



KESEM STRATEGIC PLAN | 2026-2028

Magic Ahead



LETTER FROM OUR CEO & BOARD CO-CHAIRS

Kesem is reaching more children than ever – and the magic continues to grow. We are committed to ensuring no child faces cancer alone.

As Kesem celebrates its 25th anniversary, we are filled with gratitude for the incredible impact we’ve created together. Since our earliest days, the magic of Kesem has touched the lives of over 90,000 children impacted by a parent’s cancer, and the need for our programs has never been more urgent.

Kesem touches hearts. For parents, the burden on children when cancer disrupts family life is unimaginable. For those affected personally or through a loved one, we have witnessed the heart-wrenching struggles children face – and the power of support to transform their lives.

Magic comes alive at Kesem. Every moment is carefully crafted with input from the cancer community, ensuring that our programs are grounded in the best practices for child well-being. Kesem programs bring children joy, connection, and healing. Our 5,000+ college volunteers make it possible, giving their time, compassion, and leadership year after year. They help children thrive while building invaluable empathy, resilience, and leadership skills that last a lifetime – passing the torch to the next generation every year.

Kesem is growing – and the magic is spreading. We are committed to ensuring no child faces cancer alone. Guided by our four strategic pillars – Expand Kesem’s Impact, Empower Our Volunteers, Welcome New Families, and Rally Resources for Impact – we’re reaching more children, empowering more volunteers, and bringing Kesem’s joy and support to new communities nationwide.

Thank you for being part of Kesem’s extraordinary community. By sharing our mission, opening your networks, and providing financial support, you transform the lives of children and families facing cancer – bringing Kesem’s magic, **always free**, to every child and family who needs it most.

With gratitude and optimism,

Jay Stilwell
Chief Executive
Officer, Kesem
Kesem Parent &
Former Board Chair

Neha Biggs
Co-Chair,
Board of Directors
Kesem Parent &
Longtime Supporter

Jerry Katz
Co-Chair, Board
of Directors
Board Member
Since 2003

KESEM IN NUMBERS

90,000+
children
supported
since our
founding

99%
would
recommend
Kesem to
other
families

41
states with
Kesem
programs
and
available to
all virtually

165
locations
across the
country

5,000+
active
college
student
volunteers
each year

200,000+
lives
impacted
by Kesem's
programs

KESEM IN STORIES

KESEM PARENT

"My three children came home from Kesem with joy and contentment in their hearts. They have been home one week, and I have not seen this level of peace within them since before my husband's diagnosis. Thank you, Camp Kesem."

KESEM COUNSELOR

"Without Kesem, I wouldn't have had all of these opportunities to grow as a person and a leader. I found myself through Kesem and, more importantly, I found the person I want to continue to be."

"The best week of my life. I have been multiple times and every time I go I am able to enjoy life, be a kid, and also process my feelings with kids who have gone through the same thing as me. You guys give me hope and make me feel like I can get through anything."

KESEM CAMPER

"I first heard about Kesem from a friend and colleague. As I've learned more about the incredible mission and seen the enormous impact on families, I've been inspired to increase my support and spread the word about Kesem's life-changing programs."

KESEM DONOR

THE NEED

More than five million children in the United States have a parent who is living with or has died from cancer. These children often face anxiety, stress, isolation, and grief, without the support systems to address their needs.

The need for Kesem is urgent. Cancer is being diagnosed at younger ages, and many parents are raising children later in life. As a result, the number of children navigating their parent's cancer diagnosis is growing.

According to a recent global study*, early-onset cancer diagnoses have increased nearly 80% in the past 25 years. Cancer-related deaths in young adults have risen by 27%*. These statistics paint a stark picture, and they also motivate us to act.

*<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39434099/>

**<https://www.cancer.gov/news-events/cancer-currents-blog/2025/early-onset-cancer-research-environment-genetics-support>

"When my wife got sick, I never realized that I needed an organization like Kesem. I'm grateful the nurse at the hospital suggested Kesem. I can't imagine my kid's childhood without this community."

