

# Twist Out Cancer Annual Report 2023



## **Backbone**

By Suhani Amin

Inspired by Donna Dang, Caregiver to fiancé with chondrosarcoma and osteosarcoma



## About the Cover

*"Most of my experience with cancer up to David's passing was through my work as a cancer biologist, working in both breast and prostate cancers. Having it affect me so intimately was never something I had never imagined, so in many ways, I had always felt that I was fighting cancer, both in the lab and outside of the lab with David (also a cancer biologist). Having this experience as a young adult reshaped my entire life and it also changed what I valued in the type of work that I wanted to do. David's diagnosis inspired me to change careers and move away from academic research and into philanthropy, where I wanted to work in a nonprofit while still utilizing my scientific background. I am currently a program officer, where I run funding programs that include cancer research. I have finally found fulfillment in my work, and I feel that much of David's legacy is still carried through the work that he did, but also through my work in nonprofit."*

— Donna Dang, Inspiration

*"While they were surrounded by darkness—a heartbreaking diagnosis amidst an isolating pandemic—the world Donna and David created for themselves was quite the opposite. Their bubble was warm, supportive, and golden. In my painting, I have tried to encapsulate this: a dark world, a shining bubble, all focusing on the spine. Not only because that's where the cancer was, but because this spine, this backbone, is symbolic of what Donna and David are to each other."*

— Suhani Amin, Artist



Inspiration Donna Dang and Artist Suhani Amin at Brushes with Cancer Midwest 2023 at Zhou B Gallery in Chicago



**Listen to their podcast episode on Spotify**

## Message from Jenna

It is hard to believe that Twist Out Cancer has been going strong for over a decade. When I started Twist I was in treatment for a rare blood disorder called Gray Zone Lymphoma. I made a commitment early on that if I was to survive treatment, I would create the community that I was so desperately seeking. I was committed to building a community that focused on the power of storytelling and utilizing the creative arts for healing. Thanks to an extraordinary team of staff, board members and committed donors, the impact of Twist Out Cancer has grown exponentially over the last ten years.

In 2023, we had a record-breaking year. For the first time in our 10 year history we forged deep partnerships with MD Anderson Cooper, Rush University Health, Henry Ford Cancer Center, Northern Westchester Hospital and Little Company of Mary Hospital. We launched 2 private licensed programs with Rolfe Pancreatic Cancer Foundation and Wayne State University and recently launched programs with the Adrienne Arsht Performing Arts Center in Miami and Blueprint Medicines. As our licensing partnerships have expanded we also have been able to grow our Open Brushes with Cancer programs. By offering more Brushes with Cancer programs with extended exhibitions, we have been able to reach thousands more people than in previous years.

None of this would have been possible without the commitment and love of our community who has stood by us. This community has been a source of inspiration, support, and resilience.



Jenna Benn Shersher, MSW at the Brushes with Cancer event

As we embark on the journey into 2024, I am filled with excitement and anticipation for what lies ahead. Thank you for being an integral part of this incredible journey. Your presence, your contributions, and your unique perspectives enrich the tapestry of our community.

**Jenna Benn Shersher, MSW, Founder and CEO**

*Jenna Benn Shersher*

# Twist Out Cancer is **just getting started**

## What we do:

Twist Out Cancer provides psychosocial support to individuals touched by cancer through creative arts programming.

## How we do it:

Twist Out Cancer's core program, **Brushes with Cancer**, improves the quality of life for survivors, previvors, caregivers and loved ones through a unique art experience.

Twist Out Cancer programs utilize the arts as a mechanism for healing. All programs afford participants a chance to share their cancer experience and to be heard. Through these unique expressions and connections, a vital support community grows.

## Our impact:

To date, Twist Out Cancer has impacted **over 257,000 people** through our programming and outreach, including our **Brushes with Cancer** programs, **Twistshops**, **Twist Hearts** and more.



