

# AYA NEWSLETTER

Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Program Newsletter

February 2019

## JENNIFER'S STORY

I was suddenly thrown into the world of cancer in 2013, a month after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, when I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Lymphoma. I realized I was not the typical patient at Princess Margaret on my very first day of chemotherapy. I was setting up my hospital bed when a well-meaning hospital porter mentioned that it was very nice of me to accompany my mother to her chemo appointment. The reality was that because I was young, I was different. I wasn't what people pictured when they thought of a cancer patient.

Just before my diagnosis I had finished my first semester of university, was making friends, and had finally gotten used to living away from home for the first time. My cancer diagnosis completely disrupted it all. My two-and-a-half-year chemotherapy treatment meant that I had to withdraw from university, move out of my residence and leave behind my new-found independence. When I was first diagnosed, my first thoughts were on how I would ever get back on track with my education and how to tell my boyfriend of six months that I had cancer. These concerns were not what my doctors were used to dealing with because most of their patients were much older and had different issues.

I always thought that undergoing treatment would be difficult, but what surprised me most were not the medical and physical challenges of treatment, but the psychological aspects. When it came to my chemotherapy and hospital visits, there was always a plan, but in terms of how my cancer would impact my life outside of the hospital, I often felt like I had no answers. That's when I started looking up ways to connect to other young adults with cancer.

After lots of searching on the internet, I came across the organization [Young Adult Cancer Canada](#), and worked up the courage to attend one of their Localife events. I was shocked to find that all of the other survivors were dealing with the exact same issues as me. They all just "got it" and suddenly I went from feeling isolated and alone, to feeling somewhat normal for the first time in over a year.

From that point on I made it my mission to make more health professionals aware of how different it is to be a young adult with cancer, and the power of age-appropriate supports. Near the end of my treatment I worked out a way to return to school part-time, graduated only a few years behind my friends and was accepted into medical school at U of T. When I found out that an AYA program was created soon after I finished treatment at Princess Margaret, I decided to volunteer. I wished this program existed when I was a patient. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to hopefully make other young adults' cancer journey a little bit better.

After everything I have been through, cancer was definitely the worst thing to ever happen to me. But in a way, it was also the best. It taught me a lot about who I am as a person and what I want from life. It gave me the opportunity to meet so many amazing survivors who I call friends and helped direct me to the career path that I'm on today. It was definitely a tough road that disrupted my life more than I ever could have imagined. But ultimately, I don't think I would be where I am today if I never had cancer.



*"The reality was that because I was young, I was different. I wasn't what people pictured when they thought of a cancer patient."*



Adolescent and  
Young Adult Program

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 [ayaprogram\\_uhn](https://www.instagram.com/ayaprogram_uhn)

 [AYA Program at Princess Margaret](https://www.facebook.com/AYAProgramatPrincessMargaret)

 [@ayaprogram](https://twitter.com/ayaprogram)

# MONTHLY COMMUNITY UPDATES

## GILDA'S CLUB

24 Cecil St. Toronto, ON  
www.gildasclubtoronto.org  
416 214 9898



## 20s & 30s Support Group

February 7, 14, 21, 28  
6:30 — 8 PM

This is a group for people ages 18 to 39 who are living with cancer or after a cancer diagnosis, welcoming those newly diagnosed or up to 5 years post-treatment. Some topics include: fear of recurrence, relationships, sex & sexuality and more.

## WELLSPRING



4 Charles St E  
Toronto, ON  
www.wellspring.ca  
416 961 1928

Visit online for upcoming program event dates this month: <http://bit.ly/2sGqCdy>

# AYA PROGRAM UPDATES

## FEBRUARY 28: AYA MEET-UP

Our upcoming monthly AYA meet-up will be on Thurs, February 28 from 6 to 7:30 PM on the 16th floor, Room 726 at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. We encourage participants to RSVP to [aya@uhn.ca](mailto:aya@uhn.ca) if they are planning to attend. Pizza will be provided.



# COMMUNITY EVENTS & UPDATES

## YOUNG ADULT CANCER CANADA: RETREAT YOURSELF

YACC is hosting another **Retreat Yourself** event from **March 14—18, 2019 in Five Oaks, Paris, Ontario**. Talk about your experiences, relax, have fun, and connect with those who “get it.” There is no registration fee, food & accommodations are included and travel assistance is available. Learn more about it & register here: <http://bit.ly/yacc-retreat-2019>

## PINK PEARL FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

Pink Pearl Foundation is giving away one \$1,000 scholarship for college/university to a Canadian woman facing cancer. **Application intake is open until March 5th, with the recipient being notified on March 20, 2019.** For more information on eligibility and how to apply, visit <http://bit.ly/2w2h68E>



## PINK PEARL FOUNDATION: WINTER RETREAT

**Pink Pearl Foundation** is hosting a Winter Retreat this March 1st to 3rd, 2019 at the Prince of Wales in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Connect, learn and share experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Retreats are open to young women facing cancer between ages of 18-40 at no cost. Join the waitlist here: [rsvp@pinkpearlfoundation.org](mailto:rsvp@pinkpearlfoundation.org)

## SEEKING PARTICIPANTS FOR SURVEY ON PEER SUPPORT IN CANCER

Cancer can be isolating.

Support from peers who've been through it can help.

Help us learn how to improve access to peer support for adolescents and young adults (AYA) with cancer.

Complete our voluntary research survey if:

- You were diagnosed with cancer between 15 and 39 years of age
- You received cancer treatment within the last 10 years

There will be a draw to win 1 of 3 VISA gift cards worth **\$100!** CAD

AYA Adolescent and Young Adult Program | UHN Princess Margaret Cancer Centre | ARCC

The security of social media is not guaranteed. Contact us about the study. Don't post if concerned about privacy.

Seeking participants for a study on peer support! Please complete our 25 minute survey here: <http://bit.do/Connect4Health>