KESEM PARENT



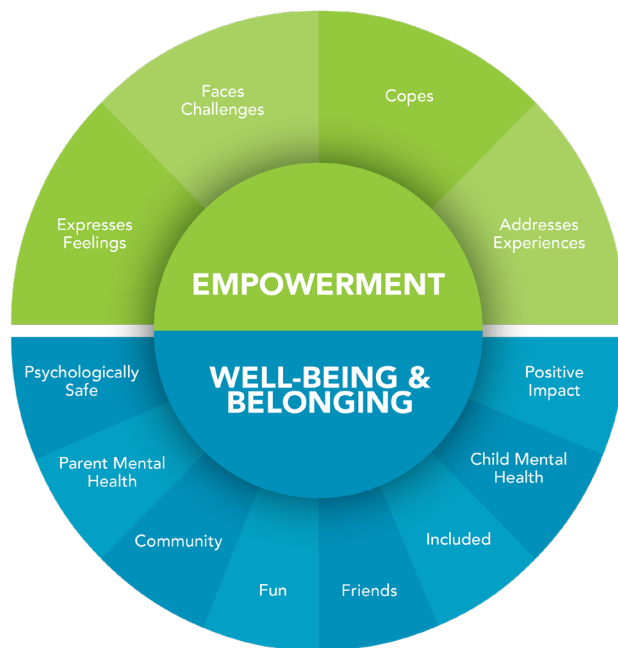
Kesem was shown to play a critical role in enhancing quality of life by offering peer connection, emotional expression, recreational activities, and a sense of normalcy and empowerment in the face of family illness.

CLINICALLY PROVEN BENEFITS

Camp Kesem creates measurable psychological benefits. In a rigorous statistical analysis by experts at **Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center at Georgetown University**, Kesem was shown to play a critical role in enhancing quality of life by offering peer connection, emotional expression, recreational activities, and a sense of normalcy and empowerment in the face of family illness.

Children who attended Camp Kesem benefited psychologically and felt they belonged in therapeutic ways, including by having fun and making new friends; they also felt empowered by being more confident when facing challenges.

Psychological Benefits of the Kesem Experience



*Analysis of Kesem's annual camp evaluation data (2021-2024)

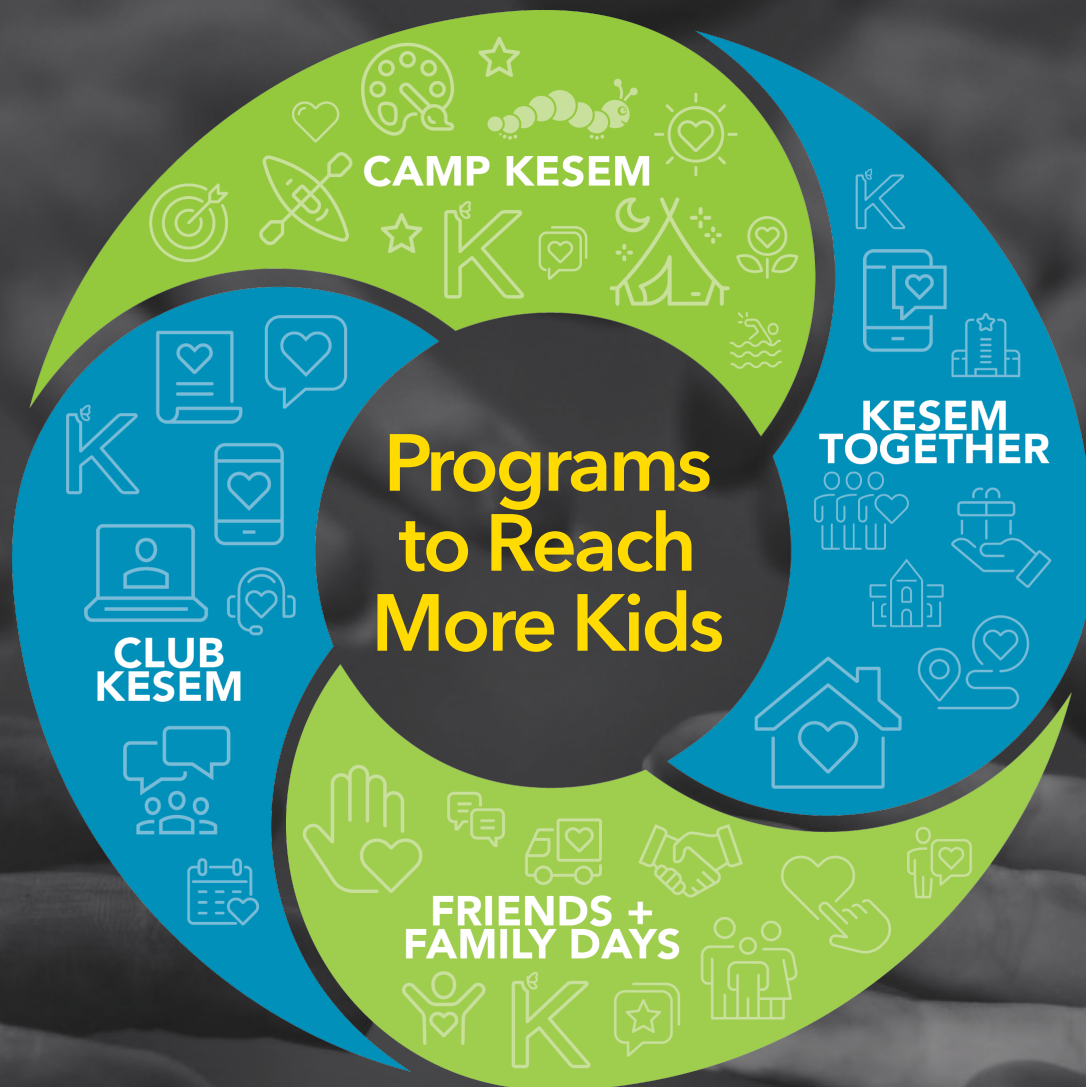
**GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY**