**Lighthouse of Love**, created by Jelena Martinovic and Inspired by Kristie Fields



Sonya Keshwani, Inspiration at Brushes with Cancer at Wayne State University



## Awards

### 2023 Shawn Strong Award Recipient: Howard Aaron

Shawn Green is the driving force behind the Shawn Strong Award. A Twist Out Cancer board member and supporter, Shawn passed away from brain cancer in 2016. To honor his positive spirit, Twist Out Cancer leadership votes on a participant from each Brushes with Cancer program who exemplifies the qualities Shawn demonstrated throughout his cancer journey. This year, Howard Aaron was the recipient of the award in Shawn's honor.



Howard Aaron, Award Recipient



Chelsea Lewis-Bahr, Artist

*"Cancer can be defeated. Living a healthy life with consistent resistance training helped my body handle the side effects of chemotherapy. Having a strong mind-body connection kept my attitude positive. Yes, there were bad days, but they passed like the clouds in the sky. Attitude is everything!"*

*—Howard Aaron, Survivor of Intravascular B Cell Lymphoma and Brushes with Cancer Inspiration*



### 2023 Jacqueline Carmody Creative Artist Award Recipient: Magdalena Cuevas

The Jacqueline Carmody Creative Artist Award is presented to a Brushes with Cancer Artist who embodies trust, willingness, connection and a creative spirit.

*"Not only do I feel like I have a purpose in life now but I am inspired by these beautiful Inspirations that I have been paired with. They have taught us all in the organization what courage, perseverance, love, strength and compassion mean."*

*—Magdalena Cuevas, Brushes with Cancer Artist*

## 10 Moments of Twist from 2023

1. Hosted 40 virtual and in-person **Twistshops**
2. Completed two licensed **Brushes with Cancer** programs and secured four licensed programs for 2024
3. Hosted a table at the 2023 ASCO Conference
4. Engaged more than 400 MD Anderson at Cooper cancer patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals in an art directive
5. Twistshop Director Jacqueline Carmody was invited by Bayer Pharmaceuticals to present at **ESMO in Madrid, Spain**
6. Founder and CEO Jenna Benn Shersher spoke at Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day, hosted by University of Pennsylvania Medicine
7. Hired Lindsey Taucher, our first Twistshop facilitator in Austin, Texas
8. Hosted our second **Twist Hearts** program at Little City Montessori
9. Displayed art from Wayne State University's Brushes with Cancer program at the Henry Ford Cancer Center
10. Launched **Team Twist** so supporters can raise funds and awareness through health-and-wellness-based activities



***The Eighth Light***, created by Chelsea Lewis-Bahr and Inspired by Howard Aaron



## Twist Out Cancer Scales its Programming to Make a Larger Impact

Twist Out Cancer has positively impacted more than 257,000 people since its founding in 2012. This includes 1,422 people who participated in our Brushes with Cancer program as either an Inspiration or Artist. As a result, there are now 711 unique pieces of art in the world that represent 711 individual journeys with cancer.

### Brushes with Cancer

Brushes with Cancer strategically matches artists with individuals touched by cancer ("Inspirations"). Over six months, the Artist and Inspiration work together to forge a relationship built on mutual understanding and trust. The Artist creates a unique work of art that is reflective of the Inspiration's journey with cancer. The program culminates in an event that celebrates survivorship and hope, where the art is auctioned off with all proceeds benefiting the mission and work of Twist Out Cancer. Across three programs in 2023, Brushes with Cancer facilitated connections between 120 participants, creating 60 unique pieces of art reflecting the stories of inspiration, hope and healing. Artist and Inspiration participants in 2023 represented 14 states and six countries, to expand the mission to share, connect and heal beyond national U.S. borders.

