanies the child, while the other parent arrives at the hospital after work –doubling the gas and parking costs. In 2020, we distributed 200 gas gift cards. Grocery Gift Cards for use at major grocery stores are available for Candlelighters families. Whether families need for grocery expenses or pharmacy, Candlelighters provides grocery gift cards to help with costs for childhood cancer families. ***In 2020, we distributed 57 gas gift cards, and 200 grocery gift cards.***

Meal Passes for hospital cafeteria food are available to childhood cancer families when leaving the hospital to get food is not an option. Patients' meals are taken care of while the child is in the hospital, however, the meals of the parents staying with the children or the young siblings at the hospital are not taken care of. Help with meal passes for the hospital cafeteria is vital to the parents who stay with their child 24 hours a day. This becomes a costly burden over the weeks and months. Also, food is not provided while the patient is in clinic. These passes are used primarily for families who are in-patient for long time periods. ***In 2020, we provided 230 meal passes.***

Memorial Fund for assistance of funeral related expenses. The funeral assistance is paid directly to a funeral home in one of the 13 counties served by Candlelighters. ***In 2020, Candlelighters assisted 16 families with funeral expenses.***

Parking Validations are available to pay part of, if not all of the parking expenses during hospital stays or clinic visits for childhood cancer families. Following the emotional support provided by Candlelighters, parking assistance continues to be the top practical need requested from our families. To a parent who stays with an ill child for weeks, even months, paying for parking can become a tremendous financial burden. Parking vouchers are distributed by Candlelighters Parent Consultants both in person, and digitally. ***In 2020, we supplied 4,450 parking validations.***

Toiletry bags are available for families who are in the hospital and need personal toiletry items. Families often arrive at the hospital after an emergency or following a doctor visit and are not prepared for a hospital stay. Candlelighters provides personal toiletry items needed for that unexpected stay. ***In 2020, we supplied more than 300 toiletry bags.***

Candlelighters Programs

Adopt A Family for the Holidays provides hope, support and practical help to families during the holiday season. Sponsors are provided the unique opportunity to be directly matched with childhood cancer families and personally deliver gifts to their family. ***In 2020, a total of 219 families, or 1,087 family members, were adopted.***

Candlelighters Cares provides meals and treats to staff at our partner hospitals: Children's Memorial Hermann, MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital and Texas Children's Cancer Center (Medical Center, West Campus, and Woodlands Campus). Candlelighters is fortunate to have such a strong relationship with our partner hospitals, with the opportunity to be directly integrated into the patient care philosophy at these world-renowned pediatric cancer programs. In a year where medical staff were needed more than ever, we are proud to have been able to continue this program through the COVID-19 pandemic. ***In 2020, a total of 1,300 meals/treats were provided for nurses, doctors, and administrative staff, as well as 300 snack bags at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.***

Camp CLIFF (Children Loved In Families Forever) a unique camp that includes the entire family, providing a weekend away from cancer. In normal years this is a physical, no boundary camp facility – but in 2020, we had to get creative! Candlelighters developed a Camp-At-Home Camp CLIFF experience for our families like no other. Families enjoyed all the experiences of Camp CLIFF from the safety of their own home – a flameless campfire craft, popping up tents in their living rooms or backyards, scavenger hunts and more! Families were able to connect virtually through our private Facebook group and on Zoom calls that spanned the camp weekend. Camp is provided at no charge to Candlelighters families. ***In 2020, we hosted 30 families for our virtual Camp CLIFF, a total of 120 campers were provided with all the materials, crafts, and activities they needed for a weekend of camping.***

Parent Support Group Meetings at MD Anderson are held every Wednesday at the Children's Cancer Hospital at MD Anderson from 11:30 am - 1:00 pm, Family Room, 9th Floor, Alkek Hospital. In 2020, our Parent Consultants were asked to take a leave of absence from the hospital due to COVID-19 hospital restrictions, and our support groups were moved to the virtual world and held via Zoom. Fortunately,

this actually allowed for our support group meetings to grow, as parents could access the meetings from their child's hospital room AND from their own homes. ***In 2020, our MD Anderson Parent Consultants led 50 parent support group meetings.***

Parent Support Group Meetings Texas Children's Hospital are held every Wednesday at Texas Children's Hospital from 1 – 2 pm, West Tower Ronald McDonald Kitchen, 9th floor. In 2020, our Parent Consultants were asked to take a leave of absence from the hospital due to COVID-19 hospital restrictions, and our support groups were moved to the virtual world and held via Zoom. Fortunately, this actually allowed for our support group meetings to grow, as parents could access the meetings from their child's hospital room AND from their own homes. ***In 2020, our Texas Children's Parent Consultants led 50 parent support group meetings.***

Sporting Event Tickets are provided to Candlelighters families when available to allow for families to make memories and enjoy time together. Oftentimes, childhood cancer families, especially those with children on treatment, have a severe lack of family time. Candlelighters partners with the local sports teams and other sponsors and is often able to send families to sporting events free of charge. Opportunities such as this are a much-needed respite for childhood cancer families and a highlight during their treatment period and beyond. ***In 2020, we were able to send 119 Candlelighters family members to socially distanced Houston Texans games, and feature 15 kids as virtual fans during Astros games, and 5 kids as virtual fans during Texans games.***

Senior Surprises was a program created in 2020 to celebrate the senior class who was missing out on so many senior traditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ***In 2020, we celebrated the accomplishments of 39 High School Seniors with a graduation gift.***

Summer Surprises is an event Candlelighters holds each summer at Texas Children's and MD Anderson Hospitals. Volunteers deliver gifts to children in the hospital or at the clinic. Usually these are large events that enable Candlelighters staff and volunteers to be able to hand out gifts and sweets to all of the childhood cancer patients and their siblings at the hospitals, bringing "holiday" cheer in the middle of summer to children undergoing treatment at the cancer centers; however, as with everything in 2020, this looked very different. We relied on hospital staff to directly partner with us to hand out Summer Surprises to in-patient children. ***In 2020, we delivered gifts to 46 children with cancer in the hospitals and clinics.***

Candlelighters Summer Zoom Series was created in 2020 to meet our families where they were: in isolation as the world shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Candlelighters partnered with friends and sponsors to bring fun, interactive activities and personalities directly to the homes of our childhood cancer families. We had calls for parents and kids alike that included: meet & greets with local sports heroes (Astros, Texans and Dynamo players held Q&A sessions), a NASA Astronaut, magician, art classes and more! ***In 2020, more than 213 kids participated across our 15 kid/family Zoom calls, and more than 94 parents participated across our 6 parent Zoom calls.***

As a result of a generous grant we received, we were also able to provide Texas Children's Hospital West Campus with a roaming gaming system to be used as an interactive therapy for both clinic and in-patient children in 2020. This gaming system is able to support multiple children each and every day.