**Lombardi Comprehensive
Cancer Center**

“The findings underscore the significant and positive impact of the Kesem experience on children’s psychological resilience, particularly in fostering well-being, belonging, and empowerment, which translate into meaningful behavioral outcomes.”

Kenneth P. Tercyak, PhD, Lead Evaluator and Professor of Oncology, Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Georgetown University and Marcelo Sleiman, Jr., BA, CPPN, Program Manager, Interventions for Managing Parenting and Cancer Team (IMPACT) & Research Operations Manager, Cancer Prevention and Control Program at Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center

KESEM PROGRAMMING: MORE THAN CAMP



CAMP KESEM

Camp Kesem, Kesem's flagship program, is a free, week-long overnight summer camp. Kesem campers grow confident and form lasting bonds through joyful, creative experiences and adventures – empowering them to cope with a parent's cancer.

KESEM TOGETHER

Kesem Together programs are day programs offered through partnerships with organizations such as cancer centers, nonprofits, and conferences that allow Kesem to expand its reach to support more children and build stronger relationships within our communities.

FRIENDS + FAMILY DAYS

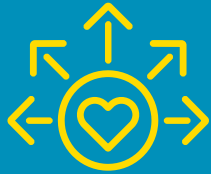
Friends + Family Days are excellent ways to get connected – and stay connected – with other families while enjoying fun activities, celebration, and community building with Kesem volunteer college students and alumni.

CLUB KESEM

Club Kesem brings compassion and technology together to create transformative experiences for children navigating a parent's cancer. Monthly online meet-ups offer a supportive community where kids can connect, share, and build resilience.

STRATEGY TO GROW OUR IMPACT

Every child affected by a parent's cancer deserves access to the life-changing magic of Kesem. To achieve this, we are prioritizing four strategic pillars that will guide our efforts and expand our impact.



STRATEGIC PILLAR 1:

Expand Kesem's Impact

Serve more children and families with Kesem's life-changing programs



STRATEGIC PILLAR 2:

Empower Our Volunteers

Inspire and equip our passionate volunteers to make a lasting difference in children's lives



STRATEGIC PILLAR 3:

Welcome New Families

Ensure all families impacted by a parent's cancer can access Kesem's transformative programs



STRATEGIC PILLAR 4:

Rally Resources for Impact

Secure financial resources to expand programs and provide access to all families



STRATEGIC PILLAR 1:



EXPAND KESEM'S IMPACT

Serve more children and families

with Kesem's life-changing programs.

Across the country, more than 5 million children are affected by a parent's cancer. Today, Kesem serves just over 10,000 – a fraction of the children who need support. To serve more children, we must scale all of our programs – Camp Kesem, Kesem Together, Friends + Family Days, and Club Kesem – and ensure that every family has access to offerings that fit their needs.

Grow our programs to reach 50% more children

Over the next three years, we are committed to bringing the magic of Kesem to significantly more children. We will grow by expanding capacity at our chapters, launching additional sessions of camp in high-demand areas, and offering Kesem in new locations with unmet needs.

Expand our program options to support different needs and interests

We will grow our year-round programs and virtual offerings to reach a wider population, increase engagement, and enhance the year-round Kesem experience, ensuring more families benefit from the magic of Kesem.

Continue to deliver the highest quality programming

Every Kesem experience – from campfires to virtual connections – is designed with input from families, mental health professionals, and cancer community leaders. We will maintain the highest standards across our programs and improve them with expert guidance.



STRATEGIC PILLAR 2:



EMPOWER OUR VOLUNTEERS

Inspire and equip our passionate volunteers

to make a lasting difference in children's lives.