### Brushes with Cancer Open Program

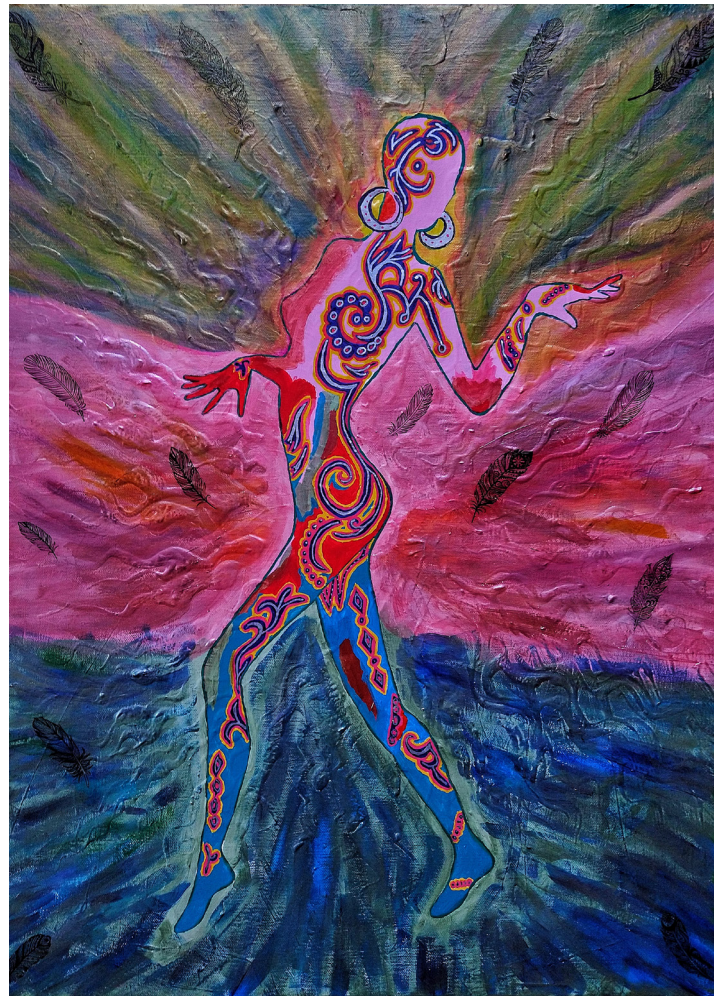
The 2023 Brushes with Cancer open program was available to the public and served about 70 participants. The sold-out celebratory event took place at **Zhou B. Art Center** in Chicago, where 35 works of art were exhibited and the connections made between Inspirations, Artists and the larger Twist Out Cancer community were honored.



#### 2023 Brushes with Cancer Honoree

The 2023 Brushes with Cancer Open Program celebrated Board Member Jenny Buntman Indig as its honoree. Jenny lost her mother to stage four kidney cancer around the same time that Twist Out Cancer was founded. A decade later, Jenny

wanted to honor her mother's life and legacy in a way that "felt more personal than just writing a check to a cancer organization." With passion and love that only the memory of her mother could inspire, Jenny serves the entirety of the Twist Out Cancer community through her entrepreneurial spirit, strategic vision and personal connection to a cancer experience.



**Spirit Dancer**, created by Lena Snow and Inspired by Lauren Tarpley

*"In my artwork I wanted to capture the energy of my Inspiration. My piece is a representation of something that might be referred to as the soul of combined forces of nature and transcendental energies that lie within Lauren and make her a spirit dancer."*

**—Lena Snow, Artist**



2023 was a pivotal year for Brushes with Cancer programming and its capacity to facilitate opportunities to share, connect and heal. Through licensing Brushes with Cancer to **Wayne State University** and the **Rolfe Pancreatic Cancer Foundation**, Twist Out Cancer empowered the use of creative arts as a mechanism for healing beyond our immediate community. Combined, these two programs provided 50 additional participants with a storytelling platform that turns something scary and lonely, such as cancer, into something beautiful and hopeful.

Peer-to-peer programming launched in 2021 and serves as an additional resource to Brushes with Cancer participants to help them navigate the process of sharing with their match. Peer-to-peer groups are split into Artists and Inspirations, so participants may find support and guidance from others throughout the Brushes with Cancer process. Both Inspiration and Artist sessions are led by a trained Twist Out Cancer facilitator.

In 2024, Twist Out Cancer will run its Brushes with Cancer program with two licensed partners, Blueprint Medicines and Adrienne Arsht Performing Arts Center. In addition, we will be hosting two open programs throughout the United States and abroad, with art exhibitions and celebrations taking place at Writer's Theatre in Glencoe, IL and at the Old City Jewish Arts Center in Philadelphia.

