



THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF SUNRISE DAY CAMPS

*Results of the independent Sunrise Day Camps Research Study Conducted June-August 2024
With Additional Insights from a Secondary Study Conducted in November 2024*





INTRODUCTION

For nearly two decades, the Sunrise Day Camps Association has been restoring the joys of childhood to tens of thousands of children with cancer and their siblings through its signature summer day camps and year-round in-hospital programs. Twenty years following its founding, Sunrise remains the only organization in the world to offer full-summer day camps, completely free of charge, for children with cancer and their siblings.

Having accumulated years of anecdotal information on the impact of its programs, in 2024 Sunrise engaged the School of Public Health, Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Tel-Aviv University to conduct the first formal, IRB approved study to measure the impact of a Sunrise Day Camp on the children we serve. This rigorous evaluation followed 343 children aged 8–17 across five Sunrise camps in the U.S., with 195 completing both pre- and post-camp surveys. The goal was to measure what happens to children—diagnosed and healthy siblings alike—when they are given a summer of belonging, joy, and safety at a Sunrise Day Camp.

The results of the study far exceeded expectations.

STUDY AT A GLANCE

Conducted by: School of Public Health, Gray Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Tel-Aviv University

Type: First-ever independent, IRB-approved evaluation of Sunrise Day Camps

Timeframe: June–August 2024, with follow-up in November 2024

Sample Size: 343 children (ages 8–17) across 5 Sunrise camps. 195 completed both pre- and post-camp surveys

Groups Studied: Children diagnosed with cancer and their siblings attending a Sunrise Day Camp

Goal: Measure the emotional, social, and psychosocial impact of a Sunrise summer

Core Measures:

- Resilience
- Quality of Life
- Stress & Anxiety
- Sibling Relationships
- Illness Management
- Well-Being
- Self Esteem





KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The study measured levels of **Resilience**, **Quality of Life**, **Stress and Anxiety**, **Sibling Relationships**, **Illness Management** and **Well Being**. Each data point showed improvements between the start of camp and the conclusion of camp, with a number showing significant improvement as follows:

-  **RESILIENCE** increased significantly across the board, with children leaving camp more emotionally equipped to handle adversity. This held true for both diagnosed campers and siblings.
-  **QUALITY OF LIFE** also improved significantly, with campers reporting more happiness, better moods, and greater overall satisfaction with life.
-  **STRESS AND ANXIETY** levels dropped, especially for children with cancer whose emotional burdens were eased through the camp experience. Remarkably, diagnosed children started the summer with higher distress than their healthy brothers/sisters, but by the end, their levels of anxiety were lower than those of their sibling.
-  **SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS, ILLNESS MANAGEMENT, SELF-ESTEEM,** and **WELL-BEING** all showed improvements during the camp season.
-  **LONG-TERM IMPACT:** Children who had attended multiple summers reported the highest resilience scores, suggesting that repeat attendance builds emotional strength over time.



Pre-Camp



Post-Camp

Scale 1-5



Resilience

Well Being

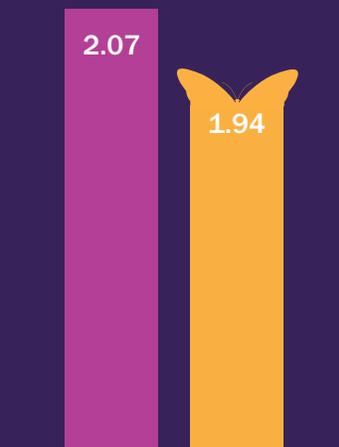
Sibling Relationship



Quality Of Life

Illness Management

Self Esteem



Stress and Anxiety



LONG TERM IMPACT

1 WHERE CAMP MAKES A SIGNIFICANT, SUSTAINED DIFFERENCE

A second study conducted 12 weeks following the conclusion of camp confirms that **Sunrise Day Camps have a powerful and lasting psychosocial impact** on children diagnosed with cancer and their siblings.

Most notably, for

- **Resilience, and**
- **Illness Management**

the improvements were not only observed immediately after camp **but were sustained 12 weeks later - a rare and significant outcome in short-term psychosocial interventions**. Such long-term emotional gains underscore the unique effectiveness of the camp environment in promoting psychological well-being over time.

In addition:

- Campers reported statistically significant improvements in **quality of life** after camp—feeling more positive about their lives, their health, and their emotional states. **12 weeks later, these gains held steady**. The sense of wellness cultivated at camp doesn't vanish—it lingers, anchoring children through the school year and beyond.
- While only marginally changed immediately post-camp, **self-esteem rose steadily over time**. By the 12-week follow-up, there was a notable upward trend, suggesting that the confidence built at camp continues to grow after the summer ends.
- **For diagnosed children, illness management** improved after camp—and while the effect diminished slightly at 12 weeks, **levels nevertheless remained higher than their pre-camp baseline**. The study suggests that being in a medically supportive, empowering environment like Sunrise can change the way children understand and manage their condition, even weeks later.

2 A RESPITE FROM STRESS AND ANXIETY- EVEN IF JUST FOR A WHILE

- One of the most remarkable immediate effects of camp was a statistically significant decrease in stress and anxiety, especially among children with cancer. At 12 weeks though, some of these gains had diminished, with stress levels trending upward again.
- According to the researchers, these findings reinforce the reality that Sunrise provides **a critical emotional break**. For children who live under the weight of chronic illness, that temporary release from anxiety is profoundly healing. that being in a medically supportive, empowering environment like Sunrise can change the way children understand and manage their condition, even weeks later.
- Sunrise gives children more than a distraction—it gives them a **reliable pause** from pain, fear, and isolation. A summer of joy becomes a **season of healing**, even if the pressures of daily life return later.



RESEARCHERS' CONCLUSIONS

The academic team concluded that Sunrise Day Camps offer a **transformative psychosocial experience**, delivering improvements in all measured areas. The camp environment preserves existing strengths while alleviating specific psychological burdens, particularly for children undergoing cancer treatment. The researchers particularly focused on the fact that **Resilience levels held months after the camp experience had ended** – an anomaly hardly ever seen in other camp studies. The researchers labeled this finding “a rare and significant outcome.”

Sunrise Day Camps are not just joyful experiences—they are **evidence-based interventions** for families coping with pediatric cancer. The camp model measurably improves psychosocial well-being and builds emotional resilience. And even when some gains diminish over time, the initial impact remains meaningful—and often unmatched.

They further emphasize that **emotional health is central to illness management**—that a child who feels more supported, connected, and confident is more likely to follow treatment protocols, maintain daily routines, and believe in their future.

Finally, they underscored the importance of **returning summer after summer**. The impact of camp isn't just immediate—it's cumulative. Children who return for multiple summers consistently report higher resilience, showing that each year of Sunrise builds upon the last. The camp experience not only sparks joy and emotional healing in the moment but also strengthens a child's ability to cope with life's challenges over time.

FINAL REFLECTION: A MODEL THAT WORKS- AND NEEDS TO GROW

According to the research, **Sunrise Day Camps deliver statistically significant, emotionally relevant outcomes for children facing cancer and their siblings.** And while no single experience can solve all the challenges these families face, Sunrise shows what is possible when children are treated not as patients—but as children first.

Sunrise Day Camps offer **a replicable, scalable model of psychosocial support** for children with cancer and their families. More than camp. This is an intervention—a protective factor—for families facing one of life's hardest battles. It's built on medical safety, emotional understanding, and joyful experiences. The challenge ahead is no longer proving that it works; that's been done. The challenge now is **ensuring that every child who needs it can access it.**



Get involved by visiting sunriseassociation.org