Kesem is a leadership incubator. Over 5,000 college students give their time, skills, and compassion to support children during the hardest moments of their lives, creating spaces of joy, healing, and deep friendships. Through Kesem, countless young leaders gain formative experience managing peers, budgets, and operational plans. The empathy and leadership skills they develop stay with them long after camp.

Invest in volunteers to enable their transformative impact on children and families

Provide hands-on training, mentorship, and support that empowers volunteers to lead with empathy, deliver safe and inclusive programming, and create lasting impact in the lives of Kesem children and families.

Prepare Kesem volunteers to make a difference throughout their lives and careers

Enhance leadership development pathways that empower student leaders to grow both personally and professionally – equipping them with enduring skills in management, communication, teamwork, organization, and beyond.

Build a lasting alumni network to strengthen and sustain Kesem

Foster a strong community of Kesem alumni who remain connected through mentorship, service opportunities, fundraising, and leadership roles – creating a powerful, multi-generational network that continues to fuel Kesem's mission.

KESEM DEVELOPS LEADERS

Lifelong Leadership Skills
reported by volunteers

EMPATHY
TEAMWORK

DECISION MAKING

INITIATIVE
CRITICAL THINKING

LEADERSHIP
COMMUNICATION

PUBLIC SPEAKING

DIVERSITY

IMPACT

EQUITY

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

TIME MANAGEMENT
INCLUSION

FUNDRAISING

"I was a camper for 10 years before becoming a counselor, so Kesem has had an impact on me for a long time. I have learned so much about myself and my leadership throughout my years at Kesem, and I've learned so much about working with people of all ages, which is an incredibly important skill to have as I look toward my future career."

COLLEGE STUDENT VOLUNTEER

"Kesem changed my life for the better. It taught me to look beyond myself and how to be even more empathetic and understanding. I learned how to fundraise and form professional relationships with those around me."

COLLEGE STUDENT VOLUNTEER

SPOTLIGHT: FROM CAMPERS TO FOUNDERS

Expanding Kesem's Reach in Southwest Texas



In 2018, five girls sat side by side in the Orange Unit at Camp Kesem Texas A&M – laughing, healing, and building lifelong friendships in the face of their shared experience: a parent's cancer. Today, those same five – Alysen "Bandana," Sadie "Kitkat," Kamille "Chameleon," Brittany "Junebug," and Lacy "Blue" – are channeling that bond into something bigger. In 2025, they launched a brand new Kesem chapter at Texas State University, hosting Kesem's new Kesem Together programs.

Fueled by their own journeys as campers, they are determined to bring Kesem's magic to families in Southwest Texas – an area that has never had access to Kesem before. They're especially passionate about offering Kesem Together, knowing firsthand how even one afternoon of connection can be life-changing.

What began as healing for this group is now a national Kesem program that reaches more children. Their story is a powerful reminder: when we invest in young leaders and expand intentionally, the impact grows far beyond one week of camp.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3:



WELCOME NEW FAMILIES

Ensure all families impacted by a parent's cancer

can access Kesem's transformative programs.

Kesem exists to support all children impacted by a parent's cancer, but many families and communities don't yet know about us or aren't sure they can access our programs. We are committed to ensuring every child can experience the magic of Kesem by building awareness, eliminating barriers, and fostering inclusion.

Strengthen early connections to families

By forming collaborative relationships with cancer centers, school systems, and community-based organizations, we can ensure that families hear about Kesem early in their cancer journey and that they understand how our programs can support their children throughout the year.

Expand outreach to new communities

We will grow enrollment by reaching families in historically underserved communities. Amplifying awareness through tailored outreach and local partners, such as nonprofit organizations and school counselors, will ensure families of all backgrounds feel seen and included.

Eliminate barriers to participation

We will make it easier for families to say "yes" to Kesem by continuing to address logistical challenges and prioritizing the onboarding experience for new families. We will also work to eliminate any financial barriers that may limit participation in our community.



STRATEGIC PILLAR 4:



RALLY RESOURCES

Secure financial resources to expand programs and provide access to all families.

At Kesem, every gift is more than a donation – it’s a commitment to a future where no child faces a parent’s cancer without a supportive community that lets them be a kid. It’s a commitment to the power of young leaders creating lasting change and to healing through laughter, friendship, and understanding. Kesem is accessible and 100% free thanks to the shared commitment of our supporters.