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An abstract painting by Robert Rauschenberg titled 'The Heart'. The artwork is a vibrant, multi-layered composition of colors including deep reds, oranges, yellows, greens, blues, and purples. The colors are applied in thick, expressive brushstrokes, creating a sense of depth and movement. A central, somewhat indistinct heart shape is visible, formed by the interplay of the red and orange hues. The overall effect is one of intense energy and emotional resonance.

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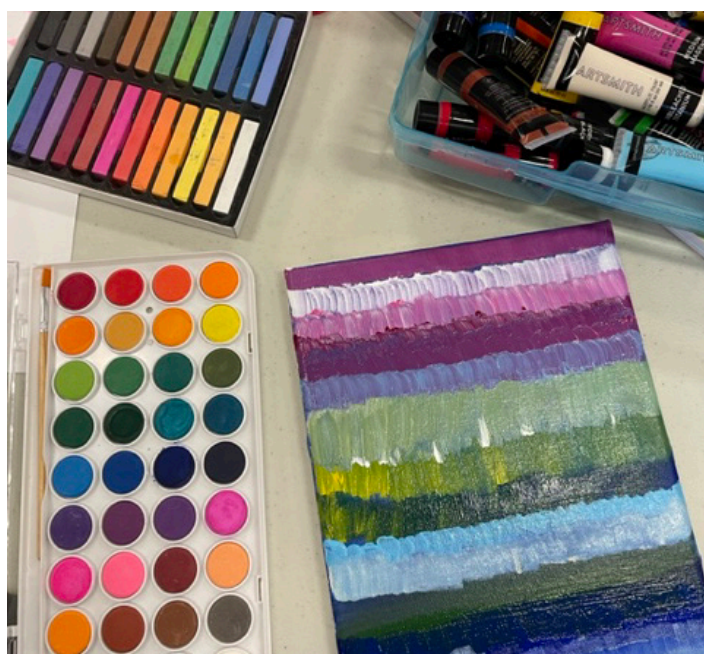
Brushes with Cancer meetup at WIP Chicago

### Twistshops

#### ***Free and Open to the Public***

Twistshops are art therapy-focused workshops that promote healing, relaxation and emotional recovery through art therapy-based interventions that are designed to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress related to cancer. Participants are guided by a licensed art therapist through a variety of art-making activities that allow them to process their past and current experiences as patients, survivors, caregivers or supporters of someone with cancer. Through storytelling and mindful art-making, the intention is to help participants explore different emotions, and, in turn, heal and find ways to move forward.

Throughout 2023, Twist Out Cancer conducted 40 Twistshops, serving over 470 participants in their experiences with cancer as patients, survivors, or caregivers.











Twist Hearts Workshop at Little City Montessori in Philadelphia, PA

### Twist Hearts

**Twist Hearts** is a series within our Twistshop program that offers creative arts-based groups for children, teens and adults to explore their inner creativity and focus on the love that has resulted from their experiences with themselves and with their community.



### Team Twist

**Team Twist Out Cancer** launched in May 2023 for those in our community committed to raising awareness and critical funds for Twist Out Cancer programming through fitness and athletic-based activities. Team Twist operates in a “choose your own adventure”

format that allows individuals to train for events that motivate or hold a special meaning to them. Team Twist events include but are not limited to 5ks, 10ks, marathons, triathlons, cycling races, yoga, dance and CrossFit competitions.



Team Twist runs the Asbury Park 1/2 marathon



Jenna Benn Shersher, Founder and CEO of Twist Out Cancer and Jenny Indig, Brushes with Cancer Honoree at Team Twist Event in Bryn Mawr, PA

The Team Twist community surpassed its fundraising goal of \$10,000 for 2023 and looks forward to increasing engagement and involvement throughout our international community in 2024 to continue the Twist Out Cancer mission.

### Brushes with Cancer and the Virtual Space Livestream and Virtual Galleries

As a part of Twist Out Cancer’s commitment to ensuring that individuals who are immunocompromised or unable to travel can continue to access our programs, we have continued to partner with **Padcaster** to livestream our Brushes with Cancer programs. Thanks to their partnership, hundreds of patients and their families were able to view the Brushes with Cancer program in real-time through Facebook Live. In addition, we partnered with **CultureVerse** to digitally recreate the physical Midwest Brushes with Cancer exhibition. CultureVerse is a Michigan-based nonprofit leveraging technology as a resource for artists that combines technological know-how, intense enthusiasm and deep respect for the makers and keepers of art, culture and knowledge.

