

# EXPOSURE



## HANDS-ON HEALING

*The power of a camp in a magical woods*

**Story by [Fresno State](#)**

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Beyond a two-lane highway, in an obscure California town, lies a magical woods. It's a place that celebrates childhood, life-long connections and community.

What makes it magical? It's home to Camp Kesem – a summer camp for children whose parents have been diagnosed with cancer.

"Kesem actually means magic," said Hailee Ramont, a Fresno State graduate student studying speech pathology. "It's a place where I can go with my campers and they can open up and tell stories that they might not be able to share at home."

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Like other counselors at Camp Kesem, Ramont is fondly known by her camp name, "Miss Elle." She is one of approximately 85 Fresno State student volunteers who make Camp Kesem possible.

"Sometimes, when a parent has cancer, the spotlight goes on the parents – as it should," Ramont said. "However, these little kids kind of lose that dad that's always been there, or that mom that's been making them meals since they were little babies. So it's nice for them to just come and have counselors that are focusing on them, and just them, for one week."

⇒ **Did you know? Each year, Fresno State students provide over 1 million hours of volunteer service to the community.**





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# MORE THAN A CAMP

But Camp Kesem is more than a week-long summer camp filled with fun activities and catchy camp songs. Student volunteers spend the year fundraising, hosting reunions and conducting monthly planning meetings. They're learning about the operations behind a project of this magnitude, developing their communication skills, business savvy and leadership potential.

The camp is entirely free for children ages 6 to 16, which means students must raise over \$500 for each camper. Last year, the camp hosted 45 children.

For Ishaq "Quack" Ali, a political science graduate and camp counselor, the planning and fundraising is time well spent – since Camp Kesem offers children an opportunity to just be a kid.

"My mom passed away right after I graduated high school," he said "Cancer was a part of my life whether I liked it or not. It was difficult for me; I didn't have other people my age that I could connect with. When I saw [Camp Kesem] come to Fresno State, I really wanted to make sure I was able to be there for those kids who are dealing with it the same way I did."



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⇒ **Did you know? At Fresno State, our goal is that every student will have at least three meaningful community service experiences by graduation — learning that by serving others, you also learn a lot about yourself.**

Hands-on healing



## A NATIONWIDE COMMUNITY

The Fresno State Camp Kesem chapter began four years ago to serve the Central Valley; it is one of 105 Kesem chapters in the nation, driven by college students.

Navmit “Coco” Dhesi has been involved with Camp Kesem since it started at Fresno State.

“I was really drawn to a population that is generally forgotten and underserved,” she said. “In the cancer community, we think about the patients first. And a lot of the time these children are going through something that can’t be seen physically. Camp Kesem is a community that has so much love, support and positivity – you can’t help but be drawn in.”

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Since its inception, Ramont said she has been inspired by the campers' strength and kindness. Campers and counselors bond through laughter and tears, and children who lose their parents along the way are not alone. Counselors like Ramont are there for them at funerals, proving that the connections they forge at camp are life-long.

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“It’s magical,” Ramont said. “This isn’t just a one-week experience. Camp Kesem, once you’re involved, it is a family.”

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⇒ Did you know? Service-learning is a high-impact educational practice, and students who serve the community are more likely to continue volunteering after graduation.

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Footnote: Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Esra Hashem, Video by Domenick Satterberg and Arman Sandhu — University Brand Strategy and Marketing

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