2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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What Gilda’s Club Means to Me

Going to Gilda’s club has been extremely transformative for my family and I during my mom’s cancer treatment. This club has truly created a safe space to discuss the emotional effects of cancer and connect to other people who were going through similar journeys. It was very comforting to be around people who truly understood and cared for one another. One activity that I really enjoyed in particular was when we wrote journaling entries about how our loved one’s cancer had made us angry. We had made art about our feelings instead of just writing them. It was a great outlet to let all the rage and frustration out, because often that anger gets turned inward into depression when it is not properly released. I definitely have learned a lot of terms and more of what cancer puts my mom through. I had learned about the different cancer treatments and how to prepare myself while my mother was down. I got an understanding of what my mother was going through during her time of Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Gilda's group also provided a lot of memorable experiences to meet other people and just have fun which helped me to forget the stress of my mom’s cancer. I loved when we had the experience of going to the horse farm and riding horses. It was so freeing and made me realize how therapeutic horses are. These experiences have truly helped me continue to get out of bed and want to do things with others. It kept me motivated to want to try new things during a time where it was hard too because cancer played a big role in my moms life as well as ours. Cancer affects people financially, so having to be a part of a group where they provide for you it was refreshing. Since the Gilda’s group I discovered a new interest and passion in something other than my phone. I also appreciate how truly generous the Gilda’s Club has always been. They truly wanted to figure out ways to help my mother as she couldn’t be there for me enough as she wanted to. While trying to be there for my mom and balance school, my grades started to slip during my mom’s chemotherapy. They told us how Gilda’s group had offered me free tutoring, and eventually my grades were improved being on a schedule. It helped me take time to focus on other things. Gilda’s group also gave my younger sister books about cancer which really helped her to understand her emotions and relate to other kid’s stories whose parents also have cancer. They also made wonderful meals every Tuesday so that we could all enjoy and eat together. As well as beautiful decorated cupcakes that were made every Tuesday so we could have something to look forward to. After our night of discussing and coming together as a group. It helped my mom feel less stressed about what food was going to be on the table for my family as she was sick and couldn’t provide like she used to. Gilda’s Club made it a point to show kindness to families who were too weak or sick to cook for their families which truly helped us a lot. While going every Tuesday it created a routine for us to get us back on track. We got to sit down and enjoy each other's company while also being safe and distant from unknowing germs that were easily catched and could affect my mom even worse. It was so nice to see others while my mom was undergoing chemotherapy, especially during covid when we had to isolate and couldn’t see many people during this time.

When going through something everyone needs a support system during hard times especially when a parent or loved one gets diagnosed with something as life altering as cancer. Gilda’s Club was that support system for me and my sister. I felt like that saying where “whatever happens in here stays in here,” because they are comforting people and want to make a safe place. I am so beyond thankful for the Gilda’s Club, and the kindness, generosity, and support that they showed me and my family during an incredibly scary time. They were and continue to be there for us. This group has definitely shown me how to care for others more. It as well showed me how to appreciate life, that others around me are here for me and relate to my situation. Besides my moms cancer I am glad that my mom found out about this group. Or else I would have never met the people or got to have someone to talk to besides my mom.