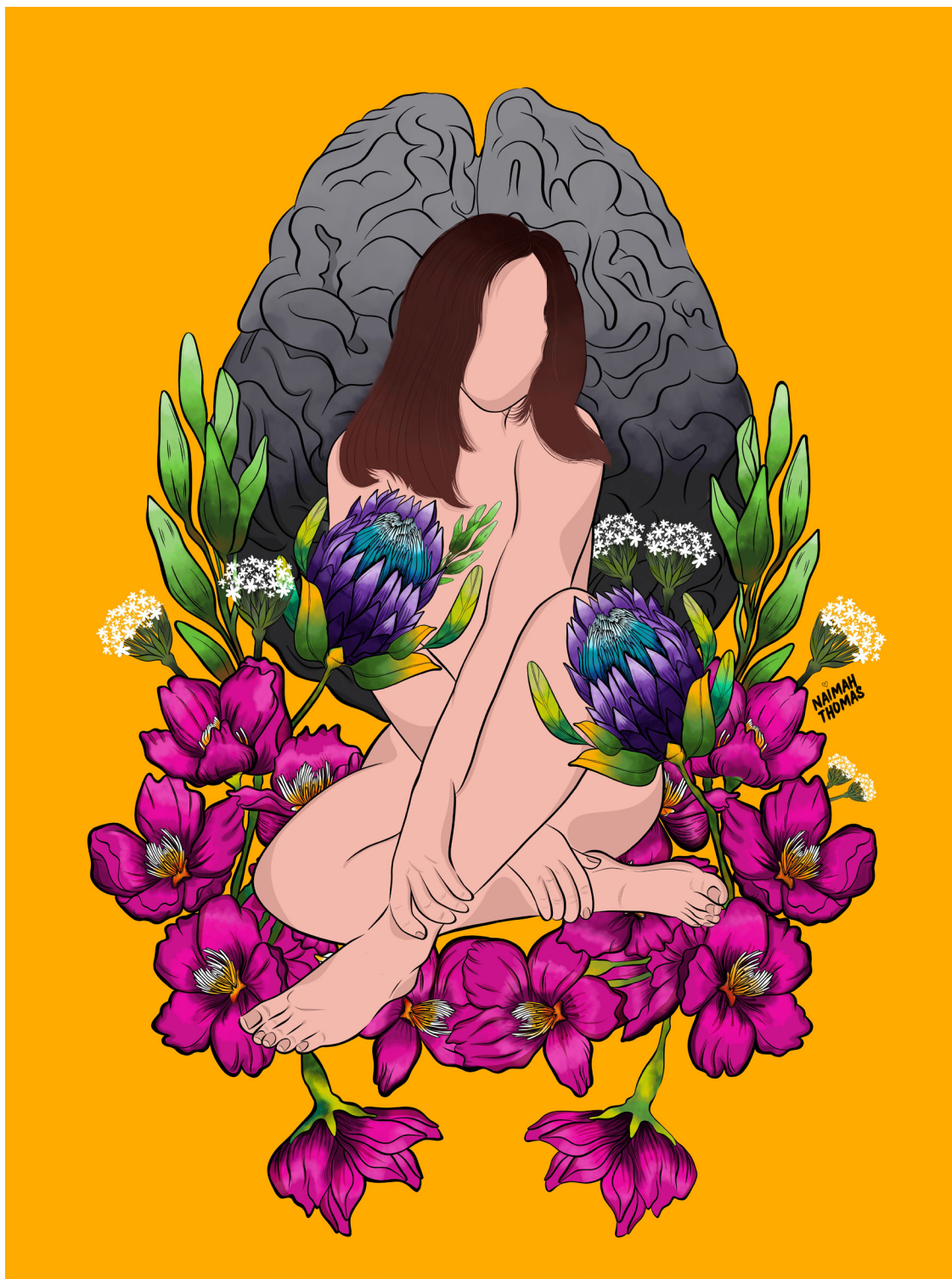


### Podcasts

Twist Out Cancer increases the number of storytelling opportunities for participants through our podcast, “Stories of Hope and Inspiration.” The podcast features Brushes with Cancer Inspiration and Artist pairs, the unique relationships they created throughout their Brushes with Cancer processes and how it led them to be more open with their experience with cancer and their creative gifts.