Maximize the use of Kesem’s resources toward mission and impact

Our commitment to donors includes the intentional use of every dollar entrusted to us. We will continue strengthening operational efficiency to ensure resources are aligned with what matters most: direct support for children, volunteers, and chapter growth.

Show supporters how their contributions transform lives

We will bring supporters even closer to the heart of Kesem by sharing powerful stories, data-driven impact, and real-time insights into how their gifts make a difference for the children and families we serve and the student leaders we develop.

Leverage grassroots fundraising to sustain Kesem’s impact

Grassroots fundraising is core to Kesem’s model. As part of their leadership training, our 5,000 college student volunteers become master fundraisers, which generates critical resources and builds a sense of ownership and connection within local communities, allowing Kesem to thrive and expand its reach.

SPOTLIGHT: CAROLINE "CONGO" HUANG, KESEM ALUMNI

Kesem has been a constant in my life for nearly 20 years. In 2006, founding MIT's chapter began as a wonderful way to honor my parental grandparents, who both died of cancer. In 2024, I became a (grown-up) kid affected by a parent's cancer when my father was successfully treated for prostate cancer. In between, I have spent thousands of hours volunteering with Kesem in different capacities, including as a chapter director, Camp Advisor, Hotline Operator, Advisory Board member, and National Alumni Leadership Board member.

While volunteering with Kesem has always been about helping families in need, it also laid the groundwork for my professional life. My PhD in Public Health was funded through a Rhodes Scholarship, an opportunity made possible because of leadership skills developed through Kesem. My thesis examined access to care for breast cancer gene mutations, a topic inspired by Kesem families. And in my current role as a senior advisor at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, I work to prevent drug overdoses and reduce deaths, drawing on my Kesem experience with stakeholder outreach and strategic planning.



While I don't know what the next 20 years will bring, I do know Kesem will be an integral part of them, both personally and professionally.





FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

Our ability to achieve the bold goals outlined in this plan depends on key enablers that strengthen every part of our work. These are the cross-cutting investments that ensure we can serve more children, support more volunteers, and drive greater impact.

Clinically Informed

Kesem will continue to engage with industry experts and research in the fields of public health, oncology, child development, and social work to design experiences that support children through uncertainty, stress, and traumatic loss. Each element of our programs leverages age-appropriate strategies to help children cope, build resilience, and heal.

User-Centered Design

By elevating feedback and prioritizing the lived experiences of those we serve, Kesem will remain responsive, relevant, and rooted in community needs. We continually engage children, caregivers, and our volunteers to improve the Kesem experience and meet the complex and changing needs of the children and families we serve.

Technology as an Accelerator

We will utilize digital tools and platforms and build infrastructure that streamlines operations, expands program access, and enables deeper, more personalized engagement with families, volunteers, and supporters. From improving the registration experience to advancing data collection and decision-making tools, technology will be a catalyst for growth.

Culture of Belonging

At Kesem, kids join an understanding community where they feel like they belong. We will continue to foster a welcoming environment where every child, volunteer, and staff member feels seen, heard, and valued. We will embed these principles across family outreach and recruitment, program design, training, and leadership development.

“As a first-time family with Kesem... A counselor not only took the time to talk to me and answer my questions but was genuinely excited to meet my children. It was heartwarming.”

KESEM PARENT

“Thanks to the incredible volunteers at Kesem, my daughter was able to experience the magic of camp without any financial burden. Their dedication made this experience possible, and I am forever grateful for the joy and healing they brought to our family.”

KESEM PARENT

JOIN US AND MAKE AN IMPACT

Thank you for engaging with our 2026-2028 Strategic Plan. Whether you've been part of our journey since the beginning or just joined the Kesem community, we are grateful and hope you feel inspired to help bring Kesem magic to more children. We invite you to join us as we make a lasting impact, expanding our reach, strengthening our community, and creating brighter futures for children and families. Every action matters.

Together we can ensure no child has to face a parent's cancer alone.

Donate

Your gift helps keep Kesem free for families. It supports camp meals, transportation, mental health professionals, counselor training, year-round programming, and more.

Volunteer

From college campuses to corporate offices, Kesem volunteers make our mission possible. Join a chapter, lend your expertise, or serve as a mentor.

Refer Families

Know a family impacted by a parent's cancer? Connect them with Kesem at kesem.org.

Fundraise

Host an event, join Team Kesem, launch a birthday campaign, or rally your workplace. Every dollar makes a difference.

Partner

Collaborate with us through in-kind donations, grant funding, or strategic alliances. Together, we can expand access and deepen our impact.



kesem[®]

A child's friend through and beyond a parent's cancer.

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