



THINKING ABOUT SENDING YOUR CHILD TO THE ALS YOUTH RETREAT?

A WEEKEND CREATED JUST FOR YOUTH WHO HAVE A PARENT LIVING WITH ALS

When someone in your family is living with ALS, life can feel different. Many young people carry worries they don't always talk about. They may take on extra responsibilities at home, wonder what the future will bring, or feel like their friends don't fully understand what they're experiencing.

The ALS Youth Retreat was created to give young people something many have never experienced before: **The chance to spend a weekend with other youth who simply get it.**

Hosted by AWC Grief Support and generously funded by the ALS Society of Canada (ALS Canada), this free weekend retreat brings together youth ages 8-17 from across Ontario for a weekend of friendship, recreation, outdoor adventure, and connection.

While ALS is something participants have in common, it is rarely the only thing they talk about. Friendships are built through games, campfires, creative activities, sports, laughter, and shared experiences.

Age-appropriate, clinically-led peer support sessions: Facilitated by professional therapists and grief specialists, these structured spaces allow youth to safely explore topics like understanding ALS, managing changing roles at home, coping with stress, and navigating the complex emotions of having an illness in the family. We use creativity, storytelling, and play to ensure these sessions are supportive, gentle, and empowering.

Many youth leave camp with:

- New friendships
- Healthy coping tools
- A stronger sense of belonging
- The comfort of knowing they are not alone

Retreat
led by:

AWC
GRIEF SUPPORT

Made
possible
by:

ALS SLA
CANADA

WHAT MAKES THIS RETREAT DIFFERENT?

Most camps offer fun activities. This retreat offers something much harder to find: a community of peers who understand life with ALS. Participants don't have to explain what ALS is. They don't have to explain why things at home may feel different. They're surrounded by other young people who understand many of the same challenges, questions, and emotions.

Again and again, young people tell us that the most powerful part of camps we host is realizing: **"I'm not the only one."**

We recognize that ALS brings a unique type of grief that happens the moment a diagnosis occurs. Grief is tied to ongoing physical changes, changes in routines, and the weight of a terminal prognosis. Our clinical team is highly skilled and trained in anticipatory grief due to serious illness, and will ensure youth feel validated in all their complex feelings about the present and the future.

A WELCOME FROM THE CAMP DIRECTORS

We're so glad you're considering the ALS Youth Retreat for your child.

We've both spent many years supporting children, youth, and families navigating difficult life experiences. Again and again, we've seen the incredible difference that connection can make when a young person realizes they are not facing life's challenges alone.

We know that having a parent or guardian living with ALS can bring experiences that many young people around them simply don't understand. It can mean carrying worries, responsibilities, questions, and emotions that can feel difficult to put into words. It can also mean feeling different from friends and classmates who haven't experienced anything similar. That's one of the reasons we're so excited about this retreat.

The ALS Youth Retreat is much more than a weekend away. It's an opportunity for young people to meet others who understand some of what they're going through, build meaningful friendships, try new things, develop confidence, and simply have fun. While ALS may be what brings participants together, we know from experience that the memories youth carry home are often the laughter around a campfire, the friendships formed during games and activities, the moments of courage, and the feeling of truly belonging.

We also understand that sending your child to a retreat like this may come with questions or even a few nerves of your own. Please know that creating a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment is our highest priority. Our team is made up of experienced staff and volunteers who are passionate about helping young people feel included, valued, and cared for throughout the weekend.

Whether your child arrives feeling excited, nervous, curious, shy, outgoing, or somewhere in between, they will be welcomed exactly as they are. We hope you'll consider joining us for what promises to be a very special weekend.

Warmly,



Jules Porter
Camp Director



Nicola Elbro
Clinical Director

WHAT WILL THE WEEKEND BE LIKE?

Youth will enjoy a balance of traditional camp activities and therapeutic exercises designed to support their experience with ALS. Activities include:

- A variety of age-appropriate therapeutic workshops designed specifically for children and youth affected by ALS
- Campfires
- A visit to the barn (where there is a petting zoo)
- Rock climbing
- Archery
- Creative arts
- Team-building challenges

Participants are never required to share personal experiences or discuss anything they aren't comfortable discussing. There is no "right way" to participate.

WHO IS LEADING THE RETREAT?

The retreat is hosted by AWC Grief Support, an organization with extensive experience delivering camps, retreats, workshops, and therapeutic support for children, youth, and families navigating serious illness, grief, and bereavement.

Our team combines evidence-informed practices with recreation, creativity, peer connection, and outdoor experiences to create environments where young people can learn, grow, and thrive.

Throughout the weekend, youth are supported by experienced therapists and trained volunteers who understand how to create safe, welcoming, and supportive spaces.

WHAT FAMILIES TELL US ABOUT SIMILAR THERAPEUTIC CAMPS WE SUPPORT

"A place for me to exist, free of judgment." — camper

*"If it's your first time, you have **NOTHING** to be afraid of. I met other people that were struggling and have gone through something similar to me."* — camper

"Maya's mental health absolutely depended on this experience. It has been a life shift for Maya." — Parent



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RETREAT DETAILS

- **Who:** Youth, ages 8-17 residing in Ontario, with a parent or guardian living with ALS
- **Where:** Tim Hortons Onondaga Farms, St. George, Ontario (approx. 1hr from Toronto)
- **When:** October 23-25, 2026
- **Cost:** Free
- **Transportation:** Families arrange transportation, and mileage reimbursement is available. We recognize that travelling to and from camp can be an added expense for families. To help reduce this barrier, eligible families may receive travel reimbursement for transportation costs related to camper drop-off and pickup.

Families travelling by car may be reimbursed at a rate of \$0.65/km based on the verified distance travelled, up to a maximum reimbursement amount based on 400 km per family.

For families travelling by plane or train, ALS Canada will connect directly with families to discuss travel arrangements and available support.

If you would like to request travel reimbursement, please indicate your travel plans in the registration form. Reimbursement will be provided by cheque following the completion of the retreat.

ELIGIBILITY

The retreat is free for Ontario families who are registered with ALS Canada. Registration with ALS Canada ensures families are connected to the services and supports available before, during, and after the retreat. If your family is not yet registered with ALS Canada, please complete that registration before continuing with this retreat application. You can register here: [ALS REGISTRATION](#)

If you have questions or concerns about registering with ALS Canada, please reach out to communityservices@als.ca.

READY TO REGISTER?

Space is limited. Register [HERE](#). As this is our inaugural pilot retreat, space is limited to just 20 campers, allowing us to create a safe, supportive, and highly personalized experience for every participant.

Please note that submitting a registration form does not automatically guarantee a spot at the retreat. Because space is limited, our clinical and camp team will review each registration to ensure the retreat is appropriate for each child and that we can provide the safest and most supportive experience for all participants. Families will be contacted to confirm whether a space has been offered.

HAVE QUESTIONS?

We would be honoured to welcome your child for a weekend filled with friendship, fun, and belonging.

Reach out: jules@awcgrief.com

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