***Wandering amongst the cherry blossoms***, created by Naimah Thomas and Inspired by Wendy Santana



Inspiration Wendy Santana and Artist Naimah Thomas have forged an unexpected friendship through the creative process. Not only has this partnership resulted in a piece of art that has meaning for both women, but they have come to be huge supporters of each other through life's ups and downs.

***"Pretty much every time that Naimah and I spoke, we were amazed ourselves at how much we connected and how much we had in common."***

***—Wendy Santana, Inspiration***



## Our Digital Footprint

### Online Store

The Twist Out Cancer **online store** saw an increase in the total average order value in 2023, with orders averaging \$50.04.

**Total orders: 36**

**Total sales: \$2,053.01**

**Conversion rate: 1.05%**

**Returning customer rate: 18.18%**

### Social Media

Twist Out Cancer's social media platforms have 24,148 supporters that are active and engaged in the organization's activities. In 2023, Twist Out Cancer gained 611 online followers.

#### Facebook

Followers: 16,883

**2023 Reach: 19,362**

2023 page visits: 3,881

Gender breakdown: 53.7% women, 46.3% men

Top cities: Chicago, Delhi (India), Kolkata (West Bengal, India), Bangalore (Karnataka, India), Mumbai (Maharashtra, India), NYC

Top countries: 45.1% United States, 40% India, 6.1% Canada, 2.2% Israel, 0.7% United Kingdom

#### Instagram

Followers: 6,616

**2023 reach: 10,480**

2023 page visits: 3,603

Gender breakdown: 83.1% women, 16.9% men

Top cities: Chicago, NYC, Philadelphia, Austin, Toronto

Top countries: 58.1% United States, 3.9% United Kingdom, 3.8% Canada, 1.2% Australia, 0.8% India

#### LinkedIn

Followers: 647

**2023 impressions: 23,311**

2023 engagement: 8.34%

2023 clicks: 628

Top Cities: Greater Chicago, Greater Philadelphia, New York Metropolitan area, Washington DC/Baltimore, Los Angeles Metropolitan area, Detroit Metropolitan area, San Francisco/Bay area, Austin, Greater Boston

### Newsletter

Subscribers: 5,322

2023 emails sent to date: 50

2023 open rate average to date: 40.3%

2023 click rate to date: 0.93%

Gender breakdown: 51.6% women, 28.2% male

Age: 36.8% 35-44; 14.1% 45-54; 9.9% 25-34; 9.0% 55-64; 7.9% 65+; 2.2% 18-24

Top cities: Chicago, Dallas, Ashburn

## Diversity and Inclusion

### Vision Statement

Providing psychosocial support to any individual touched by cancer through creative arts programming.

### Mission

Twist Out Cancer recognizes the isolating feelings that can accompany any cancer experience. We strive to build a community inclusive of any race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, marital status, citizenship, ability, veteran status, health, socioeconomic status, and healthcare access. Twist Out Cancer believes in the power of using our personal backgrounds as a foundation for understanding the diversity of a cancer experience, sharing that experience with the world, and ultimately, taking steps towards healing.

Cancer is one disease, but it is not one experience. Twist Out Cancer attends to the emotional needs of anyone touched by cancer, no matter their cancer identity nor personal identity.

At Twist, we know the power of the arts is an underutilized mechanism for healing. Institutional resources to address social and emotional wellness for anyone touched by cancer can be inequitable, bound by geography, and are often cost-prohibitive.

We believe that anyone touched by cancer should have the opportunity to experience the transformative power of art to heal which is why we are deeply committed to ensuring that our programs remain accessible and free to all participants.

