

Camp Kesem at the University of Washington

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Kesem



camp kesem.

A PROGRAM OF
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AT UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

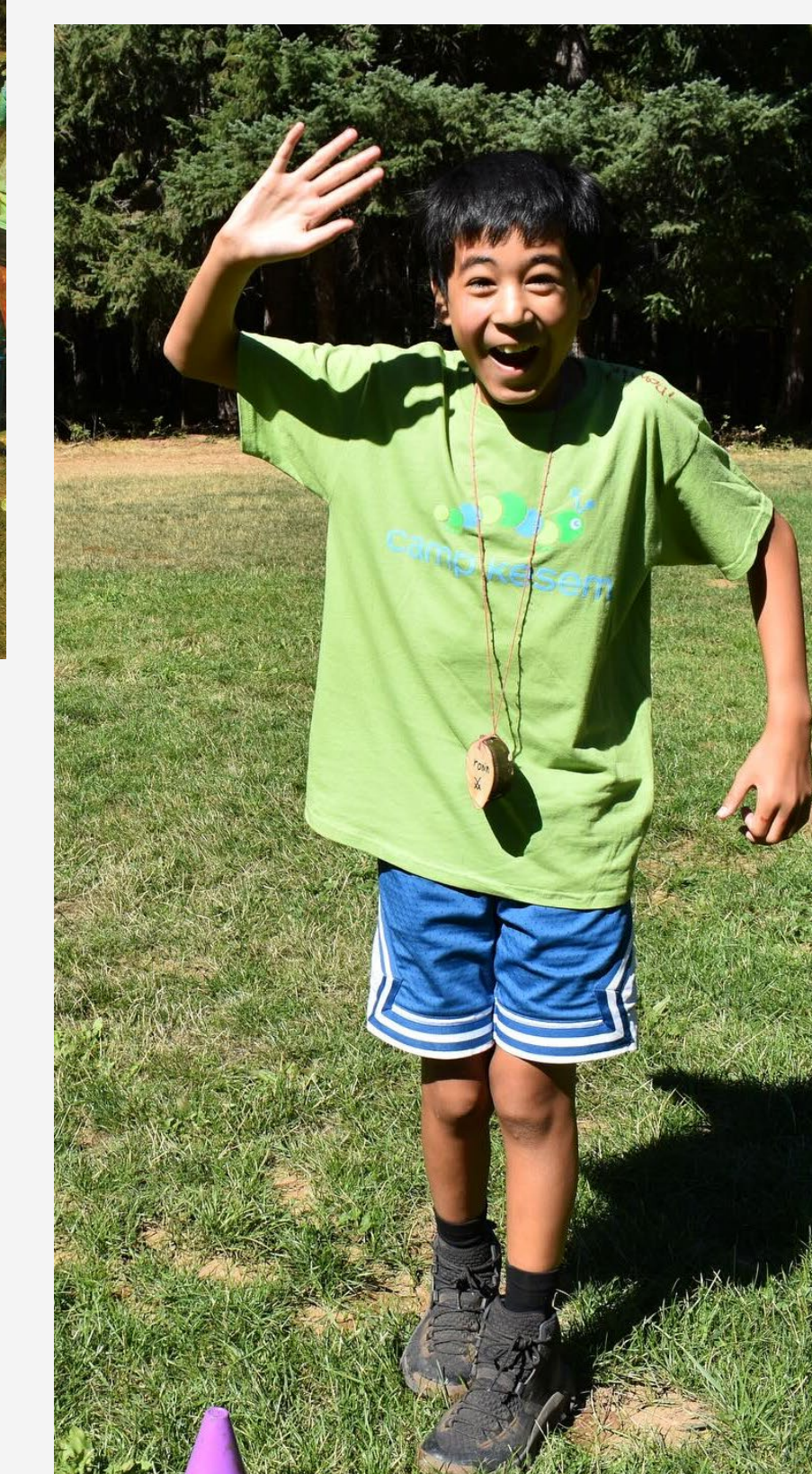
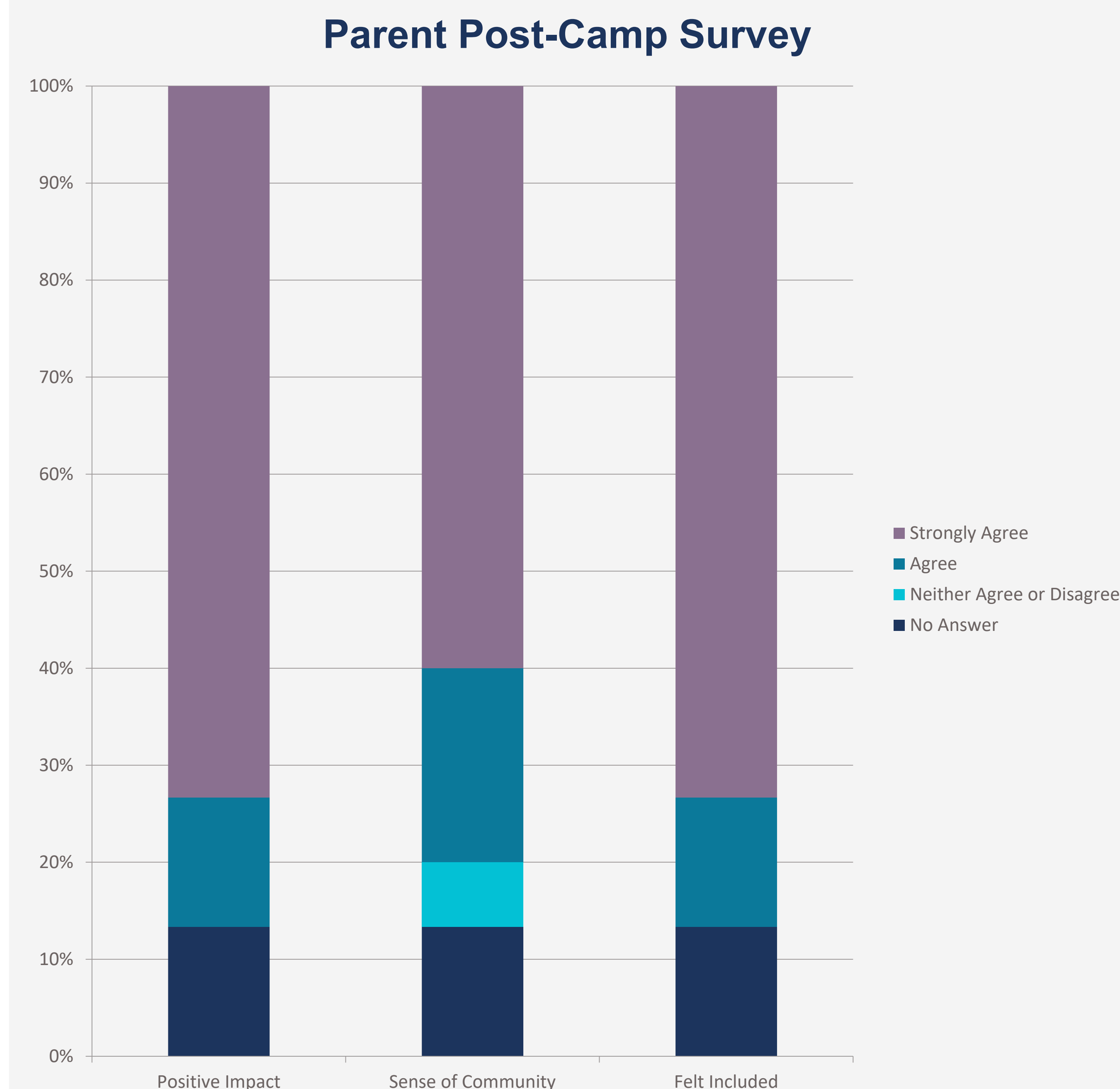
Background