### How we commit to inclusion in our community:

- Soliciting feedback from our participants, board members, staff, and community members about the unique challenges they face as a result of their social identities and how we can support them.
- Partnering with organizations that serve a diverse population of individuals touched by cancer.
- Carefully choosing modes of communication and language to reflect our mission to build an inclusive community.
- Critically reflecting upon accessibility to our programs and acting to lower barriers that perpetuate inequality.
- Continuously assessing our efforts to achieve equity and inclusion through our programming and implementing necessary changes to improve those efforts.



## Staff

**Jenna Benn Shersher**, MSW Founder and CEO

**Amelia Hanrahan**, COO

**August Spree**, Director of Programs

**Lindsay Patton**, Director of Digital Strategy and Peer to Peer Facilitator

**Jenna Koch**, Social Work Intern

**Ana Gordon**, LCSW, OSW-C Clinical Director

**Jacqueline Carmody**, LCPC ATR-BC ATCS Director of Twistshops and Twist Hearts

**Mignon Dupepe**, LCPC, ATR Twist Heart Curriculum Facilitator and Twistshop Facilitator

**Michaela Herr**, MA, ATR-BC, LPC Twistshop Facilitator

**Sherry Warner**, MFA, MA, ATR-BC, ATCS Twistshop Facilitator

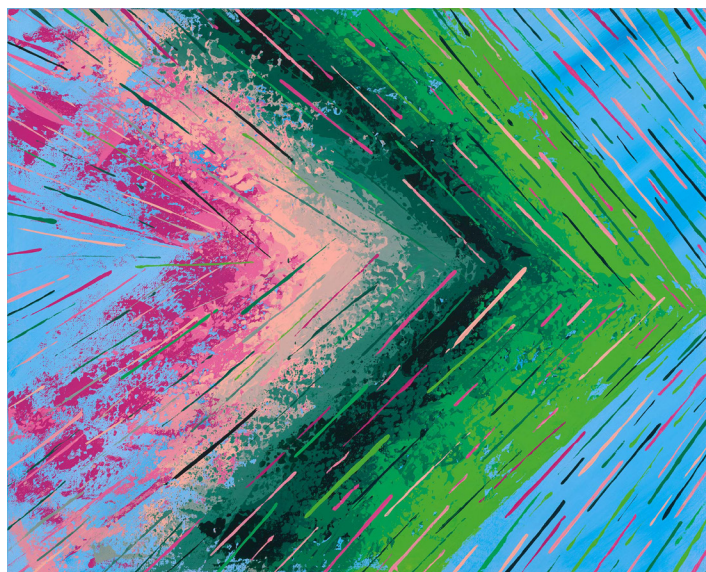
**Callie Cullinan**, LPCC-S, ATR Twistshop and Peer to Peer Facilitator

**Lindsey Taucher**, LPC, Twistshop Artist, Licensed Professional Counselor; formerly Registered and Board Certified Art Therapist

**Kim Spaulding**, MA ATR, Twistshop Facilitator, Art Therapist

**Kara Thomas**, Peer to Peer Facilitator

**Joselyn Arana**, Bilingual/Spanish-speaking facilitator and Art Therapist



**Move Forward**, created by Emma Lyons and Inspired by Vanessa Purefoy

***“Getting cancer in my 20s is not something I expected. And that changed my entire outlook on how I want to spend my time. I don’t waste time thinking about why not; I now focus on making my dreams come true.”***

**—Vanessa Purefoy, Inspiration**



Brushes with Cancer Midwest 2023 Participants



## **Board of Directors**

### **Executive Board & Officers**

Howard Aaron  
Cynthia Beck  
Joelle Goldman Bilow  
Emma Peck Block, Secretary  
Andrew Edelston, Board Chair  
Daniel Glick  
Jon Goldberg  
Erin Green Johnson  
Jennifer L. Katz Margolis  
Jenna Benn Shersher, President  
Dr. Christian Squillante  
Joshua Taustein  
Jennifer Indig  
Kevin Morgan  
Alex Perry  
Bari Fleischer

### **Advisory Board**

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Jeffrey Guerrero  
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Dr. Martin Hogan  
Gudrun Wu Snyder  
Tanya Kertsman  
Bari Murphy  
Kara Thomas  
Shelby Zitelman  
Mignon Dupepe  
Joe Lombardo  
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### **Individual Benefactors of \$1,000+**

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Howard Aaron & Andrea Silver  
Suhani Amin  
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Monique Walters

Marc Wilkow  
Ben Yerys  
Deborah and Jeff Zaluda

### **Organizational Partners**

Allstate Employee Giving  
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Blueprint Medicines  
The Coleman Foundation  
Nathan Cummings Foundation  
Benjamin B. Green-Field  
Foundation  
Lannett  
North Shore Congregation Israel  
Charles and Lynn Schusterman  
Foundation  
Rightway Signs  
Rolfe Pancreatic Cancer  
Foundation  
Tito's Handmade Vodka  
Texas Oncology  
Toyota Financial Services  
NovaCare Rehabilitation  
The WAWA Foundation  
Select Medical Corporation  
Servier US  
Wayne State University

### **Partner Participants (Minimum of \$500 commitment over 3 years)**

Joelle Bilow Goldman  
Danny Glick  
Cynthia Beck  
Andrew Edelston  
Bari Murphy  
Kenny Lapins  
Dr. Christian Squillante  
Emma Peck Block  
The Semel Family Fund  
Joshua Taustein  
Gary Metzner  
Deborah and Jeff Zaluda

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Moon Rabbit Acupuncture  
Padcaster  
Right Way Signs, LLC  
Sugar Factory  
Swissa Creative  
TipTop Proper Cocktails  
Vital Proteins  
Zengeler Cleaners



## Financials

Individual, Corporate and Grant Revenue:

**\$269,071**

Brushes with Cancer Event Gross Totals:

**\$103,534**

Total Value of In Kind Contributions:

**\$192,893**

Total 2023 Cash Revenue:

**\$373,563**

Twist Out Cancer gratefully acknowledges its donors and friends who gave at any level during 2023 and relies on the generosity of our community to grow its programs.



Brushes with Cancer Artist Cara Marie Young at Wayne State University



**Resilience**, created by Bari Fleisher and Inspired by Charlotte Bayala





**3 Colors**, created by Alejandro Lopez-Rincon and Inspired by Dr. Antje Petershagen

*"Cancer is a challenge that has pushed me to my limits and far beyond. It has made me grow, brought out my inner potential, my resources and made me the person I am today. I came back stronger and wiser from this journey and enjoy life unconditionally. Cancer comes when it wants; before it we are all equal, but it is our own decision how we want to deal with it and its consequences."*

—Dr. Antje Petershagen, Inspiration

*"It was difficult to make an artwork good enough for this beautiful program. I was so lucky to work with such a wonderful inspiration (Dr. Antje). Thus, I wanted to do something great, meaningful. I tried different ideas, paintings, colors, but then I found an idea from seeing how cancer cells look under imaging with a red dye, they reminded me a cherry blossom tree. My inspiration, has three different facets. The artist (blue), the patient (red) and the healer (green), so the flowers are in these colors to reflect her. I learned so much from her, her spirituality, her positivity, so that is why I settled on a golden background, that changes with the light."*

—Alejandro Lopez-Rincon, Artist



## An Eye to the Future

Twist Out Cancer has built a vibrant and diverse community of support that believes in the power of the expressive arts as a mechanism for healing. As the organization embarks on its next chapter, Twist Out Cancer is excited to grow the Brushes with Cancer, Twistshops and Twist Hearts programs internationally, and create new access points for meaningful connections. Twist Out Cancer's mission is to empower thousands of individuals touched by cancer to come forward with their stories, grow our community and aid in healing.

*You just never know who your story will impact. Cheers to sharing, connecting, and healing!*

## Join us!

For more information contact  
Jenna Benn Shersher,  
MSW Founder and CEO at:  
[jenna@twistoutcancer.org](mailto:jenna@twistoutcancer.org)  
(847) 802-9183

A 501(c)(3) organization

[twistoutcancer.org](https://twistoutcancer.org)



*You've always had the power, my dear*, created by Jeff Guerrero and Inspired by Carina Ranieri