In 2000, Kesem was founded at Stanford University through a joint project with Hillel by a leader who recognized the opportunity for college students to make a positive, long-term impact on children's lives whose parents were affected by cancer. The camp was named "Kesem" (the Hebrew word for magic) to represent the "magic" of play and the transformative experience of peer connectivity. The first Camp Kesem program was held in the summer of 2001 with 37 children and 20 counselors. The successful chapter model quickly spread to other campuses at a grassroots level, inspired by the passion and commitment of students eager to start Camp Kesem chapters in their communities.

Project Description/Methods

- Kesem at the University of Washington was founded in 2011 and is one of three chapters in Washington that supports this population of youth. Over its history, Kesem at UW has served 1783 children affected by a parent's cancer. Currently, the chapter is led by a team of 18 volunteer college student leaders who spend their entire school year planning to execute chapter programming and fundraising to make all programs free and accessible to families.
- Camp Kesem at UW is implemented through 2, 5-day long summer camp experiences in August for children ages 6-18 impacted by a parent's cancer. Student leaders plan the camp schedules, with campers ages 14-18 joining our Teen Leadership Program.
- These students are also responsible for implementing other chapter-based programs throughout the year, including Friends + Family Days, Kesem's Warm Welcome Program, and Kesem By Your Side - all designed to provide ongoing support to children and families in their local community.

Results



Program Impact/Accomplishments

- Kesem has identified common challenges faced by this often-overlooked population by surveying parents and guardians, as well as through first-hand experiences working with these children:
 - Isolation from peers
 - Negative academic performance
 - Loss of social interest
 - Taking on adult responsibilities at home
- A child's Kesem experience, rooted in rediscovering the joy of childhood, directly addresses these challenges by providing children coping with a parent's cancer with a community of support with peers who are just like them and exemplary role models in our college student leaders, resulting in:
 - Improved self-esteem
 - Enhanced coping skills
 - Increased self-confidence
 - Stronger emotional intelligence

Conclusion/Implications

Kesem is a life-changing experience for many children, providing a safe and welcoming environment to have fun and rediscover their childhood. Parents report a marked increase in their child's ability to express their feelings, connection to other children who have been affected by a parent's cancer, confidence in handling challenges, and self-esteem. Kesem's programs have been clinically proven to increase the well-being of children facing a parent's cancer: creating meaningful, measurable, improvements in kids' emotional health and connection (Price et al., 2026).

Acknowledgements:

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